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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RISK AND THE PLAYGROUND

by

Stephen J. Smith

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The basic contention of this study is that risk can be regarded as a term of positive educational significance, depending upon the level of reflectivity we bring to bear upon playground activity. At one level, there are the risks that children experience which, if left unattended, may lead to serious injury. At a second level, we can think about the nature of our interest in the risks that children take and see "risk" as a term of our pedagogical relation to children. In doing so, we can put risk at the centre of our reflections on the course of children's playground activity. Then, at a third level of reflection, there are the measured responses we make to the riskiness of children's activity—responses which are intended to help children yet still allow them the latitude to find things out for themselves. These levels at which we can reflect upon the riskiness of children's playground activity show the extent to which we can be personally and practically responsive to the risks that children might take.

The divisions of the study conform to these three levels of reflection. In the first section, which includes Chapters Two and Three, the playground is defined as a place of risk and as a place where one might attend to the meaning of risk in children's lives. The second section of the study, including Chapters Four to Six, shows how to be responsive to the risks of the playground. Key interactions with children are understood in terms of the various ways they can be challenged to take risks and our own ways of encountering the risks of the playground with them. The third section of the study, including Chapters Seven to Ten, serves to put the descriptions of risky playground situations into an educational framework. The interactions that have been considered so far are now described in terms of being in practice with children on playgrounds and seeing the practical consequences of what one does with children on playgrounds. In particular, the practical consequences of this pedagogy of risk are

discussed in terms that make sense of the more physical dimensions of the school curriculum.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Have you been with a child on the playground? I don't just mean, have you taken a child to the playground? But have you really taken note of what a child does on a playground? Have you followed a child as he or she explored the different activities afforded by a playground? And in following this child, have you stopped to consider the nature of this playground activity, and whether the child feels secure, or whether he or she should exercise more care, or perhaps if the child appears overly anxious, whether he or she should not be a bit more adventurous, be a little more of a risk-taker on this apparatus of the playground?

I think of taking my youngest child to the playground at a local schoolyard. No sooner do we arrive than she leaves me behind in her eagerness to explore the slippery slides, climbing frames, platforms and beams that comprise this playground. I watch as she races off to a slippery slide where only moments earlier some older children could be seen playing. For now, my child has the slide all to herself. "Can you manage all by yourself?" I ask as she begins to climb the ladder. My question falls on deaf ears. But halfway up, she glances in my direction. A frown creases her brow. She grasps the rungs more tightly, pulls herself closer to the ladder, and cautiously ventures a little higher up. Now two-thirds of the way up, she does not seem to want to go any higher. She calls for me to come over to her, to come and bring her down from this precarious place. So I do as she requests, wondering at the same time at how the slide can lose its appeal so quickly, wondering if lifting her down is the best thing to do, and wondering if perhaps the slide would seem less risky were I to follow her up to the top of the ladder and then to come down with

her. Should I not respond in a way that is consistent with the enthusiasm she first showed for this activity? Should I not respond in a way that is respectful of the risks of this activity yet mindful of the child's initial inclination to take the risk of going down the slide? What is the best thing to do for this child when a sense of risk impinges upon her enjoyment of the playground?

The situation involving my child on the playground raises questions that have to do with how we should treat children in general. It raises questions regarding a child's experience of the playground, further questions regarding our understanding of a child's experience, and practical questions pertaining to what we ought to do in order to stay in touch with and yet give direction to a child's activity. In particular, it raises questions regarding the riskiness of the playground: questions that have to do with a child's sense of risk, our understanding of such risk, and of what we might do so that risks can be taken in a prevailing atmosphere of security.

The study upon which we are now embarking is an attempt to grasp the meaning of these questions that arise out of our interactions with children on playgrounds. It begins with a formulation of "risk" which will guide our reflections on these playground interactions with children and help define those encounters which are of most interest. First and foremost, *risk is a term of our pedagogic relation to children.* This study aims to show that risk signifies a relation that holds for children on the playground and for the precarious world which children find beyond the playground. For adults, risk is a term for remembering children's activity on the playground, even for identifying with it. More fundamentally, it is a reflective term of maturity whereby adults can follow children's activities as they attempt to influence them in ways the child is only beginning to understand. Risk acknowledges positively the difference that maturity creates between an adult's and a child's understanding of

playground activity. This is what is meant by saying that "risk" is a term of our pedagogic relation to children.

The second term of the study, the "playground," is the reference point for these reflections on the significance of risk. We want to ground relections in the lifeworld of children, and so we ought to observe children where they are likely to be found. The playground stands out in this regard as an important focus, being a place set aside for children and a place for viewing activities which have a particularly child-like quality. But the playground holds a greater significance than the mere fact of its accessibility. It is at times a risky place and a place where children are often seen to be taking risks. Hence the playground serves not only as a focus for our reflections on risk but also as a point of reference in our attempts to describe a responsible pedagogy of risk.

By way of introduction, I will attempt to show how such a formulation of risk can make sense of the interactions that invariably occur on the playground.

The Riskiness of the Playground

The school doors open and children come streaming outside. Some run towards the school gates to where their parents stand beside opened car doors. Others head to bicycle racks to join the growing confusion of children already there, each trying to steer his or her way through cluttered exits. Still others join up with friends or with an older brother or sister, and disappear from view along the sidewalks. A number of children, however, seem much less concerned to get away so quickly. In dribs and drabs they cross the playing field to an adjoining playground. Here they climb ladders, chains, platforms and beams. They swing on tires and bars. They jump down from

various heights or from one piece of equipment to another, and slide down poles and slippery slides or off plastic casings. They sit in the sand, sculpture the sand, throw the sand. They chase each other over the playground, stopping every now and then to discuss what's fair and what's not. All sorts of activities take place on this playground. And after a while this playground is where most of the remaining children are to be found.

Some children are on the playground waiting for their parents to collect them. A car pulls up the asphalt driveway skirting the field that adjoins this playground. A car horn signals the arrival of one of the parents. The passenger-side door is thrust open. "I gotta go, Justine. See you tomorrow," says one young girl as she heads off in the direction of the waiting adult. The scene is repeated many times over. A few adults get out of their cars and walk towards the playground before they are spotted. Some even take a cursory look at what their children are doing on the playground before leading them away. One woman arrives in a flurry. She looks anxiously for her child. "Melissa," she says, "I've been looking everywhere for you. Your music lesson is in five minutes. Oh. Hi, Jillian, how are you? How's your mother? Tell her I'll give her a ring tomorrow....Melissa, I told you to come straight home. Get your things and let's go!" And so it goes on this playground. Parents have important things to do. They must pick up children. And children have important things to do. They have homes to go to and lessons to attend.

But what if we were to ask the children themselves; what order of priorities would they give us? "What did you do at school today?" I ask my child. "Nothing," he replies in a rather disinterested manner. "You mean you just stood around all day doing nothing?" "No, we did things," he says matter-of-factly. This line of questioning is not proving very helpful, so I ask: "And what do you like doing at school?" His

expression softens. "I like recess. I like playing with Dorian and Michael. I lik climbing things, and I like the slippery slide, except when the big kids push us down. We don't like the big kids. They say, 'Can't come on the slide! You can't come on the slide, kid!' Do you know Dorian got pushed off the slide? Like, we were on the slide first, and then a big kid was climbing up the slide. He said, 'Don't touch me or I'll push you off.' And he pushed Dorian off and hurt his mouth. Like, he was laughing and Dorian was crying." He pauses for a moment. "So you like going to the playground," I say, hoping to hear more about what happens there (and becoming a little concerned about the safety of the children there). "Yes," he replies, "but the teacher always makes us sit and eat our lunch first. It takes too long. We just want to play."

The playground is an important place. It is a place for children who are waiting for their parents to collect them. It is a place of recess. And it is a place to take the children when there is nothing more pressing to do. But the playground is even more than this. Although ignored by those for whom children are of little consequence or by those who are too preoccupied with adult concerns to be much bothered with things that matter to children, although taken for granted by those who take children for granted and prefer to see their effective removal from the adult world, the playground is also a place for understanding what is happening to children. It is a child's place, a place for being able to act like a child, and a place for seeing what matters to children. Of course, this does not mean that an interest in playgrounds is synonymous with an interest in understanding children. The child molester is also interested in playgrounds. So, too, is the distributor of "Tot Lots" and "Creative Playgrounds." Nevertheless, because the playground is reserved for children, by looking at what children do in this context it is more likely that questions related to

understanding them on their own terms will be raised than by looking at them in some other domain where they may be expected to be something other than just children. Then again, we cannot actually understand children "on their own terms." We can only do so in a manner of speaking, since children are *essentially* in need of pedagogy and indeed are children only if they stand in a pedagogic relation. All of which ought not to diminish the significance of the playground, but rather, to show that the playground, if we consider it as a place where the effort can be made to understand children "on their own terms," is a very important pedagogical place.

Still, it must be acknowledged from the outset that not all children relish the thought of going to the playground. It loses its appeal for the older child, for example, the child who has entered a fraternity of skateboarders and is now allowed to travel further afield than the local park or school ground. This child's access to the streets takes him or her far beyond the domain of the playground. And though such children may return to the playground once in a while, it is now clear the playground holds a different meaning for them than it does for the younger child. They are like adults who, when at the playground, will try some manoeuvre on, say, a set of parallel bars, or perhaps will try to pull themselves up a vertical pole to a platform above, just to see if they can still do it. The actions of these older people show that the playground holds few fears for them. They are now too big for what the playground allows. They have now outgrown the playground. There are children, however, who are not quite so old, yet they stay clear of the playground as well. At recess they loiter near the buildings, after school they skirt around the playground on their way home. These children have not outgrown the playground; on the contrary, they seem to see the playground as an intimidating place to be avoided at all costs. So what can we say about such children? How shall we consider them? Perhaps the

answer lies in looking more closely at the nature of playground activity, not only to determine the meaning of what children enjoy and then eventually outgrow, but also to come to an understanding of that which is potentially so intimidating to some children. By looking at the normal course of playground activity perhaps something might be said even for the sake of children who choose to stay out of sight.

To take an interest in playground activity means to see children doing things many of us have done ourselves: swinging on tires, climbing metal frames, or playing in a sandpit. We see ourselves in the activities of children on a playground, and we follow what they are doing on the basis of our own recollections of childhood. But this is not all there is to understanding playground activity. Beyond the amusement of watching children at play, we are at times concerned for what particular children can and cannot do, and this concern springs from a maturity which enables us to make sense of their activity. We see children, for instance, as they develop physical skills, acquire problem-solving and other cognitive strategies, gain in self-esteem or lose self-confidence, acquire the ability to interact with others, and so on. We see children from the vantage point of our own sense of maturity, and this provides the basis for our coming to terms with their playground activity. And yet, the real task of maturity remains: to try to understand playground activity through our reflective participation as adults who see and formulate the meaning of this activity for the sake of children's growth towards maturity, or in other words, by interacting pedagogically with children.

What pedagogic sense do we make of the riskiness of the playground? And how do we act on our pedagogic understanding of risk? A sense of risk arises when, on the basis of our own experiences, we become concerned about children's fears and difficulties, and the danger and challenge of their playground activity. We ask: To what extent is the playground a place of risk? Such a question is important

historically and sociologically for the way in which playgrounds have developed as "safe" places set aside for children (and places which serve to keep adult places "safe" from children), but it is also important pedagogically for the way it draws us onto the playground and leads us to consider the significance of our adult place in a child's life. What does risk-taking mean to a child? How do children respond to risk? And how should we, as adults, respond to their taking risks? These are specific questions to consider as we look at children on the playground. A sensitive consideration of such questions helps us to realize that to expect all children to feel comfortable on swings, climbing frames and slippery slides, without our being there at times, may be to expect too much of children and too little of ourselves. Such questions enable us to appreciate the inherent riskiness of children's playground activity, and at the same time, they help us to avoid the sort of adult indifference that makes the world seem all the more dangerous to children. From a position of responsiveness to such questions of risk we can try to adopt a child's perspective, which is to say, we can try to remember the child in the activities we are able to share and to cast these remembrances within a terminology of risk that might give direction to our everyday relations with children.

Defining Risk

"Risk" is a term which brings to mind our responsibility for the direction of children's activity. It is a pedagogically significant term to the extent that it defines some essential feature of adult conduct aimed at guiding young children towards a position of being responsible themselves for the consequences of their activity. This is not to say that risk is simply an adult formulation of children's activity. There is indeed a visibility of risk in playground activity—in its difficulty, danger and challenge,

in the observable fears it arouses, and especially in the obviously daring and audacious ways children respond to it. Nevertheless, it is only by being with the child as if returning to the landscape of our own childhood that the riskiness of children's activity becomes a disclosure of a shared and remembered world and a disclosure of our place in relation to the child. Only by being with the child in this interactive and self-reflective way do we appreciate the full meaning of the term "risk."

There is an openness to the formulation of "risk as an aspect of the pedagogic relation" that defies more conventional notions of risk. It would appear to be at odds with the common assumption that risk is something like pain which we try to reduce and hopefully avoid rather than value for its significance for children's growth and development. This formulation ascribes to risk even something beyond the "entertainment" and "escapist" values of the risks we freely choose to take. Then again, it can be argued that current notions of risk, notably those that cast risk in negative terms, may not go far enough and may prevent us from seeing risk in a pedagogic way. They deal, in other words, with lesser significances than the human significance of how adults ought to treat children. But the point of this open formulation of risk is not to dismiss the common notions of risk out of hand; instead, it is to show the derivation of a pedagogy of risk from our most common ways of experiencing risk, which includes our ways of talking about risk as well.

How might the formulation of risk as a term of our pedagogic relation to children account for the various kinds and forms of risk, many of which seem to have little relation to a pedagogical mindedness? After all, risk can be defined in many ways (Fishoff, Watson and Hope, 1984); and risk-taking can be explained away by such different discourses as the physiology of enzyme production (Morell, 1986), the psychology of personality typing (Begley, 1986) and risk tolerance (Sewell, 1986), and

the sociology of job placement and economic aspiration (MacCrimmon and Wehrung, 1986, p. 36). And sometimes the question of what makes a situation seem risky, especially situations involving children, can be put aside for the sake of managing fears (eg., Serafino, 1986) and instilling a "safety consciousness" (*Canada Safety Council*, 1984; Wishon and Oreskovich, 1986). There are indeed many definitions, explanations and prescriptions for the nature of risk.

To take a risk means to be open to danger, loss or hurt--"to navigate among cliffs" (Weekley, 1924, p. xii). A more recent interpretation goes: "To take a risk is to take a chance or a gamble; it implies a degree of uncertainty and inability to control fully the outcomes or consequences of such an action" (Moore, 1983, p. 1). Similarly, Roche (1980) notes that "Gambling as a movement represents an affirmation not of outcomes, per se, but rather their unpredictability; it thus represents the notion of taking a risk" (p. 79). Risk can also be met in obstacles during a task, by responding to a dare or a challenge, by seeking out adventure, or by simply taking our chances stepping out onto the street. Risk would therefore seem to be a complex notion. Its meaning depends upon the various ways it enters our lives. How then can it be said that risk defines our everyday relations with children and particularly our pedagogic way of seeing their playground activities?

I see two points in response to this question. First, no matter what particular view of risk and risk-taking we adopt, from an educational perspective we must be mindful of the fact that for the most part ours is an adult view of risk and one which the child has yet to learn. For example, when we say a child is taking a risk, it may be one which the child cannot see. The child may need to learn about the hazards, difficulties and dangers of an activity before we can actually say that a risk is being taken. And even when a child does appear to sense something of the

riskiness of a situation, the question remains as to how much we can presume to know of the child's experience and how much of what we presume to understand of the child's experience is due to our adult interpretation of risk-taking. What constitutes a child's sense of risk other than that which we can understand from an adult point of view? Which leads to the second point. As soon as the child comes into the picture then it would seem that we must consider most favourably that view of risk which is good for the child. There is an obligation placed upon us to consider risk in light of the child's growth towards maturity. For instance, in a recent text on taking risks, the authors document a range of risks—financial, health-related, social, career, and so forth—and they give the following example:

> In 1976 John deLorean quit his high-paying job as vice-president of General Motors to start his own automobile company. The costs of the machinery and supplies necessary to compete in the auto industry are enormous. Even though no one had successfully created a major auto company since the 1930s, deLorean managed to obtain the financial backing of the British Government by building his plant in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, the automobile market collapsed just as deLorean was getting his first cars to dealers. With slow sales, massive amounts of money were required to keep the factory going, and in late 1982 John deLorean was faced with impending bankruptcy of his company. He was charged with being involved in a major drug deal that, if it had been successful, would have provided the funds to keep his company going. Although there was a videotape of a drug transaction, the jury decided that deLorean was entrapped and he was acquitted. ***John deLorean clearly fits our image of the entrepreneurial risk taker.*** (MacCrimmon and Wehrung, 1986, p. 7, my emphasis)

Now this individual may be considered to be an "entrepreneurial risk taker," however this image of risk-taking appears hideously corrupt if it is to stand as an image guiding children's experiences of risk. Even if entrepreneurial risk does in fact lie within the paradigm of laudable risk-taking to which children are exposed, our task as adults in the presence of children is to *see through* our adult notions of risk in order to see the child more clearly.

Bollnow (1971) articulates this pedagogic formulation of risk by making clear distinctions between ordinary notions of risk, such as experimentation and gambling, and "true risk." He says, "real risk always occurs because of genuine ethical responsibility." Real risk-taking has possible consequences which hit a person in his or her "innermost core" (p. 525). To take a risk is not simply "to face" a danger, nor to find ourselves without warning or conscious effort to be "at risk," nor "to run a risk" by acting in an oblivious way to inherent dangers (cf. Rescher, 1983, p. 6). To take a risk requires much more of us than this. It requires that the unknown be encountered, that we do indeed experience uncertainty. We are required to do more than that which feels comfortable, more than simply display those "capabilities" we possess. We must even at times dig deep within ourselves and test the limits of our resources. Taking a risk is the project of encountering the unknown wherein self-understanding occurs. "Risk-taking situations are occasions in which what kind of people we are is literally held open to question, indeed, in which we find our who we are in the midst of becoming who we are" (Hyland, 1984, p. 130).

This thinking about risk turns once again in a pedagogic direction as we look at the playground and consider why it is problematic and why it calls for thought. We come to appreciate that, although an adult view of risk takes us far beyond the playground and seemingly beyond the sorts of physical risks to which children are exposed on the playground, the here and now concerns we have for what is good for children serve to bring our experiences of risk to bear upon the playground. In effect, to watch children take risks means our own experiences of risk already impinge upon the situation at hand. To help children take risks, however, means we should be critically aware of how our experiences influence our actions and how our experiences can inform right actions. Seeing the riskiness of the playground means holding open

the question of what a sense of risk actually implies with respect to our ethical responsibility for the nurturance of the young. In playground situations of risk-taking it is our responsibility for seeing the risks children ought to take that issue.

Yet this "ethical responsibility" of which Bollnow speaks can very easily be regarded as an abstract principle of risk-taking, as an educational slogan that supplants concern for the exigencies of the playground, and as a nostrum for change rather than as a way of pointing to an essential quality of risk-taking. In order to keep our feet on the playground, it is necessary to see how this sense of responsibility might characterize our dealings with children and how it might enjoin our experience with theirs. We need to see how this redefined notion of risk points to the primacy of an adult-child relation which is not merely a relation that holds for the playground, but a relation which contextualizes an abiding interest in playground situations.

The Structure of the Study

If risk is indeed a term of our pedagogic relation to children, how shall we describe it beyond simply pointing to selected instances of playground activity? What language of risk shall we appeal to in describing this term of our relation to children? The answer lies in bringing a "pedagogical consciousness" (Hildebrandt, 1987) to bear upon selected instances of playground activity where risk is present, which in practical terms means, organizing our reflections on risk around such terms as the "place," "silence," "atmosphere," "challenge," "encounter," "practice" and "possibility" of risk, which already have pedagogical significance. These terms come from a tradition of pedagogical theorizing called the *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* tradition (Danner, 1979) which is represented in this study in references to the work of Bollnow, the

German pedagogue at the University of Tübingen (cf. Bollnow, 1966/1987), and that of Beets, Buytendijk, Langeveld, Van den Berg and more recently, Beekman, of the "Utrecht School" (van Manen, 1979). The task of this present series of reflections is to show that risk is implicated in these dimensions of "pedagogical consciousness" and to use this terminology of "place," "atmosphere," "silence," etc., in order to give a textual rendering of the relational view of risk which is our starting point.

Concerns regarding the structure of this study may arise as we think about this terminology. Will the playground stand up to such scrutiny? Will it be possible to stay within the confines of the playground as we think about the "place," "silence," "atmosphere," "challenge," "encounter," "practice" and "possibility" of risk? Such concerns over focus are not unfounded, however they do tend to be somewhat misleading. The playground is not so much an object of study (as would be the case in more positivistic forms of research), as the point of referral for our deliberations on the meaning of risk. The playground provides a reference point for what might be said about risk. Consequently there will be reference to events and situations outside the playground, although not to suggest that the playground is a limited and not so central example of the phenomenon, but rather to establish a context for making sense of the riskiness of playground activity. Examples of risk drawn from outside the playground will serve to contextualize this study, to situate its findings, and ultimately, to show the significance of a pedagogy of risk and the playground for bringing up children who inevitably leave the playground and its risks behind.

The divisions of this study have been made in keeping with this way of exploring the relational term "risk." Chapter Two, "The Place of Risk," explores a space for thinking about the meaning of risk. Through a review of pertinent literature, my intention is to show that the space called the playground derives from a concern

for the safety of children and for their proper supervision, and that this concern points to a certain awareness of risk in children's lives. Chapter Three, "The Silence of Risk," shows how we might become increasingly aware of this risk in children's lives, and in so doing, develops an interest in the meaning of risk into a methodology of educational inquiry. Taken together, these first two chapters are a prologue to the second part of the study where a practical interest in children's risk-taking is explored in greater depth. Here the dimensions of risk, as they are disclosed through the adult's involvement with the child on the playground, are shown to characterize an interest that moves towards becoming pedagogically responsive. Chapter Four, "The Atmosphere of Risk," considers the dynamics of the adult-child relation as a reflection of the texture of risk in everyday life. More particularly, it shows the mediation of this texture, or atmosphere, of risk to be a function of how children can be helped to meet the demands of playground activity. Chapter Five, "The Challenge of Risk," presents the view that, although children respond to taunts and provocations, the response which brings the adult firmly into the situation has more to do with encouragement. Needless to say, there are limits to the encouragement of risk-taking. Fears arise and a sense of danger impinges upon playground activity. The concern for risk must therefore come to terms with how it is that the adult can lead the child in his or her risk-taking. This dimension of being responsive to risk is the subject of Chapter Six, "The Encounter with Risk." The terms of this study are then developed in a more analytical direction in the latter part of this thesis. Chapter Seven, entitled "The Practice of Risk, gives evidence of a pattern to children's risk-taking, or rather, a logic that can be followed and even planned for. Chapter Eight, "The Possibility of Risk," then poses the question of how an awareness of this logic of risk-taking enables us to understand the nature of children's activity beyond the playground. Although somewhat explanatory, this last section of the study serves to show the

importance of looking more closely at the quality of risks of the playground for education writ large.

Let us now consider very briefly how the fundamental questions underlying the above chapters are interpreted and pursued.

The Place of Risk

We begin with the question: How does the playground define risk in a child's life? Certainly the playground is not the only risky place for children. The home too is full of dangers; the street that borders the home is fraught with hazard; the shopping mall is a place where we must constantly keep a watchful eye on the young child. What distinguishes the playground is that it is a place designed for letting children *take* risks. It is a place where the adult need not see risk as danger or hazard, but more positively as challenge and adventure to which children can actively respond. Here risk can serve to highlight something that is being accomplished by the child, some intended activity that expands the child's sense of the world. To the extent that the playground is a circumscribed space, it is not just one arena for risk-taking among many equally significant arenas; it potentially represents the primary arena, the fundamental ground for understanding what risk-taking means.

Through a sociology of knowledge of the playground we can see how risk has become so essential to our appreciation of what happens there. We can account for the need to mark off a special place for children, as if they did not already have their own special places; and we can understand that the design of playgrounds has to do with a certain conception of childhood and the need to preserve its fragility. But we can see also that the separation of children from the mainstream of daily life had an effect which cannot be accounted for through a sociology of knowledge about the

playground. Such an analysis cannot account for the lived experience of being caught up in the playground activity of children. In other words, an understanding of the social relations that led to the design of playgrounds makes sense of what happens there in general, but it does not necessarily account for the human significance of our involvements with particular children on particular playgrounds. More specifically, a concern for the safety of children and their proper supervision has led to the design of places where risk can become a theme of a lived relation to children.

This riskiness of the playground, this place designed for seeing risk positively, enables us to question our relation to children and to consider how through this relation we might enable children to take risks in relative safety. What makes the playground an important place of risk, therefore, has to do with how we might attend to the activity that takes place there. We have an ongoing role to play in securing this place, in making it safe, in creating the conditions whereby the child can test the confidence of what he or she knows. Our task is thus to see within playground situations, especially those situations that appear risky, a direction for the child's explorations and growth.

The playground is in this regard an exemplary place of risk. Through design and daily use, the playground exemplifies the relationality that makes risk a term of human significance. So, if risk can be defined as that which in part structures our relation to children, and if it can be shown that the playground reveals an underlying, deep-seated interest in risk-taking, then even playgrounds as we presently conceive them might evoke a sense of the domain in which pedagogic relatedness unfolds most clearly.

The Silence of Risk

Since what is good for one child may not be good for another, what is the value of an analysis which ends up categorizing a situation-specific pedagogy of risk-taking? What is the good of an analysis that glosses over the tentativeness of decisions that are to be made in practice? The answer requires from us that we look more closely at playground situations where our responses to what we see taking place are problematic, and where we must question on what grounds we can even know how to respond at all. So when a child brings our attention to the riskiness of his or her activity, we ought to consider carefully what is the best thing to do for this particular child. What help should we give? What specific actions should we take? Our response will depend upon the particularities of the situation and upon our knowledge of the particular child. Even then, how can we be sure we have done the right thing? Of course, this is not to deny those general principles to which we can subscribe and by which we gain confidence in our dealings with children; however, the point of the present analysis is not just to define educational principles of being with children, but to show how these principles become meaningful in concrete pedagogic situations. In so doing we might come to see risk as both the topic of our inquiry and its orienting principle. We may come to see how any intervention on our part in risky playground situations is, at another level, a risk we must take.

So, as we try to talk about this relationality of risk we find that our engagement with children carries certain silences. We approach their activity with a questioning silence and often we must remain silent through our failure to see what is at stake in their activity. Such silences are the result of an inevitable distance between children and us, however this is not so much a lack as a means of redefining the nature of our relation. The silences of our approach lead to a deeper silence, a

comprehending silence where we try to find our common ground. We remember taking risks ourselves in much the same way as the children before us; and on the basis of these recollections we try to work out how to be in a position to help these children take the risks we see in their activity. These silences of our approach to children's playground activity thus serve to open us more deeply to the relational nature of risk. The silences of risk show the provisional status of our analysis. They show that our words make sense only when they serve to place us within the fluctuations, ambiguities and uncertainties of playground life.

The Atmosphere of Risk

If risk is a term of our relation to children and if we can see in the risks of the playground a positive account of this relation, then what are its constitutive features? What is the texture of risk we see manifested especially in playground situations? Perhaps the texture of risk is reflective of a generalized atmosphere of risk which is evident even in the normal course of everyday life. After all, children are often minded by people they hardly know; they are placed in the care of strangers; they are left on their own when adult activity makes their presence inconvenient. In the course of everyday life what we do with children and what constitutes the texture of our relation to them makes children aware of a certain atmosphere of risk. If left completely to themselves or if our actions are evidence of a complete disregard for them then we find children exposed unprotected in this atmosphere of risk—children who are at-risk. On the other hand, the playground, being a place that carries an adult regard for the child, is a place where this atmosphere, this texture, can be influenced in ways that bring a certain security to the child's explorations. Here we can see that risk comes down to how we might be present to the activities of children, that children can be helped to take risks in relative safety through the

encouragements we are able to give them and through the way we encounter playground challenges with them. From this general atmosphere of risk might develop a pedagogic atmosphere in which risk signifies a way of staying in touch with the course of children's playground activity.

How can we be mindful of this texture of risk and so influence the direction of children's activity most positively? In response to this question we can be guided by the visibility of risk, or rather, by our observations of what children are already able to do. Their stepping onto the playground, their responding to the challenges of the things they find there, is evidence of their desire to see the world around them in an active way. The playground appeals to children because it allows the exercise of their ability to step away from adult protectiveness and thus to feel somewhat responsible for what they do. To influence the direction of children's activity most positively requires, therefore, our looking at what children care to show us and our responding in ways that not only enhance their movement repertoire but also help them gain confidence in doing things for themselves. The visibility of this texture of risk thus enables us to see that atmosphere is determined in large part by the responses we care to make to children's activity. Through examples of risky playground situations we can even differentiate between these various responses and show that the texture of risk is disclosed in differing modes of adult presence, a classification of which might show how we can best instill confidence in the child.

The Challenge of Risk

As an adult, a parent, a teacher, how does this attunement to risk guide the responses we might make to playground activity? And how can we find within these responses certain embodied principles of pedagogic action? Our task is to work through

these silences that seem so much a part of knowing how we should respond to the riskiness of children's activity. The task is to abide by these silences and yet still say something of consequence about the pedagogic significance of risk and how we might help children learn to take risks. This is our challenge to become reacquainted with the children we see on playgrounds as they are involved in their pursuits.

Taking up this subject, we begin to see the challenges that inhere in playground activity and that make risk visible. Just being with other children creates situations of daring, of children daring one another, taunting each other to try some activity that will test their mettle publicly. These are direct social challenges. There are also indirect, social challenges that arise from watching other children or from simply seeing the possibilities of movement that some piece of equipment allows. What is important for our understanding of risk, however, is not so much the social structure of challenge as the manner in which this particular visibility of risk allows us to construe a pedagogy. More important than an analysis of the general social challenges of the playground is the distinction that might be made between positive and negative challenges. For instance, when is challenge to be considered a positive encouragement of children's risk-taking? What form should such encouragement take? And what are the limits of this pedagogic response to challenge? Alternatively, when do our words and actions place undue pressure on the child? When do they ensnare the child in a situation where the risks seem much too great?

Our encouragements should enhance the child's independence of movement, especially since we are ultimately concerned with the child's growth and maturity. So we ask ourselves: What are the limits of a pedagogic response to risky playground situations? What is the point at which a child's independence of movement should be recognized? Perhaps we should look at how children find out for themselves how to

meet a challenge and how our actions can be consistent with their learning to find their own way. Accordingly, we may then be attentive to the moment when a child no longer requests our help or even requires it—the moment when the child would just as soon try out the activity for him- or herself. We may indeed recognize in such situations of independence the limits of our involvement, and the limits beyond which we must grant children the ability to take risks on their own.

The Encounter with Risk

Having seen a certain pattern to children's playground activity, are we now in a position to know what to do about risk and how to teach children to take risks? Have we seen the features of a pedagogy of risk clearly? Or have we stressed too much the visibility of risk and forgotten that risk is fundamentally a quality of the relation we have with children? When we talk about challenging children, encouraging their efforts, even letting them find their own way of doing things, we must remember that our responses are also expressions of our own experiences of risk and that a pedagogy of risk rests upon an acknowledgement of our own ability to take risks. These risky situations with which we are concerned, these shared encounters with risk, bring an adult's sense of risk to bear upon the child's activity and show the child a direction for his or her risk-taking.

The notion of an encounter with risk highlights the reflectivity that is at the heart of a pedagogy of risk. We want to trust the child to be eventually on his or her own, yet our greater awareness of risk leads to the prudence of intervening in the child's activity. Consequently we cast playground activity in terms of a series of challenges through which such trust in the child is made possible. Still, in this reflection on the risks of the child's activity we cannot be sure of what pertains to

the activity itself and what is the product of our own way of considering the activity. It seems we must consider carefully whose interests are being served—the child's or ours. We must exercise a degree of vigilance in our thinking about the supposed riskiness of children's activity.

We see features of the encounter with risk in the manner in which we become apprehensive about the course of children's playground activity. Especially when playground things no longer seem so familiar to us, our apprehensions bring us in touch with the experience of a child who perhaps encounters such things for the very first time. We become mindful of the child, not so much out of fear as out of an attempt to stay in touch. There is, of course, always the risk of seeing too little of ourselves in the child's activity, which may lead to indifference or alternatively to a sense of danger which has no real basis to it. In such cases we bring a sense of danger to the activity when it is our understanding that is called for. The task, therefore, is to work through our apprehensiveness about children's playground activity, to understand how our feelings about the riskiness of what the child does can be the motive for helping the child learn to take risks.

The notion of an encounter with risk allows us to reconcile our need to lend security to the child's explorations with the child's need to test the security of his or her world. Encountering risk, we see that there are times when we ought to let go of our grasp of the child's activity. There is a point at which the encounter with risk obliges us to let the child go his or her own way. There is the point at which a pedagogy of risk comes down to our ability to trust the child to be on his or her own.

The Practice of Risk

In our living with children, can we begin to see a direction to the course of their risk-taking? Do our challenges and our ways of encountering the playground with them conform to a type of sequence, a progression, even a development of movement competence? For instance, we may see how a certain playground activity becomes familiar to the child, then we may see how the child tries some variation that risks the certainty of what is known, until eventually quite difficult feats become possible. A child hangs on to the bars of a climbing frame. Later on she is able to swing from one bar to the next. Eventually she is able to travel from one end of this set of bars to the other. This child develops what are commonly called physical (sometimes motor) skills.

We might call this process "skill development." The problem with the notion of skill development is that it denies the ongoing practice of taking risks. By attending to the visibility of playground activities we forget that it is fundamentally a relation of practice, a practical relation, that is being tested out in the child's explorations, and that what we are seeing of the child's activity is a consequence of the risks he or she has learned to take. Behind our talk of skill development we may find a child-oriented language of risk which may potentially give us a fuller sense of the meaning of young children's physical activity and of the continuity of the child's physical explorations. We may see how by learning to take risks the child learns to stay in practice. And we, in turn, can maintain a very practical relation to the child.

So we will speak of a practice of risk, or rather, an or[illegible]e of a child's inclination to test out the relation that establishes his or [illegible] will regard this practice as constituting a standard against which [illegible] our

responses to what we can see of the child's activity. Thus, when we see the child progressing in the difficulty of the things she can do we might consider how best to help the child achieve the potential that the playground apparatus holds. And this will require staying in practice with the child, or rather, attending to the riskiness of the child's activity over the course of successive playground encounters.

The Possibility of Risk

What are the implications of this practice of risk? How might this practice apply to situations beyond the playground? To what extent is this practical interest in the riskiness of the playground constitutive of an educational view which extends beyond the domain of the playground? Here we can only consider some possible practical directions. Specifically, we will reflect upon what happens when the playground no longer holds such intense interest for children and when they begin to be pulled away from it. We will try to see in these new challenges and encounters an adumbration of the riskiness of the playground, or in other words, a further unfolding of the pedagogy of risk which was established in the context of playground activity.

We will speak of the possibility of risk in order to accent the broader pedagogical significance of the foregoing analysis. But this does not simply mean looking for points of application of a pedagogy of risk derived from the playground. If risk is a term of our pedagogical relation to children, then our reflections on the course of playground activity ought to reveal a *telos*, a highest possibility of the riskiness of the playground, and indeed, a natural fulfillment of the possibilities of the playground in activities that extend far beyond it. What we do with children on the playground might very well hold significance for a much broader domain of activity where risk is not so readily apparent.

But is risk itself a telos? Is it an end in itself? Or is it more a rite of passage, a test of life, or a means to other ends such as "movement competence," "self-knowledge," "self-confidence," "autonomy" and "self-direction"? Again we can follow the lead which children provide, following them as they move on to activities beyond the playground, and considering these new activities in light of a pedagogy of risk and the playground. We can see, by moving on to these activities, if the significance of this pedagogy is confined to the playground activities we have attended to so far, or if it holds as well for a much broader domain of physical activity. And we can begin to formulate an answer to the question: In what long-term way is risk a function of the sense we bring to children's activity? How might this term of our pedagogic relation to children disclose possibilities for growth and development, even beyond the domain of physical activity?

Pedagogical Considerations

Writing for educators and for anyone interested in the quality of children's lives, my intention is to provide critical ground for understanding how we might, as adults, bring up children. We are, as Langeveld insists, *"animal educandum-et educans:* the animal calling for education and the educating animal" (Langeveld, 1966, p. 91; see also Schmidt, 1973, esp. chapter 2). In this regard, I am not only making a certain anthropological claim as to the primacy of the playground in the lives of children, but I am saying that the thinking that led to the development of playgrounds and the thinking that is in evidence when adults interact with children on playgrounds also shows the fundamental responsibility that adults have for the growth of children. To talk about playgrounds and to become concerned about the risks that arise there is thus to talk about education in a very mundane yet critically important way.

Whatever we do with children on playgrounds has significance for the child's general growth towards maturity. But what we do pedagogically is distinguished by the level of reflectivity which we bring to these experiences with children. We must reflect, first of all, on whether playgrounds are good places for children and how they can be made better places. We must consider carefully our designs for children's learning. Furthermore, we must question the nature of our actions with children on playgrounds, and reflect especially upon how we might help children as they encounter the riskiness of the playground. From our playground reflections we may then be able to say something about how certain physical experiences should proceed for children in general.

From the present analysis might come some very practical recommendations regarding the learning experiences that are important for all children. All of which should not blind us to the fact that pedagogy remains a theory addressed to the individual child. Pedagogy seeks to establish a relation to the child before us, and to bring a reflective sense of the Good to the actions we take on behalf of this child (cf. van Manen, 1982a). Pedagogy, as theory, should not be so speculative that it loses touch with particular children, but rather it should be "built up and formulated from the concrete situation of adult and child related to each other in an existential communication and encounter" (Nel, 1973, p. 204). Or, as van Manen put it: "Pedagogy is not found in philosophy, but like love or friendship, it is found in the experience of its presence—that is, in concrete, real life situations" (van Manen, 1982b, p. 284).

Pedagogical Description

I take the view that pedagogy will be most compellingly real if we speak of children directly. "Can you find the child?" asks Langeveld of most "educational research" (reported in Flitner, 1982, p. 66). The children of this study are Andrew, Carson, Chris, Cory, Denny, Dorian, Eduardo, Gerrard, James, Jamie, Jonathan, Kyler, Lewis, Lisa, Marc, Matthew, Paco, Rodrigo, Shayle, Sophie, Stephen and Tyler. Their names are mostly fictitious, although behind the names I have given them there are certainly real children with real names. They are children I know, children I see on playgrounds. They are not subjects, and certainly not a random sample, but children I have followed for nigh on three years.

I describe what these children do in actual situations on actual playgrounds. My intention is to base this study upon an awareness of the concrete situations in which risk appears. And yet I do not want to be totally bound by the situations in which these children are to be found. I want to take some distance from the clutter of each situation, not so much to leave the child behind as to see the situation more clearly. Consequently, I "write up" these situations, going beyond the written record of what children do in order to explore in narrative form the value of what they do and of what our responses might be. Composing rather than simply recording the situations in which we find ourselves with children on playgrounds, my intention is to disclose a "narrative knowledge" (Dienske, 1988) of what the pedagogic relation might be.

The form of the anecdote is used to help define the meaning of these playground situations and to find within each particular situation the point from which pedagogical reflection should proceed. Anecdotes of children on playgrounds thus become a means of deliberating on the point of the concrete situation to which they

refer. Anecdotes serve to keep the child in view while obliging us to reflect upon not only what a situation holds for this particular child, but what similar situations might hold for other children. In other words, the anecdote stands between the particularity of being with children we know and the more general truth, or the pedagogical theory, which we wish to formulate on the basis of these encounters. It could therefore be said that anecdote underlies the method of this study. It is the methodological device for providing points of attachment, lifeworld attachments, for the somewhat abstract pedagogical theorizing by means of which we will give structure to our deliberations on the riskiness of the playground. So when we talk about the "place," "atmosphere," "silence," etc., of risk and tend to become immersed in a fairly weighty tradition of pedagogical theorizing, the anecdote will serve to keep our feet firmly placed on the playground.

Pedagogical Method

The use of anecdote in this study conforms to the guidelines for lifeworld description which van Manen (1984; 1989) has developed. Here the emphasis is placed on writing as the *modus operandi* of the research endeavour. "Writing is our measure," says van Manen (1988, p. 188).

> Writing involves a textual reflection in the sense of separating and confronting ourselves with what we know, distancing ourselves from the lifeworld, decontextualizing our thoughtful preoccupations from immediate action, abstracting and objectifying our lived understandings from our concrete involvements...and all this for the sake of now reuniting us with what we know, drawing us more closely to living relations and situations of the lifeworld, turning thought to a more tactful praxis, and concretizing and subjectifying our deepened understanding in practical action. (p. 124)

A text of playground activity results from our writing about seemingly risky playground situations. This text can be read in different ways (cf. Geertz, 1973; Ricoeur, 1971, 1982; Silverman, 1986), yet it remains a text that raises the fundamental question:

How might one see oneself in the actions of children on playgrounds? In other words, the anecdotal quality of the writing up of this study situates us within a "dialogic textuality" (van Manen, 1986, p. 90) of the riskiness of the playground.

The particular application of anecdotal writing to the matter of the riskiness of the playground is something that will unfold as this study progresses. Besides, method should not be discussed totally apart from the pedagogical questions we want to raise. At a technical level, such a division of method and substance tends to result in a "reconstructed logic" of the investigation which bears little resemblance to the actual conduct of the inquiry (Soltis, 1984). At a phenomenological level, method is as much a way of speaking about our orientation, commitment and presence of mind as it is about procedures by which we come to understand what children do on playgrounds. Researching the riskiness of the playground aims at answering the question: How might we establish and maintain a relation to children which would attest to the significance of risk-taking for their growth and maturity? Our method of inquiry thus stems from an understanding of what it might mean to lead children into the wider world via the playground. So, although the anecdote stands out as an important methodological device within a broader phenomenological method of lifeworld description, we will follow such a phenomenological method only so long as it allows us to see the point of being with these children on playgrounds. More importantly, we will develop our own phenomenologically oriented, pedagogical method as we seek to address the questions that arise when risk is seen to be a term of our relation to children on playgrounds with which we are familiar.

Nel writes:

> Pedagogy should evolve its own approach, its own method starting from the pedagogical situation as point of departure. It is indeed obvious that the pedagogical situation, as an existential situation, will itself indicate how

it should be analysed and interpreted. (Nel, 1973, p. 209)

Our immediate task, then, is to define the situations that are of interest and that require our involvement in the actions of children. Our task will be to map out a space for our investigation in such a way that we are situated in the midst of children's activity. Hence, the starting point for pedagogical consideration will be the risky playground situations in which we find ourselves with children. From this starting point we shall hope to see the nature of our particular method of pedagogical inquiry. This means that any further explication of the pedagogical method underlying the study shall have to wait until we have defined more clearly the nature of these pedagogical situations and our stake within them.

Pedagogical Theory

A final consideration for this study pertains to the place of this phenomenological style of pedagogical theorizing in the North American context. To be sure, we should acknowledge the European tradition of inquiry from which many of the insights of this study are derived. In particular, the claim made by representatives of the *Geisteswissenchaftliche Pädagogik* tradition to the effect that pedagogy is an autonomus discipline (van Manen, 1987) is one which I make for the purposes of the present study. According to Weniger, who was one of the more influential proponents of the idea of pedagogical autonomy, there is a distinctiveness to pedagogical activity, which is to say, to activity serving the interests of children. This distinctiveness then suggests a need for places designed specifically to serve children's interests. In order to ensure what these interests are, however, there is a necessity for a science of pedagogy which would understand the distinctiveness of pedagogical activity and provide a knowledge of how the conditions of the world for children can be improved (Beugelsdijk and Miedema, 1984). But even though this claim has not been widely

considered in the North American context, except by way of calls for the autonomy of educational theory (eg. McMurray, 1955; Kneller, 1984) and for seeing the importance of a "phenomenology of education" for establishing a North American philosophy "of education" (Vandenberg, 1974, 1979, 1987), the claim of the present study goes beyond an ostensibly theoretical justification of the place of pedagogical thinking. The claim I shall make throughout this study is that our theorizing should be grounded by a practical understanding of how a pedagogic life ought to be lived. Van Manen says:

> Few educational theorists have addressed the question of how to apply the measure of pedagogy to the standard of one's own work. To be responsive to pedagogy could be termed the half-life state of modern educational theory and research which has forgotten its original vocation: that all theory and research were meant to orient us to pedagogy in our relations with children. (van Manen, 1986b, p. 79)

Accordingly, the more important task to which the principle of the autonomy of pedagogy lays claim is that our theorizing should be a way of orienting ourselves to the world we share with children, and that that it should be a way of principling the everyday actions we take on behalf of children for the sake of their maturity.

The present analysis of risk and the playground is intended to be a North American example, or let us say, a locally familiar example, of the practicality of pedagogical theory. Playgrounds are, after all, a common feature of our cultural landscape, and thinking about playground activity does resonate with the conditions of North American life. So, if there is to be a place for thinking pedagogically, then the phenomenological style of analysis adopted in this study of the riskiness of the playground should serve to remind us of how we should live in the everyday world with children. It ought to direct us back to the lived experience of being with children on playgrounds with a deepened interest in doing the right thing by them. This is the acid-test of the value of the following account of risk and the playground.

PART A

AN AWARENESS OF RISK

CHAPTER II

THE PLACE OF RISK

The notion of the "playground" opens up at least two lines of inquiry. First, it contains the suggestion that one ought to consider that physical locale where children behave in a "free, spontaneous, non-serious and joyful manner" (cf. Ellis, 1973, p. 14). The playground, that area where children play, becomes of interest because of the distinctive type of activity that occurs there. And it is a place of psychological, sociological, anthropological, philosophical, even philanthropic and antiquarian interest, to the extent that play is held up as being of value psychologically, sociologically, anthropologically, and so forth.

Certainly these interests are apparent as one looks to the literature on playgrounds which, for the most part, deals implicitly with enhancing the values of play activity by paying explict attention to the nature and design of the grounds where such activity might take place. Four fairly distinct types of playground stand out: *traditional playgrounds* comprised of gle gyms, see-saws, slides, swings of various types ranging from trapeze bars to metal rings on chains to wooden or, more recently, rubber seats, as well as revolving platforms and the occasional sets of parallel bars and horizontal bars--each piece of equipment standing separately and anchored firmly in a terrain of gravel or asphalt; *designer playgrounds* linking together apparatuses which, instead of being metal, are now made of wood, rubber and plastic--playgrounds where one finds tire swings, plastic tunnels, variously shaped climbing frames, slides of differing shapes and widths, all connected together by means of platforms, ladders and even landscaped terraces; *adventure or junk playgrounds* established on vacant lots where children may come and actually construct their own

play area using building materials and tools supplied by a playground supervisor who also directs the activities in a specifically built indoor play area; and *creative playgrounds* where heavy construction materials such as cable spools, water pipes, large tires and telephone poles are fashioned into a variety of play shapes, and where children may either play on this equipment or in some of the other areas with sand, water, or with smaller pieces of lumber (cf. Frost, 1985, p. 168). Various studies have been undertaken to show the benefits of one type of playground over another (eg. Frost and Klein, 1979; Hart and Sheehan, 1986; Rothenberg and Beasley, 1974); nevertheless, "children themselves do not discriminate strongly, and sometimes not at all, between such areas and a multitude of other places in the environment that they find attractive—or places that they are obliged to use simply because there are no other options available" (Moore, 1986, xiii). These many and varied places where children play show that perhaps the design of playgrounds alone is not as important as adults may think. In fact, through their play space preferences children challenge the wisdom of an adult-constructed, self-contained, play space. They call into question the motives adults may have for being so preoccupied with playground design.

The preference shown in the playground literature for certain types of playgrounds over others would seem to reflect more an interest, on the part of adults, in defining "the perfect play experience" for children (Hill, 1980). One notable example of such interest is the advocacy of adventure playgrounds as places where children can learn to take risks. Perhaps the best-known proponent of adventure playgrounds had this to say about them:

> Their love of freedom to take calculated risks is recognized and welcomed in adventure playgrounds for these qualities bring their own exhilarating sense of independence and adventure. As Ibsen has said "There is always a certain risk in being alive, and if you are more alive there is more risk." The children feel liberated in an adventure playground, especially those who live in crowded cities or in over-regulated and over-tidy estates.

> Adventure playgrounds are places where they can learn to come to terms with the responsibilities of freedom. (Lady Allen of Hurtwood, in Bengtsson, 1972, p. 8, see also Hurtwood, 1968, p. 17)

It is interesting to note in passing that play is thought to be related etymologically to the Old English *pleoh* meaning "danger or risk," to *pleon* meaning "to expose to danger or risk," and to the Dutch *plegen* meaning "to care for, and be accustomed to" (Klein, 1971, p. 568). These meanings, when taken together, resonate with the thinking behind the development of adventure playgrounds. Yet even here, in this admirable attempt to expand the traditional boundaries of play by appealing to certain risk-related qualities of children's playground activity, a playground design and an existing design rationale seem to be the dominant considerations. The direction of inquiry that this interest spawns could thus be considered as one of developing alternative playground structures and environments which may, through increased usage, attest to the importance of *play* in a child's life.

Now I do not want to disregard this line of thinking about playgrounds, although it seems to me always in danger of misunderstanding the rationale behind playgrounds. Playgrounds are not just places to play, regardless of how broadly the idea of play is defined; they are presumably also good places for children. Playgrounds represent, in fact, an implicit connection, and one which is borne out etymologically, between play and children.

> For the Greeks, play, *paizo*, is what a child, *pais*, does. The Doric form of the verb "to play," *paisdo*, betrays its origin more clearly than the Attic. Children play with playthings or toys, *paignion*, or play at a game or sport, *paigma*, or play an instrument, dance, and sing. What is sung is a *paian*, a paen to Apollo the Healer, himself called *Paian* or "physician." Playing, singing and dancing occur during religious celebrations, festivals or healing, *paigna*. Anything suited to children is described as *paideos*, whether it be a game, *paidia*, or their education, *paideia* or *paideusis*. A less fortunate accompaniment to education may have been *paio* to hit or strike! Play, education, music, athletics, and the religious festival, are all bound to the same root-syllable, which sounds the vocative for Greek children: *Pai*. (Krell, 1972, p. 77)

This etymology betrays as well a "common cultural meaning" (cf. Taylor, 1979) of being a child. Ontologically speaking, "playing brings a fullness to the child's being that is otherwise lacking and forms the fundamental world that will otherwise be taken for granted. In childhood play the fundamental and primordial relation to being is formed and remains rooted..." (Vandenberg, 1971, p. 46). Play, "that ontological mode essential to the development of human culture and, even more, to the development of the evolving child" (Suransky, 1982, p. 21), stands out as that which best characterizes what it means to be child-like.[1] Accordingly, when we look at playgrounds we not only look at children at play, we also look at that which the idea of play signifies and symbolizes. The playground, provided it is a good place to play, lets us look at the meaning of childhood.

Playgrounds represent a space for thinking about children. Perez and Hart (1980) make a similar point when considering what they regard as a narrow interest in enhancing the design of playgrounds so as to maximize their use. Their point is that "children—not playgrounds—should be the basis for planning" (p. 253). They ask: "What can be said from present knowledge of the development of children and from the behaviour of their caregivers, about the environmental opportunities which need to be created for children?" (p. 253). Now while I am sympathetic to the design project in which those like Perez and Hart are engaged, my point is that thinking about children on playgrounds requires a greater measure of self-reflection than that which is needed for planning and designing playgrounds. There remains something to the notion of the playground that needs to be addressed. There is the question of the nature of this

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[1]It may even be argued that the history of play theorizing, as it is reflected for example in the works of Schiller, Groos, Huizinga, Caillois, even Nietzsche, Gadamer, Fink and Derrida, bears out Heraclitis' famous fragment 52, that "Time (or lifetime: *aion*) is a child playing, playing at draughts. Kingship belongs to the child." See Hyland, 1984, p. 83.

space that begs understanding–the question of what makes the playground, or any other place for that matter, seem a place for children. And there is the supplementary question of why we should, as adults, even be interested in such places and how it is that we are in a position to observe their "specialness" (cf. Langeveld, 1983; Polakow and Sherif, 1987).

"What is 'place'?" asks Moore (1980), another playground designer. "To me, it is a means for integrating knowledge of the world into human relationships. It is a currency of belonging–a hierarchy of intersecting social and physical geographies" (p. 59). Playground places provide in other words, a "landscape" of childhood–landscape as "a construct of the mind as well as a physical and measurable entity" (Tuan, 1979, p. 6). The playground, as a landscape of childhood, not only provides a place for thinking about children, it also symbolizes how we think about children. It is our special place maybe as much as it is the child's. Accordingly the behaviour of children and their caregivers in that particular physical location defined as a playground cannot be viewed solely in terms of the design of that play space, because the question remains as to what makes that space interesting, which is to say, a child's place and a place where childhood can be recalled. The second line of inquiry into the notion of the playground thus requires not only considering the design aspect that distinguishes playgrounds from other human spaces, but also examining our own sense of a child's place in the world that a playground affords. It requires considering the grounds for thinking about children.

My contention is that playgrounds provide an opening, a *topos*, a multi-dimensional space where seemingly disparate events can be gathered together to connote a network of interaction between adults and children. The notion of "play" has served to denote this interaction and mask it at the same time (cf. Sutton-Smith

and Kelly-Byrne, 1984a). Certain activities have been shown to be of interest without the basis for our interest in them having been disclosed, and some activities have been ear-marked as being of more value than others, again without it having been made clear upon what basis a preference might be given.[2] Consequently I prefer to stay with the notion of the "playground" with its topographical orientation, its implication of an expressive and interrogative space which might provide clarification of childhood existence, and ask: What is the nature of this place? What view of life does it allow? And how might the adult be present for the development of such a view? Clues to answering these questions may be found in a review of the playground-related literature where it may be possible to show how the notion of "risk" serves better than the notion of "play" in capturing this potentially *pedagogical* nature of playground activity. Here I shall attempt to show that "risk" is actually a more important notion than "play" in understanding the playground. And by implication, I will be showing how "risk" is also more important than "play" in understanding all pedagogy.

The Safety of the Playground

From an historical perspective, an interest in children coupled with a concern for their safety led to the development of playgrounds as places set apart from the traffic of adult life. Curtis (1917) says, while referring to the proliferation of what we now regard as traditional playgrounds,

> It seeks to provide a place for play where the children can go during their leisure time, and be off the street and away from the evil influences which they might encounter there, and under the constructive leadership of

[2] See Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne, 1984b, and Sutton-Smith, 1987, on the "idealization of play," the legitimation of a distinction between child play and adult play, and hence, the denial of adult-child interaction *within* play.

trained directors. (p. 19)

Nevertheless this relatively recent interest in the safety of children cannot be equated directly with an interest in children themselves. Wood (1977), in denouncing the very idea of a playground, refers to what the Opies had to say about past attitudes to children playing too near adults.

> Children always do seem to have been in trouble about the places where they played. In the nineteenth century there were repeated complaints that the pavements of London were made impassable by children's shuttlecock and tipcat. In Stuart times, Richard Steele reported, the vicinity of the Royal Exchange was infested with uninvited sportsmen, and a beadle was employed to whip away the "unlucky Boys with Toys and Balls." Even in the Middle Ages, when it might be supposed a meadow was within reach of every Jack and Jill in Britain, the young had a way of gravitating to unsuitable places. In 1332 it was found necessary to prohibit boys and others from playing in the precincts of the Palace of Westminster while parliament was sitting. In 1385 the Bishop of London was forced to declaim against the ball-play about St. Paul's; and in 1447, away in Devonshire, the Bishop of Exeter was complaining of "yong peple" playing in the cloister, even during divine serice, such games as "the toppe, queke, penny prykke, and most atte tenys, by which the walles of the saide Cloistre have be defowled and the glas wyndowes all to brost." (Opie and Opie, 1969, p. 11)

Wood concludes that the idea of the playground is actually a convenient way of not being bothered by children.

> By getting the kids out of the streets, out of the yards—out of the hair—and into the playgrounds, adults were thinking not so much of the kids as of themselves. It was the automobile that made it possible, for the first time, to disguise this selfishness under the sanctimonious skirts of pretended concern for the safety of children. (Wood, 1977, p. 235)

Now I think that Wood is only partly correct in this conclusion, especially since the concern for safety does not stop at the idea of a playground—still there is concern for the design of "safe" playgrounds. For instance, the leader to Lady Allen of Hurtwood's article extolling the virtues of the Danish experiment in Adventure Playgrounds, which appeared in the November 1946 *Picture Post*, referred to the dangers of bombed-out play sites. Readers were asked, "Why not make them safe places to play in?" (Bengtsson, 1972, p. 25). If concern for the safety of children were

simply a disguise for adult indifference to children then why would adults be so concerned about the safety of playgrounds and the safety of children on playgrounds?

Literature on the historical and social context of childhood is important in this regard since it shows the conditions that give rise to an interest in the safety of children. We see that childhood is at least in part an historical invention (Aries, 1962; Boas, 1980; De Mause, 1974; Lee, 1982), that childhood can be easily eroded (Suransky, 1982), and that it might even disappear (Postman, 1982). We see that there is today an absence of "public love" for children (Grubb and Lazerson, 1982). In fact, the preferred attitude towards children at large seems to be one of antipathy in view of the pressures to which parenting is subject, especially in Western countries (Greer, 1984, pp. 26–29).

This indifference may be demonstrated by bringing to mind one very traditional playground located within a tourist attraction where, on busy days, one can observe the large gathering of people at this particular site. Children, and some adults too, queue up to try the slippery slides, the carousels, the horizontal bars, the see-saws and the assortment of swings. On this playground the question of which child goes with which adult/s is not too hard to answer since we can watch as the children are shepherded around the playground, enticed down the slides and photographed on the swings. What we notice is that for the most part the adults only have eyes for their own children. We hear one adult say to a child on the slippery slide: "Wow, look at you....Come on Jessica. Come to Grandma....Sure, you can do it!" Jessica falters for a moment and then, with children backing up behind her, she lets the slide have its way. "Hey, Mom," says the grandmother, "did you see your little girl?" Jessica runs to her mother, gets a cuddle, and then hurries over to her father who stands near the ladder to ensure that Jessica can find a place in the queue. Another adult carries his

child up the ladder of the slippery slide. He holds the toddler in front of him and both adult and child come down the slide together, watched by the rest of the family standing nearby. They are greeted by applause from these family members, which is a bit distracting, for as they move away from the end of the slide they stumble over a small child who dawdles in the sand. Holding his own child close to him, this adult does not notice the child underfoot. He does not mean any harm to that child. It is just that he, like the other adults on the playground, does not see children other than his own.

It is strange that so much delight can be taken in the cuteness of our own child and yet we can be so indifferent to other children. It is strange that we can be so protective of our own child and yet seem so oblivious to the safety of other children. But is it all that strange? One might object to my interpretation by arguing that in the concrete situation we are not indifferent to the children of others if, for example, they are in distress. The point of the example, however, has not to do with indifference to children who are at-risk, but with an oversight of children that makes the normal course of their playground activity unsafe. A general indifference to the safety of children is what is at issue. On the other hand, can we be genuinely caring about all children who come within our purview? That would seem to extend the range of our concern and our responsibility for the safety of children beyond all reasonableness.

This contrast between the personal and the public view of children, or rather the narrowness of the parental view, is disturbing. And it is all the more disturbing when we question to what extent present notions of parenting even allow us to see our own child. Perhaps even this seemingly well-intentioned interest in my child's safety requires closer scrutiny, for as Miller (1983) argues, child-rearing practices testify

to a "poisonous pedagogy" where parents inflict cruelty upon their children under the pretense of parental care and concern. She claims that an interest in children is actually an interest in taking vengeance for the poisoning of one's own childhood. In this context, an interest in children, especially an interest that takes the form of a concern for their safety, cannot be taken at face value.

An interest in the safety of children expresses a cultural valuation of childhood that is reflected in the development of playgrounds. For instance, Zelizer (1985) argues that the disappearance of "the street hearth of play" (Zerner, 1977) actually indicates an increasingly sentimentalized view, a "sacralizing" of children's lives. The establishment of supervised playgrounds and the subsequent limitations that were imposed upon the so-called spontaneous children's games that existed in the past did not so much stifle childhood as bring the notion of childhood to prominence. That is, getting children off the streets was based upon concern for the physical and social dangers that threatened their safety (Zelizer, 1985, pp. 33-36), and this concern, Zelizer says, was part of a more pervasive cultural change in the way children have come to be valued. Consider in this regard the nostalgia sometimes expressed for the games that once existed beyond adult control and were presumably "played for no other reason than pleasure" (Postman, 1982, p. 4). Zelizer would say that this nostalgia is itself part of the sentimentalizing of childhood, and reflects an attitude to the supposed innocence of childhood that now allows for an *investment* in the lives of children, and for the high degree of adult control and supervision of children's play that is reflected in the present-day concern for playground safety.[3]

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[3] See Smith, 1957, and Sutton-Smith, 1959 for equally nostalgic though more tellingly real accounts of "play" activity that occurred outside adult control and, we are led to believe, outside the realm of adult interest. See also the listings in the Edith McKeever Cobb collection (Cobb, 1977, pp. 119-136).

Nowadays school playgrounds, home backyards, rumpus rooms, community pools, playing fields, ice arenas, gymnasia, even water parks and thrill centres, are preferred by parents as places for their children to play over more traditional, and perhaps more alluring, places such as streets, vacant lots, woodland areas, streams and other water courses, and "such dangerous and forbidden places as sandpiles and quarries" (Hart, 1979, p. 334). Safe playgrounds, even playgrounds *per se*, are increasingly defined as those areas that are limited spatially and that allow the adult's view—that lie within the adult's purview. They are places designed with children in mind, which is to say, according to the view that childhood needs to be protected and secured. In effect, the design of the contemporary playground becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of the nature of childhood to the extent that safety is the lens through which we look at children.

Of course, it would be unreasonable to argue against the safety of children; nevertheless, this does not mean that concern for the safety of children need be accepted unquestioningly. It may be that this concern, and the adult view from which it draws, places unnecessary limitations upon the child's experience of the world. It may be that the concern for the safety of children, expressed in the provision of playgrounds, actually makes us increasingly insensitive to the child's place in a risky world. In fact, Van den Berg (1975) provides real cause for concern when he claims that the safety of the playground attests to the exile of children from an adult world. He says:

> He who wants to see with his own eyes the separateness of the child's world, who wants to observe how the child is put down (lovingly) in a space of its own, cannot do better than visit a playground. He will have to adjust his eyes to the observation of certain peculiarities. Or rather, he must take off the glasses which make all inevitabilities seem acts of love. What he will then observe is...a fenced-in space, an island in the middle of the mature world, an island of comparative safety in a fatal maturity, an island of (necessary) exile. (Van den Berg, 1975, pp. 94, 95)

Yet, lest we feel secure in what we have provided for children in terms of well-designed playgrounds, Van den Berg goes on to indicate the damage that occurs under the weight of such gestures of benevolence.

> When the child ventures on the street—he must go to school and home again—he has to be armed against the dangers he will meet. The grownups have given him a crossing guard. The children wait on the pavement until their little group has grown big enough, then the guard puts up his hand, the traffic stops, and the group of exiles hurry to the other side of the street. No sooner is the last child off the street than the waiting traffic accelerates and hurries on.
> A group of exiles? The thought that we are good for the children is more agreeable; so good are we that we lend them the attributes of maturity to defend themselves. Look, there they go; everybody stops; the business man whose time is money, the large truck, whose delay can be expressed in hard cash—everybody stops for the children. Are we not good to them? Doubtless we are, but it is the least we can do; we are obliged to be good to them, because of the great amount of irreparable evil we have done. Our goodness pays for a great injustice. (Van den Berg, 1975, p. 95)

Seen in this light, the safety of the playground becomes a troublesome notion, especially when we are reminded by Slukin (1981, 1987) that "growing up in the playground" often entails subjection to the threats and intimidations of older children and, in general, submission to a brutal order that overrides the design of playgrounds as places where children can safely be by themselves. A fairly common situation is that of one child being threatened by another and then having to find a way out of being drawn into a fight. For example,

> Ivan (9:7) grabs Graeme (9:3):
> Ivan: I'm going to smash your face in (and knees him in the stomach).
> Graeme does not react, then smiles and says: I'm going to let you off this time. (Slukin, 1981, p. 38)

A recent initiative designed to make playgrounds safe from bullying and victimization involves teaching "playground etiquette" as a "subject" in elementary school classrooms (Davidson and Seligman, 1987). Here we have an attempt to ensure the playground's safety by telling children how to behave there .n attempt which would seem to

express an adult longing for the type of playground Van Den Berg describes as "an island of comparative safety in a fatal maturity." Such an attempt should certainly give us cause for concern as we wonder about the need to "lend them [children] the attributes of maturity" so as to ensure their safety on the playground. One wonders if, under the guise of playground safety, we have not merely substituted one rigid order, albeit an adult-sanctioned one, for another. Still we must ask: What has this concern for safety achieved for the child?

The Supervision of Children

In order for there to be a real measure of safety in what children do on playgrounds it is necessary that their playground activity be properly understood. The safety of playground activity is not the absence of risk, nor is it simply a matter of the successful management of risk. The designers of playgrounds have been quick to point out that:

> It is possible to create an environment which is almost perfectly safe simply by avoiding risk. The problem is, however, that such a setting would not make a good play environment because it would lack many of those elements necesssary for meaningful play; variety, complexity, challenge, risk, flexibility, adaptability, etc. Quite simply, such a playground would go largely unused. Indeed, this is the case with many of the traditional playgrounds now in existence. They are not being heavily used because children do not like them; they are neither fun nor challenging. Incidentally, this also gives them the appearance of being safe. Few accidents are reported because few people use them. (Wilkinson and Lockhart, 1980, p. 87)

The safety of the playground hinges more on the view of things that happen when the playground is in use. Safety requires overseeing children's activity, inspecting what it is that they are doing. It requires the supervision of playground activity.

Supervision is a defining of children's activity, a bounded way of observing children, a framing of one's thoughts about them. Supervision is a measure of the safety of the playground. Perhaps it is not totally out of hand to say that

> Playgrounds themselves are really nothing other than places that have been set aside for children. They're not safe; they're not special; they're really just the marked out areas that it's okay to be in. Anyplace else you're going to get hassled: "Hey, kid, don't hang around the store. Go get someplace that you belong." Well, the only place a kid belongs is the playground. (Beckworth and Hewes, 1974, p. 64)

The point is that in order to recognize the safety (and the specialness) of the playground it is necessary to stand in a certain relation to it and to see this place as somewhere a child belongs. It is necessary, some would say, to supervise the child's activity. Thus, early playgrounds had adult play supervisors, adventure playgrounds were conceived as requiring playground leaders, and now contemporary playgrounds yield to summer playground "programs" under the direction of trained recreation workers. The point to be recognized about playground supervision, however, is that in spite of defining playground activity quite narrowly and confining children's activity within an adult view, it also holds out the possibility of truly seeing the child.

To see the child rather than simply to view his or her activity according to preconceived categories of adult interest means bringing to light that which makes the events of a playground of interest and that which cuts deeper than the verdict that children are "playing in safety." We need to look at playground activity, not with any preconceived framework which would make our looking into a set view, but rather with a certain attitude that is mindful of our involvement, even as observers, in the situation at hand. In effect, it is necessary to suspend certain theoretical as well as practical interests in playground spaces and explicate what motivates our urge to supervise playground activity.

Some time ago Herbart wrote:

> Perhaps it has been my misfortune to witness too many examples of the effect of strict supervision in public institutions, and perhaps, having due regard to the safety of life and strength of limb, I am much too possessed with the idea that boys must be allowed to run risks if they are to become men. Suffice it briefly to remember that punctilious and constant supervision is burdensome alike to the supervisor and those he watches over, and is apt therefore to be associated on both sides with deceit, and thrown off at every opportunity—and also that the need for it grows with the degree in which it is used, and that at last every moment of its intermittance is fraught with danger. Further, it prevents children from knowing and testing themselves, and learning a thousand things which are not included in any pedagogic system, but can only be found by self-search. (Herbart, 1806/1896, pp. 97, 98)

Here, it seems to me, is the crux of the matter. The safety of children that is bought through a preoccupation with their strict supervision may eventually put them at-risk, because this single-minded concern would deny the risks that are a natural and inevitable part of their activity. This supervisory concern would also deny the adult's part in helping the child take risks in relative safety.

Strict supervision means that the child is far too conscious of the adult's approval of "safe" action. Consider our own reflections of how a feeling of being supervised and hence being only a "kid" outweighed any benefit from being seen by the adult in attendance. In fact, recollections of favourite times on the playground tend to revolve around those times when we "had it to ourselves" and could try things that might not necessarily meet the approval of adults. But did we really have it to ourselves? Or was this sense of being in charge of our destiny really a result of a much less overbearing, far more subtle, adult presence? After all, children will invite adults to join their playground activity provided that the adults are kindly disposed towards them and prepared to enter the spirit of their activity (eg. Corsaro, 1981). Or, as Lindsay (1984) concluded from his study of playground activity,

> We can learn much about children, the way they think and their developmental stages, by observing them at play in a child's world. Not

> only is there a bond between players, but teachers who show an interest in the games are immediately welcomed even though they are adults. This is one very effective way for teachers to achieve rapport with a class, and the thrill of acceptance by being invited to join a game can be as satisfying for the teacher or visitor as it is for the "new kid on the block." (Lindsay, 1984, p. 11)

The point is that while strict supervision suggests a failure to understand the nature of the risks of the playground, the idea of supervision still allows for the possibility of seeing this riskiness in a more pedagogical way.

There is a riskiness to the playground that undercuts our attempts, through the design of the playground apparatus and the supervision of activities allowed on this apparatus, to ensure the safety of children. This riskiness is not antithetical to the child's safety, rather, we need to look at the child on the playground in such a way that our concern for playground safety might disclose the risk-taking that seems to be so much a part of the child's coming to terms with playground things and the things that the playground represents. We need to consider supervision for the sake of a child's safety in light of the more fundamental aspect of that child's propensity for taking risks.

The Observation of Children

If we really want to assess the riskiness of the playground perhaps we should at least sit close by, watching what children do there. Says Barrett (1972) in words that apply nicely to this study:

> Perhaps we have only enough energy and interest to sit on a park bench in the sunlight. But a world may be discovered there that has been screened off from our previous high-strung and overambitious consciousness. (p. 275)

By the same token, we should be mindful also of what our proximity to the child

implies. Remember that Walt Disney also sat on a park bench watching his children at play. In the process he dreamed up "Disneyland."

> "It all started when my daughters were very young, and I took them to amusement parks on Sunday," he told me. "I sat on a bench eating peanuts and looking all around me. I said to myself, dammit, why can't there be a better place to take your children, where you can have fun together?" (Thomas, 1976, p. 11)

His watching led to a design for children and adults that overlooked the riskiness of the playground altogether. Of course we, too, have designs for children. The question is: To what extent might our designs open up the possibility of a relation to children that goes beyond the supervisory? More specifically, how might our concern for the riskiness of the playground bring us closer to an understanding of how we should stand, or sit, in relation to them?

Consider the ubiquitous park bench: brightly-painted seats set into concrete slabs that border the traditional playgrounds, or lower benches and forms that tend to blend in with the construction materials used in the newer creative and designer playgrounds. But no matter how unobtrusive the design and placement, the park bench signifies a certain relation of the adult to the child. The bench is a place for sitting down and taking a relaxed view of what the child is doing. The well-placed bench is meant to give the adult a sense of security, not only about the safety of the child, but also in regard to the way in which one feels comfortable as an adult in a place that is ostensibly for children. This latter aspect is not so much a feeling of physical comfort (although who would deny the need for that?) as it is a feeling of correctness about one's place on the playground. It may well be that sitting with the child on one of the platforms of the playground apparatus is just as physically comfortable as reclining on the park bench, while standing on the platform at the top of the slide area is possibly more comforting safety-wise; nevertheless there is a strong tendency for the

adult to move away from these positions as if it is not proper to be seen there. At a community swimming pool, for example, the sign on the slide clearly states that only children under eight years of age can use this equipment. And the unwary adult who climbs up the ladder behind her young child is soon made aware of this rule by the attendant with the megaphone on the far side of the pool. Likewise, some outdoor playgrounds have signs that ensure that adults stay in their designated place on the park bench.

The park bench is also something upon which children do not generally play, something which they approach only when wishing to break away from the activity at hand to seek consolation, reassurance, or some other contact with the adult sitting there. The child rushes over from the swings, pulling and tugging at the coat that now seems too hot to be worn, and as he comes near he flings the coat in the direction of the bench, turns on his heels, and races back to the swings. He knows the bench is not there to be played upon; it is simply placed there to ensure the comfort of his activity. Another child approaches in tears, having been treated roughly by one of her playmates. She sits for a while beside the adult on the bench and finds some solace in the detachment of this place from those who caused her injury; but before too long she becomes restless, hearing once again the noises of those on the playground. She pauses a moment longer, unsure whether or not to leave this protective place, until she hears her name called by one of the children. All is forgiven, the bench has served its purpose, and the child re-enters the playground.

The park bench thus signifies more than a physical proximity to the child. It signifies the nature of the adult's relation to the child without necessarily foreclosing the possibilities of this relation. From a design perspective, the important consideration will be that of the proper placement of park benches. Let me cite one exaggerated

example of the designer's concern.

> When a mother arrives at a playground with her child, she is usually already footweary. She has no doubt pushed or pulled or carried a carriage, a stroller, a large bundle of toys, something to drink or eat for Junior, her knitting or a book—perhaps for part of the way she has even had to carry the child. And she has juggled these various difficulties while making her way across busy streets, keeping hand and eye on the child, and watching out for traffic. If this young mother has two young children with her, the problems are fourfold.
> It is no harder for this mother to let down her guard against potential danger once ensconced on a playground bench than it is for the long-haul automobile driver to be inclined to doze off while driving. It is a reflex which one cannot completely control. Many accidents happen because she is such a long way away from her child that the imminent danger is not apparent until too late. (Aaron and Winawer, 1965, p. 68)

For these writers, the design concern is that children should be supervised "at a range close enough for control" (p. 68). To be open to the possibilities of the adult-child relation on the playground, however, it is necessary to look beyond supervision, which means questioning the meaning of the park bench—that which is intended in its design. Like the seating of a theatre, it is possible to choose where one sits in relation to children on the playground, to see the things they do in a many-sided way, as in theatre-in-the-round, and even to take part in the drama which unfolds. But beyond the issues of control and supervision, the deeper issue of the park bench is that it brings to the fore the significance of the adult's presence on the playground, and the question of how he or she should be present to the child's activity. The adult is not a mere supervisor of children's playground activity, but rather a keen observer of what children can and cannot do, of their fears and difficulties, of the danger and challenge of their activities. The adult can come to see risk in the context of the playground with a mindfulness of the child. Although the playground, as an adult construction, gives certain visible evidence of the adult's presence, still there is a need to have the child feel this presence in a way that makes the playground a place of responsible risk-taking. So, although one needs to be in a position to see the child, the more

important issue pertains to how one tries to observe fully the question of how it is that the child can learn to take risks in safety.

The task is not only to look at the child, but also to take note of how the child is placed. Observing means looking with care. "The word 'observing' has etymological connections to 'preserving, saving, regarding, protecting.' The teacher serves the child by observing from very close proximity while still maintaining distance" (van Manen, 1986, p. 19). This is what the park bench allows. And yet, to appreciate fully the significance of the park bench, it is necessary to see it as a means of observing children in a particular manner. Beets has outlined the ways in which this significance might be appreciated.

> When I as passer-by stop to watch some children play—let's say, boys playing soccer—then my watching could be called "observing." I stand and watch for ten minutes at a soccer field that belongs to an inner-city school. If I know soccer, then I have seen quite a bit in 10 minutes' time. Subsequently, I continue my interrupted walk. For the children I am an outsider, a passer-by who stopped to watch and then left. Whatever I have "seen" is a reflection of this.
> When I am not an outsider/passer-by, but someone who *belongs* in the life of the children—a father who participates in the game, or a coach of the soccer club—then I observe the game in a very different manner. There is a relationship between myself and the children I observe. They know me and I know them. When I watch their game this, too, is observing. My vantage point is now different. I observe from out-of-their-midst. I am not an outsider but an insider in the life of the children (Beets, 1952/1975, p. 15).
> There is a third form of "observing." I pass by the schoolyard; I could be the school psychologist, a counsellor, or maybe a home-room teacher who has special responsibilities for these children. They know me and I know them. When I stand still and watch while they are playing, I am an outsider in a certain sense, since now I observe them from a scientific or an educational vantage point of "pedagogue" or "diagnosticus." But I am also involved, since I am and feel that I am responsible for their education. I stand beside the parent—on the side of the educators. Now I observe in a special manner, however. I have learned to adopt a scientific vantage point and my observing is observation from that "vision" (Beets, 1952/1975, p. 16).
> (van Manen, 1979, p. 8)

These contrasting attitudes are not only different stances taken up by the passer-by,

the father/coach or the pedagogue, they also express different forms of interaction between children and their observers. They are different ways of responding to the children's activity. Accordingly, the significance of the well-placed bench is that it not only enables the child on the playground to be seen, but it also places the adult in the midst of the child's activity and calls upon his or her ability to respond to what he or she sees happening there. Borrowing from a more technicist language, it allows for "skillful" handling of the child, where

> A skillful observer develops sensitivity to the uniqueness of personality and becomes increasingly able to interpret the language of behavior. For parents and teachers, the ability to fix attention on one child at a time makes it possible to look more deeply into that child's idiomatic behavior for clues to understanding the significance of his actions, his gestures, his facial expressions, his spoken words and the tempo of his day-to-day living. (Dowley, 1969, p. 517)

In effect, the well-placed bench puts the adult into a situation where he or she can observe pedagogically the significance of the child's activity on the playground. It allows for "being a child-watcher who keeps in view the total existence of the developing child" (van Manen, 1986, p. 18).

Risky Situations

From the park bench I see two small girls on a circular slippery slide. One stands at the top while the other straddles the raised edge of the slide, and starting at the bottom, she begins to pull herself up the slide by gripping under the edge and allowing her outside leg to dangle freely. "This is fun," she says to her friend at the top. "Why don't you try it?" Now half-way up, she decides to try something new. "Hey, watch what I can do!" Standing on the edge and then bracing herself with her arms against the pillar around which the slide curves, she edges up further. But her friend at the top becomes perturbed by what she sees. Her concern shows

even more as the adventurous one reaches the casing that covers the top of the slide–the curved plastic casing that offers no purchase for this girl and that has no guard rail to stop her from slipping over the edge and falling down onto the packed sand below–the casing that this girl is presently trying to climb over.

I have been watching what these girls are doing and now I, too, am concerned for the child who is at this moment precariously situated on the top of the slide. In fact, I am concerned for them both, because both of them find the situation risky, albeit in decidedly different ways. The little girl standing at the top is scared by the antics of her friend, while the latter child finds herself in a danger that she had not been able to anticipate nor one over which she can now exert some control. Her bravado, her attempt to impress her friend and I suspect, myself, has prevented her from appreciating the inevitable consequence of what she does.

As I watch these two little girls I feel responsible for what has now transpired. I have not shown either of them "what is the nature of mature adulthood toward which she is striving" (van Manen, 1979, p. 14). I have not helped them see a risk that is not necessarily a likely danger. An action component is missing from this situation, quite apart from the action of stopping the child from climbing up the slide. Unfortunately it is too late to act in any way. The child falls off the slide. My heart stops as I see her sprawled on the ground. A slight relief–she starts crying as I rush over to where she lays. I am further relieved–although she has fallen heavily, fortunately the little girl has suffered only some minor bruising. I help her up, allowing her to hobble around for a little while, before she and her friend head off to the swings. But as I return to the park bench, having done my job of consoling her after the fall, I feel more than a little responsible for what has happened and for what may well have been a more serious injury. I should have stepped in before

the child put herself in danger, before a fall became imminent, although I am not at all sure, even now, that preventing the child from going further up the slide would have been the best action to take. What would my concern for danger do for the child who watches from the top in a state of concern? How would she be helped by my pointing out the danger that lurks in the playground? On the other hand, the vitality has gone from the little girls' movements. I watch them now on the swings and I cannot help but think that something has been lost for these girls as a result of the fall and the lack of observance of that which led up to it. The children have gained an awareness of safety at the expense of an awareness of risk. A potential opportunity to teach them, and for myself to learn, about the nature of risk has been lost.

This situation shows that, while the park bench provides a measure of security for the child, at times it obscures the difference between watching and truly observing the child's activity. At times it is necessary to step onto the playground and address face-to-face the question of risk, the question which defines the boundaries of the playground, the question which makes the playground interesting, and the question which asks how we might observe what children do there. The young children on the slippery slide need not so much to appreciate the potential (and in this case, actual) danger in the situation at hand, as to see the risk involved in what they are doing. Well before the likelihood of mishap, the adult must not only be able to assist the child and be in a position to do so, but in addition, there must be something about the adult's positioning on the playground that enables the riskiness of the activity to become clearer to the child. In other words, the adult who has the ability to see the riskiness of a young child climbing up the slide, who sees the fear this strikes in the heart of the little girl watching from the top, who sees that the motivation for this

risky activity depends very much upon such responses of those who stand nearest, this adult must acknowledge the decisive moment of his of her positioning on the playground. Are we there simply to watch the child, to dare the child, or does the fact that we are in attendance mean the situation is potentially a pedagogical one?

> By seeing the pedagogic potential in an ordinary or everyday life situation, the educator converts by way of a pedagogic intention some incidental subject or problem situation into a situation where a certain question or problem becomes a critical one for the young person. This is made possible due to the special tension that exists in the pedagogic relation between the more mature adult and the less mature young person. As a result of this tensional relation the young person finds him- or herself in a situation where he or she must act, choose, or decide with respect to some question or problem—and this acting (learning) lifts the young person (student) to a higher level of being (*einen Aufschwung des Seins*). (van Manen, 1987, pp. 22,23)

There is risk in the situation involving the girl climbing up the slippery slide, yet it is the observer's awareness of this risk that can create a literal upswing (*Aufschwung*) in their being together on the playground, thereby transforming the situation pedagogically. The children on the slide look to the adult who sits on the park bench. And now that this vantage point is sighted it creates a site for their explorations. The adult is caught in a situation where he or she can either stay seated and leave the children to their own devices, or where the child's glance can be acknowledged and the riskiness of the situation drawn out. Either way, a decision has been made.

To this extent, a useful distinction can be made between position and situation.

> Taken in a very broad sense, we define "position" as the living environment of man, the totality of all the circumstances that influence him in a stimulating as well as restraining way. All life—not only human, but also animal life as well—finds itself at each moment in a determinate position. This position itself can then be of a very heterogenous nature: it can mean pressure, and stimulate man's efforts to change his living conditions, but it may be as well a position of rest, in which he feels well and which he by no means plans to change.
> In contrast with this, we define "situation" as a determinate critical position, namely a position that places man before the necessity of making

> a decision. Situation, therefore, designates a position in which man has to make a determinate choice between different possibilities that offer themselves to him, and to organize his life in harmony with this choice. (Bollnow, 1972, p. 376)

Of course not every instance of playground activity requires that something decisive happen on our part. One must be sensitive to the difference between critical instances and those which are not, since pedagogy fails as much at the extreme of investing absolutely everything with momentous significance as it does at the other extreme of seeing nothing at all as decisive. The truth of the matter may be that the most important decision is the one to be there for the sake of the child's explorations. This decision potentially circumscribes not only a position, a posture towards playground activity, but also a situation that gives meaning to the particular decisions one might make regarding what to do with the children one faces. This decision to observe children's playground activity creates a situation in which one is implicated no matter what one decides to do in specific instances. This decision creates a situation of responsibility for children.[4]

We are somehow responsible for the child's falling off the slippery slide although not necessarily in any culpable way. Like many other playground incidents, this incident could have been avoided. From the sidelines we see that slippery slides as well as climbing frames, swings, ladders, beams and bars, each pose a challenge for children and require them to take risks. We see dares, challenges, contests and games take place around these playground things and become part of the awareness of risk. And we see this happen in all sorts of playgrounds, even playgrounds where things appear to be quite safe. Yet as we observe more closely we see that "safe playgrounds" only make sense in light of the question of risk. The consideration of

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[4]See Peter Petersen's definition of an "educational situation" and its moral prerequisites (Dietrich, 1987).

the riskiness of the playground is thus not so much a matter of watching particular situations as a matter of seeing our place within those situations and ensuring that this place holds out the possibility of bringing a sense of security to the child's explorations.

How do we do this? How are we to take up such a position of responsibility? We need to be aware that the riskiness of the playground points beyond the situation at hand. The incident of the two young children on the slippery slide, for instance, says something about children's experience of risk and something about an adult's response, however it attests to a more pervasive meaning of risk that is compressed within this particular situation. In the words of Buytendijk,

> Any analysis of human relations must be part of the more extensive analysis of the meaningful structure which we call a "situation." I can have a living experience of fear or distress but I know only *that* I am afraid or sad. I do not know *what* fear or distress are. To know this I must interpret the conduct and its supporting "situation" which in turn depends upon the emotion. I must interpret the *meaning* of man's dialogue. And I must understand this dialogue as an "historical idea" in a situation that has become its own. (Buytendijk, 1958, p. 109)

Hence we need to reconsider such playground situations where risk appears. We need to discern within these situations important questions pertaining to children's fears and difficulties, and questions pertaining to the place of danger, challenge and adventure in children's lives. We need to raise questions that have to do with what we should or should not do for children when a sense of risk pervades their activity. How can children be taught to take risks in safety? How can parents and teachers enable children to become responsible risk-takers? These are important questions to ask in specific instances. But ultimately this questioning of the riskiness of the playground is a questioning of our relation to children within the context of a precarious social-historical world. It is a questioning of what we should do for and with children for the sake of their continued movement towards becoming responsible themselves for

the risky texture of life itself.

The playground is thus a unique place for addressing the meaning of risk in a child's life. It is designed to shield children from the risks that lie beyond it; yet, not surprisingly, we cannot minimize the risks of the playground without losing children's interest. So we create playgrounds which, to a greater or lesser extent, allow children to take risks in a sheltered environment. Instead of children climbing trees and rooftops or balancing on the tops of fences, they can now climb ladders, frames and cargo nets, and walk along wooden beams set only a short distance from the ground; instead of exploring tunnels and caverns, they can now play in concrete pipes and plastic tubes installed on playgrounds. The designed playground allows for some control over the risks a child might otherwise take when left to his or her devices. Nevertheless, children will invariably test the design of the safest playground. They will take risks which even the best of playground designers could not anticipate. Hence, in order to avoid adversity, it is necessary for us to be present to the activity of children and to stand close by at least in a supervisory relation to them. Now we can observe children from close quarters. Now we can begin to see what is at stake when we are present on the playground. We can see that risky situations are occasions for interacting with children and for helping them gain confidence in their range of movement. But risky playground situations not only have a bearing on the particular physical activities in which children are engaged, they also influence children's confidence in a world which the playground represents for the moment. The playground, we shall find, is not such an isolated place after all. This place where risk can become a term of a relation to children allows us to consider how we can help children find their place in a precarious and sometimes all too risky world.

CHAPTER III

THE SILENCE OF RISK

How shall we investigate these risky situations? What set of procedures shall we use for observing children's playground activity? To ask such questions runs the risk of putting up barriers between adult and child and ignoring the very thing we are trying to tease out in this study, namely the relation between adult and child that is somehow defined by the notion of risk. Listen to Beekman (1983) as he tells how procedures can get in the way.

> I would be like the observers of a playground in Holland, counting their own made up categories but not understanding. This is described very clearly in *Kinderen buiten spel* (*The Play of Children Out-of-Doors*) where so-called objective observers went inside an unobtrusive workman's shack, made a peeping hole, and made coded observations. In their protocols we find scores of "activities" numerically coded. The meaning of the experience is missing. For instance, if you were really "in" the park, you would see girls hanging around on bikes. Doing nothing? Or being social? How do you know, until you are really out there, interacting with the children? (p. 39)

How do you know children are taking risks, and how do you know what risk-taking might mean, "until you are really out there, interacting with children"? Procedures that deny the adult's place on the playground also deny the point of observing children in the first place. They deny the point of being on the playground and of seeing how our presence mediates the risks of the playground.

This emphasis on playground interaction does not mean there is no method to this study. On the contrary, I prefer to make a distinction between general procedures and techniques which can be followed by almost any researcher, and pedagogical method which first requires an attunement to the field, a committed stance to the researched, a certain moral sensitivity. Procedural recommendations alone do not necessarily have this orientation. Too often they serve as devices to keep us at a

distance from that which is truly important. They do not necessarily connect with a fundamental interest in the riskiness of the playground. By the same token, understanding the meaning of risk in playground activity does not require the denial of any procedures whatsoever, but more an acknowledgement that the procedures being followed only make sense in terms of a deep-seated, interactive understanding of how certain situations first stand out as being risky. The question of procedure is really a second-order question determined, in the first instance, by the experience we have of the risks children encounter on the playground.

Perhaps the distinction that ought to be made is that between procedure and methodology, the latter referring to the reflective stance that makes sense of any particular procedure of inquiry. Methodology, in the present context, expresses a standpoint in relation to the playground, a decision to stand in a particular relation to those situations where risk is apparent, a desire to make one's presence felt. "But is that not more an ethical imperative than a methodological prescription?" asks Beekman (1983, p. 38). He adds: "The question presupposes a gap between methodology and value realization. Is that gap justified?" My task in the present chapter is to show that any gap between the methodology of understanding the riskiness of the playground and a pedagogic interest in the value of children's risk-taking is simply untenable. Here I shall attempt to explicate the methodological principles that are at work when such an interest thematizes one's relation to children.

An Approach of Silence

"The child," says Smith (1986), "is always beyond our understanding because he is always beyond us" (p. 4). But this difference is not so much an impediment, as a

formative principle of understanding playground activity. That is to say, the aim of this understanding is not to conceptualize children's activity, as if somehow taking hold of their experiences, but rather to make explicit the nature of those interactions that occur when their sense of playground activity touches us. When children show fear, or even when they are oblivious to danger, when their risk-taking demands our attention—this is when the difference between adult and child is played out. This is when pedagogic understanding arises, which is to say, understanding which is not "of the child" per se, but between the child and adult, and encompasses both. And this is when "the question must be asked how the constitution of such understanding can be conceived and made feasible in the pedagogic context and how the specific interaction structure of an act of pedagogic understanding can be ideally represented" (Scarbath, 1985, p. 94). That is the practical question I shall now address as I look to certain inquiry approaches that potentially show a child orientation, that allow for an interrogation of the ways and means we have of acting in the best interests of the child, and that in turn hold promise for representing the interactional structure of our attempts to understand the riskiness of the playground.

To begin, Zerner (1977), in his admirable study of the "dwelling places" of children in the city, outlines an approach which shows a degree of deference to children. He says:

> Fieldwork in the city? Call it Alley Work and it works better. No questionnaires, no interviews, and very few numbers. Alley work occasionally had the contours of silence, the mantle of near invisibility. It meant being absolutely still and silent, sitting on a sunwashed step in Fresno Street while a moon exploration was occurring before my eyes. I sat for two hours on this modest perch, barely looking up for fear of disturbing the incredible drama of alley astronaut and Mr. Mission Control—writing down verbatim the details of a conversation transpiring between earth and moon. At these unexpected moments there are no questions to be asked. A question during these rare moments is as jarring as a thunderclap during a holy ceremony. At these times one writes, one listens, one pretends he is doing his homework on a sunwarmed step in the city's springtime alley.

(p. 19)

Zerner adopts an attitude of silence while observing children. He sits close by, listening intently, yet keeping quiet for fear of intruding upon the children's activity. What he has to say he keeps to himself; what he has to ask is confined to a realm of silence. To a certain extent, he finds himself in a situation that seems to require that he maintain a position of silent detachment.

Can such a position of silence be taken in a study that addresses a different object of experience? Is what Zerner does sufficient for understanding and being responsible for the riskiness of the playground? Will "being absolutely still and silent" allow for a pedagogical response to risk? In comparison with the present study of risk-taking, Zerner's detachment would seem to derive more from curiosity about the dwelling places of children than from deep-seated interest in dwelling with children. He shows disdain for the "spells of excruciatingly dull times" and asks: "How many replays of a common game of tag, football, or Chinese jumprope can one watch before succumbing to the pall of tedium?" (p. 26). And in his preference for the "rare moments of the exotic and surprising" over "the lion's share of the commonplace" (p. 26), a position of silent detachment is legitimized as method. The question of risk and the playground, on the other hand, has to do with engagement—with how it is that we can stand in a relation to children that directly influences the nature of their activity. This question does not deny the importance of being silent at times; rather, it requires questioning the strictures of silent detachment in order to disclose an approach that allows for pedagogic relatedness.

Consider, by way of contrast, a much less silent posture. Consider observing children as they dare each other, as they find themselves in difficulties, and as they look to us for some measure of assistance. Here it is not possible to simply observe

in silent detachment. Some guidance is required lest children are actually put at risk. Our silence must be broken. But does this mean that our research interest in these children must also be put aside as we engage in activity with them? On the contrary, I would suggest that sometimes remaining silent while being present where children are playing (and thus nevertheless breaking another silence of children's privacy, for example) is being less attuned to a relation of pedagogy than it would be to involve ourselves in the children's activity. Here we may be guilty of trading one kind of silence, the silence of pedagogic intentionality, for another more trivial kind of silence. We may, in effect, be confusing the need at times for being silent, a literal silence, with the more important project of addressing the tension between our understanding and the child's understanding of risky playground activity, which is to say, an epistemological silence.

How might we gain access to this deeper sense of playground silence. Certainly we can encounter the silences left behind by those who would make pat formulations out of the question of risk. In fact, no sooner are silences of understanding encountered than the explicit meanings assigned to the text lose their hold and the lived meanings come into view. Still, what would silence be without the attempt to establish meaning? It would be a muteness, a silence that does not speak, an ignorance. So, perhaps it is better to think of understanding playground activity in terms of the way silence and explicit meaning augment and deepen each other.

> For where are words which are meant to be said, ever entirely said? Where does meaning end? In the unity of the sentence? Rather in the unity of the utterance which ends in silence. But is it not true, however, that even in this ensuing silence that which is said takes on meaning only when it arrives at its destination, and that its meaning spreads outwards only in the stillness of its having been said? (Gadamer, 1982, pp. 181-2)

Silvers (1983) provides an illustration of this treatment of epistemological silence when describing a situ on of young children swinging on a tire. While watching this activity he notices a group of younger children standing off to the side, content, it seems, to simply watch what is going on. He asks one of them, a little girl named Sylvia: "Why don't you join in"? Sylvia responds: "They're the big people." Silvers thinks to himself that perhaps the younger children do not want to be bullied by the older ones, or perhaps they only want to play amongst themselves. These interpretations of Sylvia's response do not, however, account for the force of her remark.

> There was a force of expression, a power in the disclosure of her remark that "They're the big people." There was a thickness of history, of conflicts, of judgment, ways of relating to those older boys. And, as well there were special meanings held within it that Sylvia and her friends would talk about. (Silvers, 1983, p. 92)

For Silvers, these hidden meanings disclose the limits of an adult way of understanding.

> There are subtleties of meaning in what the big people are for her that I cannot know: neither do I know what to say to her nor do I know what to ask; the way I understand the big people allows me no access in comment or question, no way to address the depth of Sylvia's remark. In my failure to ask about the big people, I recognize a silence as a limit of my understanding. (p. 92)

Of course we are not confined to the silences that come upon us as if there is a point at which understanding ceases. While "silence is a failure borne out of difference" (Silvers, p. 96), it is in the awareness of difference that silence becomes truly meaningful.

> Self and other with their respective interpretive domains stand together in the context of silence in a tensive relationship, the self and other are constituted as a dialectic. (Silvers, p. 105)

The case of Sylvia requires a "reading" which not only recognizes this difference between adult observer and the child on the playground, but which acknowledges that

difference as the condition for a particular form of understanding, namely pedagogical understanding. The silence that falls upon us draws us forward to that which is of interest. So, it may be that "these interpretive occasions [cases where it is particularly difficult to understand] would provide better clues to the process whereby comprehension is achieved" (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 226). But in the case of the child on the playground our being brought to silence is not just of epistemological interest but fundamentally of pedagogical significance. Silence signifies the recognition of that difference which underlies a pedagogic sensibility—a sensitivity to the child and a response-ability for his or her actions.

Let me illustrate the nature of this way of understanding playground activity by referring to a situation in which silence can so easily go unnoticed unless one is mindful of pedagogic difference, a situation which thus shows a pedagogical "reading" to be more than a way of passively attending to the silences of playground activity.

"You're It" says Terry as he scampers away to join David on the blocks at the opposite side of the playground. "Not fair" cries Wayne, "I'm always It..Why don't you get David for a change"? He mutters to himself while keeping an eye on the other two. Next moment Wayne tears off after Terry. Wayne, it seems, has one last chase left in him. Twice around the playground they run until Terry leaps onto the platform of the main frame, leaving Wayne gasping for breath on the ground below.... As some new rules are being formulated in a last-ditch effort to save the game, Lewis and his friends arrive—ten of them altogether. David listens as Lewis tells his friends: "I'm It. You've got twenty seconds." "Are you allowed on the boards"? asks David, referring to the sleepers that serve as a border to the playground and form a circular path around it. Lewis nods, not only in agreement, but also in acknowledgement of the admission of the three boys to the larger game of 'It.'

Meanwhile the children are each finding their own space away from Lewis. Some have launched themselves onto the tire swings, some stand poised on the stumps and pillars ready to jump to a new vantage point, others hide beneath the playframe watching for signs of Lewis' approach, while a few of the little ones group together on the platform at the far end of the suspended bridge perhaps sensing that Lewis will give them time to escape if perchance he decides to come after them.... Lewis understands this game. Being a little older than the others he knows he can catch whomever he chooses. So he moves steadily towards no one in particular and creates, as a consequence, an excitement among all the children. He sends them scurrying in all directions, each child feeling that perhaps he or she is the one that Lewis has in mind. Lewis orchestrates this game. He is sensitive to its internal structure.

The game runs its course. It falters as some children find swinging on the tires to be more interesting, while others start to dig around in the sandy base of the playground, until eventually no one cares about 'It' anymore. The game has broken down. Even Lewis has lost all interest. This seems to be an opportune moment to move onto something else, or maybe to intervene, for just as Lewis and his friends brought the earlier game to life so might some addition revive the present game. Accordingly, I become attentive the the nuances of the game of 'It,' and in so doing I encounter a silence that questions the ready interpretation. I recognize a silence as signifying my stepping into the game, as the limit of my understanding the game from a distance. Being drawn into the game I feel a certain responsibility for the children who are gathered there. I sense a loss in seeing the game disintegrate. Yet my interest in the activity of these children requires that I do not act solely on the basis of my impression of what has transpired, rather that I look even more closely at this activity so as to enter a playful relation with the children. Although a specific

response may be called for, such as a suggestion of a new activity or even the cessation of play for the child who is in my charge, this response ideally comes from my interest in the children themselves, out of a respect for the integrity of the activity at hand and not out of a subordination of this activity to my categorization of it. I must literally bite my tongue for fear of adulterating the children's activity. Silence mediates my understanding (cf. Dauenhauer, 1980, p. 154).

A Silent Procedure

What, then, does it mean to understand playground activity? It could be said that:

> Understanding is not just a "method"....Understanding communicates to the child that "I care for you; what you say and feel is important." Understanding is hearing not only the words of a child, but also hearing the struggling, growing self....The teacher stands with the child in his life situation until the child feels that the teacher is in relationship with him as he is. The child comes to feel that he is known as he knows himself. At the same time he senses that he will not be rejected, that the teacher will stay in relationship with him. (Snyder *et al.* 1980, p. 149.

Or, as Gadamer put it,

> The person with understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart unaffected; but rather, as one united by a specific bond with the other, he thinks with the other and undergoes the situation with him. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 288)

On the other hand, there is some truth to Smith's recollection of childhood experience when he says:

> My world, as a kid, was full of things that grownups didn't care about. My fear now is that all of us grownups have become so childish that we don't leave the kids much room to move around in, that we foolishly believe that we understand them so well because we share things with them. (Smith, 1957, p. 123)

In fact, it may very well be that we understand playground activity best when "the most precious gift we can give the young" is the "privacy" of their own play spaces

(Opie and Opie, 1969, p. 14). But even this "gift" requires an understanding of how we stand in relation to children. It requires seeing and hearing what matters to the children who are already in our view and deciding, at times, to remain silent.

This procedure of silence could therefore be defined as listening to children on the playground and taking care in our approach to their activity. In the first approximation of the object of my interest I must be cognizant of "the couple *hearing/keeping silent*" (Ricoeur, 1982, p. 59). I must see where I stand as a place for interpretation and as a place for hearing what calls forth my interpretation. It is a place to be silent, especially when the situation lends itself to silence.[1] But it is also a place from which to act in response to the child's predicament. In the second approximation of the object of my interest I cannot remain unmoved by what I see, rather I must act in response to the fact of my being an adult in the presence of a child. Recall the situation of Sylvia and her friends standing near the tire swing. "They're the big people," she says, referring to the older children who monopolize this part of the playground. Hearing this, should I step in and insist that all children have their turn? Or should I not attend more closely to the tone of her remark about "the big people" in order to get some inkling of what is really at stake here? Perhaps if I had observed the situation more closely I might have seen the older children wrap one of the tire swings, perhaps even the swing that Sylvia and her friends were using, around the side support so that it would be out of their way. I might have noticed these children taking turns to jump onto the swing from a platform just off to the side, and being grabbed by their partners on the swing whose job it is to keep kranking the swing up high and steering it towards the platform. I might have noticed how Sylvia and her friends watch this activity, how they are enthralled by it

[1]Cf. situation/site: from *situs*, derivative of Indo-European base se(i) meaning "to leave off," whence also the Latin *silere*, meaning "to be silent"(Klein, 1971, p. 687).

and more than a little in awe of what "the big people" can do on the swing. So when I (or Silvers) ask Sylvia: "Why don't you join in?" I might have realized that this question accents the activity in a particular way. My question is more than a means of understanding. It is a way of defining this playground situation for Sylvia. It is a type of challenge, perhaps even a dare. My question is a way of acting in response to what I see as being the child's predicament. Similarly, when I watch Lewis chase the children around the playground I am taken in by what I see happening there. Because of Lewis' maturity I am able to sit still and watch the children jump from one thing to another, scale the higher sections of the playground, shimmy down poles and chains or just jump to the ground when Lewis comes near them. I can sit and watch the children *taking risks*. And I can feel a sense of loss when the game disintegrates, especially when I see that Lewis has lost all interest. I want to show Lewis what the game is good for. I want to take over where Lewis has left off. So, even when I am silently watching children on the playground I am nonetheless attending to what I think matters to them.

This way of understanding playground activity requires an admission of our involvement in the activity of children. Although we need to take sufficient distance to question how the activity at hand is to be understood, still we must step close enough that no one interpretation satisfies. The task is to silence the ready interpretation, and then within this silencing, encounter playground things with children in mind. The matter of silence in understanding playground activity is not, therefore, simply the inaccessibility of the child's experience but rather the meaning of that which matters both to children and to us as observers of children, or participants with them, on the playground. The matter of silence is, on the far side, the otherness that is evident in our inability to fully account for the child's activity, and on the near side, the

concealedness of that which is the motive for our interest in the playground. As Bollnow (1974) says: "we realize we are on the right track when the subject-matter resists our interpretation, when it remains independent of our expectations and forces us to correct our original starting point again and again" (p. 11). This is what I mean by the farther side of silence. The near side attests to our complicity in the actions of children. In other words, we identify ourselves when "reading" playground activity for this "reading" is only possible because of a prior complicity in such child-like activity. Hence there is a tension in our understanding playground activity pedagogically—a tension of self and other which, because of a common interest, continually questions the one-sidedness of my view of things. And this questioning, to the extent that it discloses common ground, allows us to see how we might be with children in an understanding way.

I wish now to develop further this way of grounding an understanding of playground activity—to elevate the discussion from a concern with procedural issues to a concern for a way of knowing about playground activity that might sustain a methodological orientation. At the same time, I want to show how the consideration of method is inextricably bound up with the very notion of risk. Already it should be apparent that to see risk we must be attentive to the silences of playground activity; now I would like to show that how we might respond to the riskiness of the playground, that is, what mode of presence we bring to bear upon the child's explorations, is contingent upon our ability to stand in the midst of playground activity, to take a risk ourselves, even to risk the ground upon which we stand.

The Unspoken Ground

Bollnow (1982) says that of the many kinds of silences "there is also a comprehending silence, a well-intentioned silence, for all kindness takes place in silence." There is, first of all,

> a forgiving silence like that of the older and riper man observing the vagaries and vicissitudes of a younger, less experienced man. This is not merely silence, but a mode of behaviour that consists in not intervening straightaway, but of simply standing to one side with a certain understanding smile. (pp. 43, 44)

Yet even deeper than this kind of silence is the possibility of

> wordless agreement. Where people understand each other's inmost thoughts no words are necessary, they can sit together in silence and precisely in this mutual silence have the sensation of belonging together. (p. 44)

In the case of the playground, however, this deeper kind of silence points beyond the realm of adult-child interactions. The possibility of being with the other and for the other *reciprocally* applies less to understanding playground activity than does the possibility of a "comprehending silence" where one acknowledges the child's relative immaturity and is content to be with him or her in a far more one-sided, child-oriented way. Nevertheless this formulation of "comprehending silence," I believe, indicates a direction for understanding the nature of playground activity. It discloses certain possibilities of our being in the midst of playground activity.

I think, for example, of four small girls on one of the tire swings at Alice's Playground. One is seated while the other three stand up by holding on to the long chains attaching the tire to its supporting beam. Higher and higher they swing. "I'm scared," says the one seated on the tire. "*I'm* not scared," responds one of the others hovering over her. It seems that the first child is not to be taken literally, for in the next instant she gives a squeal of delight and calls out "Higher! Higher!" Meanwhile

a third child, finding the pitch of the swing a little too much, sits down to face the first child. The extra space between the chains now allows for greater mobility on the part of the two girls who remain standing on the tire. One reaches out with her foot to touch the platform towards which the swing now revolves. She misses. Next time she manages to make contact with it. On the third attempt she finds the edge of the platform, and pushing against it, sends the swing into a much wider orbit than before. "Stop! I'm scared!" pleads the girl who registered her fear only a short while ago. "I want to get off!" The swing slows down, and for the present the girls seem content to sit on the tire and talk amongst themselves.

Their talk drifts away from this activity. They see a boy from their school ride past. "Jeffrey, Jeffrey," they call out, until the boy spots them and then self-consciously proceeds upon his way. Inevitably, though, their thoughts return to the tire swing. And now, as if rested enough, the swing must once again be set in motion. But who shall they ask to give them a push? Of course I am standing close by watching Tyler on the adjacent tire swing. I glance over at the group of girls, thinking they might request my assistance. Instead, one of the girls calls for her older sister, Lisa, to come and give them a push. She calls again, and again. It seems strange to be standing only a pace or two away and yet not be asked. True, they don't know me very well. They have seen me before at the playground, but they don't recognize me as part of their activity. In a sense they don't see me. They only see Lisa who must leave the game she plays with her friends on the far side of the playground in order to give assistance to this little group on the swing. They see Lisa as she wanders over to them while muttering something about "little brats that can't do anything for themselves;" yet they sense that hers is only a mock annoyance. Lisa is happy to come and help them.

So why don't they call upon me for help? Apart from the obvious reasons, reasons that are not necessarily so obvious to the children on the swing, it seems that Lisa is better disposed to give assistance. She knows what the children want. She understands what is required of her by these girls. Lisa is called from a distance, while I who am standing closeby get ignored, because Lisa will know how much to push the swing. On the other hand, perhaps I might have offered my help. "Can *I* give you a push?" I might have asked. Such an offer might even have been accepted; and yet the situation that would then unfold would differ, possibly dramatically, from the situation in which Lisa found herself. Would this adult know how hard to push? Would he know when to stop? In this regard, perhaps there is a time, not so much to mind one's business, but rather to view an activity in what Bollnow calls "comprehending silence, a well-intentioned silence" (Bollnow, 1982, pp. 43, 44). My reluctance to offer help until asked holds out the possibility of seeing the activity at hand even more clearly than Lisa can. In relation to the potential fearfulness of this activity on the swing, this "well-intentioned silence" holds out the possibility of helping the child in a way that even Lisa is not yet able to understand.

Reminiscence

Here we have an active questioning of what matters to children on the playground. As we watch Lisa push these children on the swing we can remember how to play on swings ourselves. We recall the effort of getting the swing started, how far back we must lean in order to thrust the seat forwards, how, by standing on the wooden seat an even greater thrust is possible, and how after a while it seems safer to sit down again. Someone starts pushing us and we go even higher—too high! The supports seem to move in the ground. At the peak of the swing we feel the chains go slack and we drop into a downward arc. Will the swing break? Will we do

a complete loop over the bar at the top? Stop pushing, we want to get off!

We see "the child within us as a way to the child before us" (Lippitz, 1986, p. 58). That which is remembered is not so much the child we once were as the child who stands before us. Our memories of being pushed on swings are caught within an interest in what Lisa is doing with these children on this tire swing—just as our memories of the playground enable us to relate to the following example.

> She felt the accuracy with which he caught her, exactly at the right moment, and the exactly proportionate strength of his thrust, and she was afraid. Down in her bowels went the hot wave of fear. She was in his hands. Again, firm and inevitable came the thrust at the right moment. She gripped the rope, almost swooning.
> "Ha!" she laughed in fear. "No higher."
> "But you're not a *bit* high," he remonstrated.
> "But no higher."
> He heard the fear in her voice, and desisted. Her heart melted in hot pain when the moment came for him to thrust her forward again. But he left her alone. She began to breathe.
> "Will you really go any farther?" he asked. "Should I keep you there?"
> "No, let me go by myself," she answered.
> He moved aside and watched her.
> "Why, you're scarcely moving," he said.
> She laughed slightly with shame, and in a moment got down. (Lawrence, 1913/1981, pp. 200, 201)

There is an empathic quality to such situations. And it registers with what Barritt *et al* (1985) say is the purpose of educational research, which is to understand situations "from the point of view of those living through them" (p. 84). In reference to the game of "Hide and Seek" they ask: "Is there anyone who does not recognize this experience? Who has either played this game or watched it being played" (Barritt *et al*, 1983, p. 143). And who in watching it does not feel the urge to become part of the situation?

Beekman certainly does. He writes:

> At camp, on a pleasant summer evening, after the meal, we all played hide and seek. Together with John, eight years old, I hide on the side of a large field, under a bush where there is a kind of shallow hole in the

ground. It is a thick bush and from the outside it looks like a dark spot, we only see it because we are looking for a hiding spot. As we work our way inside, we are under the cover of leaves in filtered light. I really have to dig myself in, in order not to make a bulk; John, with his slender small body, fits exactly in place. As we lie there together, he covers my back with dry leaves and twigs. We hear the voices of the searching team coming nearer. We hardly dare to breathe, push ourselves to the ground. Time seems an eternity. They pass, and their voices fade away. We breathe more freely and we look at each other with glittering eyes. John tells me "we stay put. They will never find us." He laughs softly. As time passes we hear the voices of the others far away. We look around us and see the ants working to restore the damage we did to their work. We enjoy the cozy lazy togetherness, and wait till we hear the chorus of voices calling out. The game is over, and we were not found. Proudly we come out of hiding. (Beekman, 1986, p. 40)

Does Beekman empathize too much with the child. Has he become childish? These are not easy questions to answer. Beekman does say that "the child in us often seems dead, but is always alive, waiting to be reawakened" (p. 41), but this would suggest that the "child in us" exists like something unto itself that has fallen asleep and can be awakened, and it would ignore the fact that this child-dimension is always filtered through adult consciousness. It is hard to say in what particular sense the act of joining children's games ecovers the "child in us." Nevertheless, Beekman's engagement in the activity at hand seems preferable by far to the "method of investigation" where one reconstructs a childhood game experience without even playing the game in question and where it is claimed that a certain engagement with children's experience can be understood within the realm of imaginative recollection (Eifermann, 1987). Such reminiscence, in contrast with Beekman's bodily recollection, seems not to lead to any practically informed "understanding of the experiencing child" (Eifermann, 1987, p. 143). The value of Beekman"s method is that it shows the memory of childhood existence to be a living memory that comes to life in the context of our present activity with children. Its virtue is that the method cannot remain separate from the intentions the adult has in interacting with children.

"My memories need a material and social support so that they do not remain just products of the mind" (Lippitz, 1986, p. 58). For instance, Van den Berg tells the story of how Jean Cocteau visits the neighborhood where he grew up. He describes Cocteau visiting the house he once lived in. And then he describes how Cocteau finds himself wandering the streets of this familiar neighborhood being led on by a desire to find the child within him.

> Thinking of the past, he trailed his hand along the wall. But he was not satisified with the result; he felt something was missing. Suddenly it became clear to him what was wrong: he had been smaller as a child, his hand had touched surfaces which he missed as an adult simply because he was drawing a different line. He decided to repeat the experiment, but this time he bent down. (In fact one can do such a thing.) He bent down, closed his eyes, and let his hand trace the wall at a height which had been natural in the days he went to school. And immediately appeared what he had vaguely sensed during. "Just as the needle picks up the music from the record, I regained the melody of the past with my hand: everything: my cape, the leather of my satchel, the names of my friends, and of my teachers, certain expressions I had used, the sound of my grandfather's voice, the smell of his beard, the smell of my sister's dress and of my mother's gown." (Van den Berg, 1961/75, p. 212)

Through Van den Berg's description we can empathize with Cocteau's search for his childhood, but at the same time we can wonder about the way he reawakens the child within him. Certainly his intent was not to reawaken the child within him but rather to remember his actual childhood. Cocteau simply wanted to rekindle the memories associated with this particular street. But in terms of the present study, what can we make of such reminiscence? Is it necessary to adopt such a childish posture? And what of the remembered child? Perhaps Cocteau's child is too much a child of nostalgia, a sentimental child, even worse, an embalmed child, or only the remains of a child. Might not a better reawakening be achieved by actually watching children doing such things as tracing their hands along walls, by having children of the here and now, actual children, make our past seem vividly present?

Reminiscence can be an occasion for nostalgia and sentimentality; it can also bring us in touch with the present and help us appreciate what children in front of us are up to.

> Look around with the eyes of your own childhood. Visit the places where you lived as a child....
> Here is the steep bank from which you first jumped, so that you would not be called a coward. This steep bank did not give you any peace for a long time. You dreamt about it. And even now you look at other small children that are romping around jumping...you look and you are filled with excitement, mixed with sorrow, for the childhood years that have irrevocably gone into the past. (Azarov, 1981/1983, p. 26)

Look closer still. Attend to the children who can be seen jumping from this embankment. Look at their faces. Hear how they taunt each other. Very soon nostalgia gives way to our own excitement over the quality of *these* children's experiences.

Good Memories

Perhaps we do not even need to try to recall the past ourselves. All we need do is watch a child like Lisa pushing children on a tire swing for certain memories to stir in us of being pushed ourselves. Here we can be drawn into a situation, perhaps even feeling a need to push the tire ourselves, and paraphrasing Cocteau, perhaps even hearing the melody of the past with our hands upon the tire. I think of Tyler who likes to lie on the swings on his stomach. Each time we go to the playground he resists my suggestion that he sit on the swing and let me push him; instead, he takes hold of the seat, pushes it forwards until it rises up to his chest, then he jumps onto it. Too big a jump and he will tip over, too small a jump and he will fall underneath it. It is amusing to watch as he holds tightly to the seat, balancing there, letting himself glide to and fro. Nevertheless, it is not totally satisfying to feel so distant from his swinging. I would like to show him how to really use the swing, not that there is anything wrong with how he is already using it, nor can

there be any doubting the pleasure he gains from his preferred position; yet, to sit on the swing going higher and higher—then he would really know what swinging is all about. So I wait. I wait until some time later he sits on the swing of his own volition and asks: "Can you push me?" I comply with his request, being careful at first not to betray his trust. But I am soon caught up in the activity, remembering the joy this brought me as a child, yet hearing also the excitement at this moment in Tyler's voice, an excitement that cancels out all the swings that made me feel nauseous and all the swings I fell off. Before too long he will want to swing himself, but for the moment it is good to be pushed higher and higher than he has been before.

Through such encounters we can bring back childhood memories, not only to better understand the child but also to deepen our own view of things. As Barritt *et al* (1985) suggest,

> We think that recollections of past experience are a legitimate, and sometimes the only source of information about important events. We believe that these recollections should be used with the acknowledgement that they are not exactly the same as the original experience. They are not unrelated to it. If the researcher places recollections in the context of the informants' present situation both can be better understood. (p. 66)

These recollections of the playground make us sensitive to the situation of Lisa being called over to lend a hand, sensitive, that is, to what seems best for these children. Just as we remember what it is like to be pushed too hard, so can we now appreciate the children's reluctance to ask us to push their swing; and yet it is this memory which discloses what is best for children, whether it be our silent watching or our offering help. Here we have the advantage over Lisa—the advantage of a maturity which allows us to ask: What is best for these children? You see, imbedded in these memories is a sense of the good of playground activity. In spite of being pushed too high at times, in spite of being fearful and afraid, still we retain a sense

of the enjoyment of swinging and a feeling for the good of it. Perhaps it would not be too out of hand to refer to the words of Dostoevsky who, through Alyosha Karamazov, said:

> You must know that there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future than some good memory, especially a memory of childhood, of home [and dare I add, the playground]. People talk to you a great deal about your education, but some good, sacred memory, preserved from childhood, is perhaps the best education. (Dostoevsky, 1912, p. 819)

Accordingly, what makes the situation of Lisa and the children on the tire swing so interesting is that it appeals to us as a "good memory" of childhood. Through Lisa's presence we can question how these children might learn best how to enjoy the activity. In fact we can question even Lisa's ability to help them. And in this questioning, which is much more ours than Lisa's, we can be drawn into the situation in an adult sort of way. Watching Lisa push the swing is not mere recollection, since the question that gave moment for pause—the question of how these children should be helped—is not a remembered one, but rather it is a question of how we, as adults should help these children on the swing. The remembered experience is more a "standing-with-oneself, a self-identification with oneself, a process not of introspection but of self-becoming in the action itself" (Bollnow, 1974, p. 17).

Adult recollection signifies on the one hand an attempt to address the child's view of things, and on the other hand the inevitable distance separating adult and child yet a distance that lends significance to what the child does. Merleau-Ponty wrote:

> Do we have the right to comprehend the time, the space of the child as an undifferentiation of *our* time, of *our* space, etc....? This is to reduce the child's experience to our own, at the very moment one is trying to respect the phenomena. For it is to think it as the *negation* of *our* differentiations. It would be necessary to go all the way to thinking it *positively*, unto phenomenology. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 203)

As soon as we face the child, his or her experience is in danger of being reduced to our own. Our task is to question this reduction, not to contribute to it, yet to be mindful that whatever we do with children is inevitably a mediation of their experience. Our presence is of itself mediational. Meyer-Drawe (1986) says in reference to the task Merleau-Ponty has laid before us, "We can only thematize childlike possibilities as specific deviations [of our adult conceptions], and this means that we cannot avoid implicating our own point of view" (p. 50). We are there with the child on the playground. With Sylvia, Lewis and Lisa we can "thematize childlike possibilities" which belong neither wholly to them nor to us. They are, if you will, compossibles. The point we should consider, however, is whether this standing *vis-a-vis* the child, this methodology, implies a distortion of the child's experience. For Meyer-Drawe the test lies in our capability to be surprised. For mine I prefer to stay with the notion of silence to the extent that surprise also ushers in silence. Thus we ought to take pains to listen carefully to what the child is saying when she says "They're the big people," when he asks, "Can you push me?" or when we are surprised that some young children do not want to ask us to give them a push. We should be silent, if only for a moment, as we try to work out more fully what is the best thing to do for the child who is now before us. And in working out what is best for this child, what can be better than attempting to define this present activity as the stuff of good memories. Such a procedure, I believe, stands a good chance of "respecting the child's experience" of the playground and of "thinking it *positively*."

A Silent Trust

Should we risk reducing the child's experiences on the playground to our own? By now we can appreciate that risk is involved in a most profound way in our attentiveness to the silences of playground activity. As well as the risk that gives occasion to help the child, the effort to be mindful of what the child does requires that we are ourselves open to risk. For instance, it is always possible that the expectation we have of children exceeds their ability, that they do not measure up, and that our efforts may only serve to discourage them. Asking Sylvia "Why don't you join in?" may actually make her acutely aware not so much of "the big people" but of the activity that she and her friends find so intriguing. The question we ask so matter-of-factly risks formulating their interest in the swinging activity for them. Our question may even turn them away from the activity and from us. This is the risk we take. This is the riskiness of the ground for which we are responsible when we attend to the silences that separate us from children. This is the motive for our taking care in attempting to understand children's playground activity.

How can we properly respond to the child's experience? It seems that at times we must trust children even though there remains a chance of mishap. Many things can happen, for instance, as Lewis chases the children around the playground. He shows a certain maturity and still the children do hair-raising things in their attempts to avoid being caught. To what extent, then, can these children be entrusted to Lewis? To what extent can we stand back and say nothing? It is worth recalling the words of Bollow in this regard, when he said:

> The risk of trust shown to the child may succeed, and if so, then the educational involvement was worthwhile. But at the same time, there may also be failure, and then the educator appears as one who lacked necessary precaution, one who had acted with irresponsible credulity and stupidity.

> The educator then must bear ridicule as well as experience failure in his work. (Bollnow, 1971, p. 530)

Our trust in Lewis, and the fact that through him the children are allowed to take risks without being deliberately exposed to danger, depends upon our ability to risk ourselves.

> He [the educator] must commit himself, he must see to it that he plays his part, he must lay himself open, and he is only a good teacher if he can definitely accept this risk which is inherent in his profession. (Bollnow, 1979, p. 77).

We should not be too surprised at how well Lewis orchestrates the game, nor, for that matter, at how well Lisa ministers to the fears of the girls on the tire swing, since by their presence they have inspired confidence in the children with whom they are playing. We should see what Lewis and Lisa do as giving notice on how we ought to approach playground activity ourselves. We, too, ought to have confidence in what children can do on the playground.

> Only when I believe the child to be capable of something does it also believe itself to be capable of it and is it prepared to overcome its hesitancy and its timidity. Hence the great significance of encouragement in education....Conversely, when from the start one does not believe a child capable of doing something, when one says to it as it were: leave it alone, you really can't do that, then one robs the child of its power and the result is that it actually does not do it. There is, in fact, no worse poison than mistrust. (Bollnow, 1979, pp. 75, 76).

Where might this silent trust lead us? In subsequent chapters I shall show how it enables us to say more about how risk is implicated in the manner in which we approach playground activity. Here I shall follow the silences of risk in order to explore the ways in which we might address the child's experience of the playground. I shall follow these epistemological, ontological, and ultimately, pedagogical silences of playground activity in order to reveal the nature of a pedagogic response to the perceived riskiness of the playground. That is to say, by utilizing an approach of

silence, by addressing the unspoken ground as the basis for our understanding what the child might be attempting to do, and by acknowledging a silent trust as our way of respecting the integrity of the child's experience. I shall outline the conditions of a pedagogic response to children on the playground. In particular, I shall use this "method" to explore how we might approach the riskiness of children's playground activity.

PART B

A RESPONSIVENESS TO RISK

CHAPTER IV

THE ATMOSPHERE OF RISK

There are risks that lie beyond the playground, risks to which children are exposed even in the normal run of everyday events. One might say the child lives in an atmosphere of risk which influences all that he or she does, including what happens on the playground. But what is the significance of this general and pervasive atmosphere of risk? How significant is it for the child? Must the child simply learn to cope in a general and pervasive atmosphere of risk or is the pervasiveness of this atmosphere a function in the first instance of parental concerns and attitudes, or the lack thereof? More importantly, how does our sense of it define the nature of our responsibility for children and the ways we might treat them, especially in playground situations. In other words, is there a certain texture of risk which, although evident in everyday life, is susceptible to pedagogic influence on the playground?

Bollnow writes, in this regard, of a "pedagogical atmosphere" characterized by the sense of security that is brought to the child's explorations. He says:

> Only in an atmosphere of security can the child grow in the right direction and only in this medium does the world reveal itself to the child in all its reasonable order. Should this security be missing, then the world remains a shocking, threatening power. And if this sense of security is not guaranteed elsewhere then the child is refused the will to life and hopelessly he or she withers emotionally. (Bollnow, 1970/1989, p. 7)

The child needs to feel the security that comes from being cared for by the mother or the father, the security that the home ideally represents, and the feeling of security which, in the normal run of events, allows other adults to take the place of the parent and other places to draw the child beyond the safety of the home. The child needs to explore the world with a sense of security, or as the term originally implied, in a way that is "free of care," where "care" meant grief, a burdened state of mind,

or to be troubled.

It is impossible, however, for parents of educators to take all trouble away from children. Indeed, many parents ask themselves whether they are overprotective of their children in attending so closely to their "cares." It follows that, rather than shielding children from the riskiness of everyday life, they should be made aware of clear and distinct instances of risk in a general context of security. Children are often at risk precisely because they have so little awareness of the atmosphere of risk and because they recognize dangers only after it is too late. Still, the more precise point of this qualification is that a totally pervasive atmosphere of risk is apedagogical, furthermore, that genuine pedagogy does not proceed wholly blind to risks nor neurotically exaggerate risks beyond all coping, but carefully meets and transcends risks in a context of security. Pedagogically speaking, between the home and the world stands the playground as a place where the child can feel secure and from where he or she can, in due course, venture into the more threatening world beyond the playground. The question we take up is thus in part a question of how the risky texture of life in general can be softened by what we do with children on the playground; but it is in greater part a question of how what we do with children on the playground can actually create a clearing in this grey atmosphere of risk. It is a question of how our responses to the riskiness of children's playground activity can constitute a more fundamental, pedagogical atmosphere of security.

The Texture of Risk

> Let us first consider some everyday examples, some events of daily life—small events that are likely to happen in any child's day and that need to be handled as they occur. If parents respond to such events unthinkingly,

> they influence the child in one way; handled sensitively, they have an entirely different impact on the child. In any case, these—the many small experiences that form the essence of our lives—are, added up, what form the child's personality and our relations between him and ourselves. Depending on how we handle such daily interactions, then, our children's personality development and their relationship to life will take one of several courses. No single event need have especially great impact, but it is amazing how such little experiences make up, in the long run, a good life or a pretty miserable one. All this occurs without anything terribly important having happened, good or bad. (Bettelheim, 1962, pp. 27-28)

I think at this juncture of a three year old boy I see wandering the streets near my house. He seems happy enough to join the children in our communal play area, however I am concerned that his parents may not know his whereabouts. I feel I need to have him take me to his home so that I might reassure them of his safety. "Don't worry," Stephen's parents tell me, "he knows his way around." I feel a little foolish, not so much for interfering as for being unnecessarily concerned. And yet the response of these parents, who greet me as reasonable people, does not put to rest my concern. After all, is it simply a question of a three-year-old knowing his way around? Their faith in the little boy's capacity to look after himself actually increases my concern, especially when they come knocking on my door long after dark, asking if I have seen their son of late, or if I see him, would I please send him home.

Of course, it would be easy to become indignant at these parents' lack of care, and if they paid no heed, to advise those deemed to be the authorities of childcare. But wait a moment. Stephen and his family are new to this neighborhood. They have moved recently from a country where the events of daily life carry very real and obvious dangers. Perhaps the parents have been lulled into a sense of the security of Stephen's explorations by the relative peace of this new neighborhood. They need to be warned. And yet, although such a course of action may very well be needed, the

presence of this child also requires a *personal* response. By being in my neighborhood, by knocking on my door seeking a playmate, Stephen asks me to look out for him. He asks not only for a response that is mindful of the dangers to which he is exposed, but for a response that is mindful of his being a child and of the obligation that this fact places on me as an adult. How should I respond?

> Because the safety of the world stands between his [in this case, Stephen's] helplessness and his explorations, the child's access to the world exists through the help that others give him in establishing the safety of his world: he is cut off from the world unless he is helped. Authentic expansion of the child's world depends upon the adults who are responsible for him, for if they engineer the world in proportion to his helplessness, they free him to explore an inviting world. Adult help liberates the child for his own possibilities in the world of play. Through participation in his being, they let the child be. (Vandenberg, 1971, p. 64)

It would seem that whatever I do, I become responsible in some way for the risky texture of Stephen's life.

Now you might think that this situation is a little on the extreme side, and that my interpretation of it is too much an excuse for a lack of parental concern. Consider, then, a situation closer to home—a common household scene such as that of parents leaving their children with a babysitter for the evening. Let me describe how it might be for two children, Marc and Matthew.

Marc comes softly to the door to see his parents off. "What time will you be coming home?" he asks. "We won't be too late—we should be home by 9.30." A look of mild relief shows on Marc's face. He then says: "Papa, Mama, you make sure you put on your seatbelts." And with an assurance from them that they will certainly buckleup, Marc again seems contented. His mother and father give Marc a kiss goodbye and some instructions for the evening, and then make their ways towards the car. Marc comes out a few moments later with the same soft approach they only half-noticed before, a softness that makes the departure seem all the more busy and

blustery. He asks: "You promise you won't be late?" "No, Marc, we won't be late. Now off you go inside." Marc saunters back to the house, is met at the door by the babysitter, and disappears inside the house as the car pulls out of the driveway. "Marc," says his father, "is very aware of consequences. He worries a lot about things that might happen to him. And he worries about us when he is not with us. He's even made me concerned about this seatbelt thing. I find I always buckleup now. I figure that if I ever have an accident and didn't have my seatbelt on, Marc would never forgive me. Even worse, he'd agonize over whether or not he told me to wear it. I am sure he would feel personally responsible if anything happened and I wasn't wearing it." "Matthew is just the opposite," says the boys' mother. "He doesn't seem to mind if we are there or not. When you say goodbye to Matthew you have to drag him away from what he is doing. I guess he's what you might call a pretty well-adjusted little guy. But, you know, I am glad we have a Marc as well as a Matthew."

Marc brings the question of risk to the fore by showing a certain insecurity in spite of the safety of the place that is provided for him (or perhaps, precisely as a consequence of it and the preoccupation with it). He has a sense of what is at stake when his parents leave. He is concerned since he knows that their departure not only puts his relation to them at risk, but it also jeopardizes the trust he has in the world they bring to him. Also, in showing such concern, Marc allows us to question his brother Matthew's nonchalance at the departure of the parents. Whereas at first sight Marc seems a little neurotic in comparison with Matthew's adjustment to the impending situation of parental absence, his concern starts to have us wonder how it is that most children can, like Matthew, accept absence so matter-of-factly. After all, it is a little disappointing to know that you will not be missed, and somewhat

disconcerting to think that absence may mean so little. Matthew, however, is not unaware of his parents' departure. He looks forward to the babysitter coming over, and so when the moment comes for his parents to leave already this expectancy has suffused his actions. In order to say goodbye to Matthew it is necessary to contain him physically for a moment, to interrupt him as he rummages around for something he wants to show the babysitter, to bring him to look at us so an instruction can be given. We must bring him physically face to face with a situation of our absence—a situation he has already understood on his own and in his own way.

The difference between Marc and Matthew in this situation would seem to lie more in the realities they perceive as a result of their parent's departure than in the form of their responses. Certainly for Marc who is anxious about the separation, the reality is different than for Matthew who enjoys the opportunity of a break from his parents' attention and for whom the attention of a babysitter is welcome. While Matthew is off about his business, Marc continues to fret about the imminent departure. He feels this separation and plays out the feeling by imagining all kinds of scenarios which might prolong it further. Thus, on the surface of it, Matthew's matter-of-factness can be regarded as a sign of independence, while Marc's exaggerated sense of responsibility may be viewed as an inextricably rooted insecurity. At a deeper level, however, Marc shows a greater maturity than Matthew as he contemplates the possibilities of the present situation and senses the fragility of his and his younger bother's relation to their parents. He can envision the relation as subject to certain risks. Nevertheless one cannot help but think that if maturity requires such a fearful sense of responsibility, maybe it is too much for one so young as Marc.[1] It is best

[1] Thinking about Marc's sense of responsibility involves a rather tenuous balance. "Responsibility," as the term implies, entails the "ability to respond," however mature responsibility is not just the recognition of risks and obligations that one takes upon oneself, but the ability to discriminate what risks and obligations are *appropriately*

to hope that Marc will grow out of this "phase," which is a strange hope since what we are hoping is that Marc will abandon something of those feelings we think he should acquire as he grows towards maturity.

This situation involving Marc and Matthew seems to disclose something of the nature of risk that gets lost when the question of risk is removed from the context of adult-child interaction. There is a texture of risky situations to which Marc and Matthew respond in differing ways and to which their parents knowingly or unknowingly contribute; and this texture increasingly defines children's relations to the world these adults care to represent. Conversely, adults are primarily responsible for the texture of risk by the manner in which they treat children in the context of an impending separation, which is to say, by the way they observe the significance of their presence for children and the ways they respond to what children may do when faced with the thought of their absence.

This texture of risk is apparent when we stop to consider even the most common of family practices. Tyler asks one evening: "How come Shayle sleeps in your room and you get to sleep with Mommy, but I don't have anyone to sleep with?" Is it any wonder that fears arise when, in our efforts to do something *for* children (such as providing them with space of their own), we overlook what we do *to* them and to their sense of security in the world as they understand it. We take our children to so-called "parent-free" classes for swimming and gymnastics, and we sign them up for "day camp" programs as soon as their day-care and kindergarten programs go into recess. It seems the life of the young child is structured around a series of well-intentioned provisions which inevitably run the risk of placing the child at-risk. In

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[1](cont'd) taken upon oneself. A pedagogy of responsibility and indeed of risks must have that "epistemic" component which would indicate what responsibilities are truly mine, what risks are genuinely worth taking.

such situations of parental absence, the risks of everyday life become dangers that threaten the child's safety; and to compound the situation even further, we give over to others the job of "educating" our children about such dangers and "teaching" them how to defend themselves. Through the rationalization of children's lives we deny our own place within this atmosphere of risk.

We must be clear in what is at stake here. I do not wish to conclude from these examples that we do children great harm by leaving them alone. In fact, Bettelheim shows how sometimes the apparent "abandonment" of children is a means to their gaining a sense of independence and personal responsibility for their lives. Bettelheim says:

> The child of school age cannot yet believe that he ever will be able to meet the world without his parents; that is why he wishes to hold on to them beyond the necessary point. He needs to learn that someday he will master the dangers of the world, even in the exaggerated form in which his fears depict them, and be enriched by it. (Bettelheim, 1975, p. 166)

More importantly, there comes a time when the child will want to be left alone, when he will want to sleep by himself, and when he will need to be trusted to explore the neighborhood unaccompanied by his parents. Before this time it may be appropriate to speak of abandoning the child, but when the child expresses a desire to venture out on his or her own, a much greater disservice may be done by keeping the child in protective custody. If we ignore the moment, rather than bringing a sense of security to the child's activity, our presence confines it and taints it with a distrust of the world. The lesson given the child is that the world is to be feared except when the adult is present. By drawing the child's attention to the atmosphere of risk in this manner, we deny the very movement towards maturity which prefigures our pedagogic relation to the child.

Let us look more closely at how this atmosphere of risk, this texture, is modulated not only by the extremes of presence or absence, but more particularly, by certain modes of presence of the adult to the child. After all, we must keep in mind that atmosphere is not only "the way in which space is lived and experienced. But atmosphere is also the way a teacher (or parent) is present to children, and the way children are present to themselves and to the teacher" (van Manen, 1986, p. 36). Atmosphere is affected by the way in which the adult is present for the sake of the child's explorations.

Modes of Presence

A risky situation that stays with me involves taking children on a climbing expedition. We are preparing to climb a mountain. For the past few days we, along with forty or so children, have been doing environmental studies, rock climbing, orienteering, canoeing and bushcraft; and throughout each activity we have spoken of the early explorers in the area, the routes they had taken and the settlements they had established. Ours is to be one such settlement for we are also explorers of this land. And all the while Mount Maroon stares down on us. Some sketch it, some photograph it, others find faces and forms within it—each anticipating in their own way the climb we are about to make.

The climb up Mount Maroon is not particularly difficult. Some sections require ropes, but for the most part it is a five hour hike and scramble to the top. Nevertheless we experience a peculiar discomfort. The children, except perhaps the "leaders," seem nervous. One of them, Chris, is scared by this mountain. Her determination to reach the top is threatened by the fear she has for her safety. Each

step pulls her away from where she feels comfortable. The glazed look in her eyes indicates that the mountain evokes a fear that prevents any attachment to the here and now. She does not see risk, but is overpowered by a sense of danger which prevents her from seeing very much at all. Her sense is that of being dominated by the mountain.[2] Even on the descent, when generally the worst is behind, she still sees danger. Still she winds her way down in a crab-like position, unaware of the terrain levelling out, unaware of the others who stay with her, talking all the while about school, home and familiar things (and afraid that the seat of her pants will soon wear out). "Not far to go now, Chris....I wonder what the others are doing....Do you think they might have reached the bottom already?" "You're doing really well. This will certainly be something to tell the folks at home about....Hang in there, there's not much further to go." Chris maintains her posture of fear in spite of, and perhaps, because of the advances of those around her. Their words provide little comfort for, in a way, they continue to address the thought she has of danger and the fear she has for her safety.

It may not be too hard to find all sorts of reasons for this child's fearfulness on the mountain—prior experiences, a complete lack of self-confidence, inability to trust others—yet the inescapable fact is that this child is cut off from us. Though we intend to be there for her, Chris feels marooned. The actions of those around her do not help Chris to take a risk. Our support only exacerbates the situation.

> Supporting tries to make a person feel good and encourages evasion of the real issue. It tries to substitute "good" feelings for unacceptable ones, to

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[2]On this score it is worth remembering that the word "danger" actually derives from the late Latin "dominiarium" meaning dominion or rule (Shipley, 1959, p. 107), but with the sense of the power to dispose of, to hurt, and to harm. The earliest uses in English had the sense of "being in someone's danger," i.e., under their power or control, in their debt, etc. So what was "dangerous" in the danger was your being subject to the other's control. Not to perceive danger, or to be daring in the face of it, was to miss or confront this control.

> deny the reality of them, or to distract the child. The message the child receives is, "You shouldn't feel the way you do." (Snyder, Snyer and Snyder, 1980, p. 171)

Chris is not the only one who does not see the risk. In our attempts to support her, we, too, fail to observe her activity in a way that would enable us to offer her genuine help.

How could this child be helped? I am playing with a much younger Chris at Lansdowne Playground. She spends her time clambering over the decks, climbing the ladders and bars, and coming down the small slides; however she avoids the larger spiralling slide at the farther end of the playground. "I bet you can't come down that one," I say, thinking that the slide's location explains why she has left it alone so far. But my words come as a challenge—as a dare which shows in the cautious way she climbs the steps to the top. Chris calls from the top: "You come down with me!" And having played on the other equipment with her it seems natural to do as she asks. Yet somewhat surprisingly this child still does not want to come down the slide; instead she proceeds to come back down the staircase. "What's the matter?" I ask, thinking of slides twice as high from which I can't keep her away. My question is also tinged with a sense of guilt at having put her in a situation where she had to back down. So I press harder: "Why don't you want to come down the slide with *me?* to which Chris answers, "I'll be upside down." And so I look again at the slide, noticing how the protective casing makes it appear to be a tunnel in which one might conceivably turn upside down. Still, I am not satisfied. I have understood the reason Chris gave me but the question of why she would not come down with me remains. Was I wrong to dare her? How might I have encouraged her efforts? Perhaps my guidance left too little room for Chris to make her own way. Maybe her response is meant as something for me to think about, a response that might stop me from

bothering her as she tries to come to terms with the challenge of the slide.

Another occasion in another playground: three children of differing ages are mounting the ladder that leads up to the top of an unusually high slippery slide, one which is probably twice as high as they are used to seeing. These three chatter among themselves, although from a distance it is not possible to recognize the gist of their talk. Perhaps they express some concern regarding the activity, for their mother soon appears in a fairly agitated state. "Now, how do you think you're going to get down?" She moves even closer so that the children appear to hang directly over her. "I told you not to go up there." The three children stand rigid. The youngest one starts calling for his mother to come up and get him, at which point she reluctantly begins to climb the ladder. As she moves closer she sees that this youngest child is quite fearful. She says, in an attempt to reassure him, "Just stay still—mommy's scared too." She climbs up to grasp this youngest child and then all four come back down the ladder, quite relieved it seems to be safely on the ground. "I don't want to see any of you going near that slide again," she cautions the children as they run off to the nearby swings. And as they run off I wonder about the risk of climbing this slippery slide. Where was the danger and what was the source of the children's fear? What was the nature of this parent's concern? In effect, how were these children helped by their mother being there on the playground?

The situation obviously changes for the worse as soon as the mother arrives on the scene and starts berating her three children. They evidently feel her concern since, with her there, the slide seems a dangerous thing as well. This situation is not unlike many others where an adult imposes a sense of normative order on children's activity. Instructing the child, the adult tells the child what to do and what to feel about his or her activity.

> Instructing a child insinuates that she is not capable of thinking for herself and that she needs an adult to take over. Hence the child becomes weaker, and she may learn to depend on someone else's thinking....Instructing makes the adult feel important, but it robs the child of her independence. (Snyder *et al*, 1980, pp. 170-171)

Perhaps the mother of these three children on the slippery slide might stop to reflect upon her own sense of risk.

I am reminded now of a little boy, Cory, who seems just the opposite of these children. Cory is a dare-devil. At the aquatic centre there are a number of swimming pools, each designed with a different group in mind. One of the pools seems ideally suited to five-year-old Cory. It has slides of differing heights at one end, and inflated inner tubes and large plastic saucers for him to play in. But Cory soon becomes restless in this pool. He much prefers to go with his father to the large swimming pool with the high diving board.

Cory has been on this diving board before. He shows little hesitation in running out onto the board, and although he has still to master fully the take-off from the end, already he is trying somersaults into the water. So we watch as Cory puts on a show for us. We watch him follow his father and try to perform the dive he has just seen. We watch him go it alone. We hear his father tell him to keep his legs together, and we watch with admiration as Cory manages to hold his legs partially together during the next dive. Then, as our attention starts to wane, Cory calls out, "Watch this one....Are you watching?" "Enough, Cory We've seen enough. Let's try something different. Let's see if you can still swim across the pool," says Cory's father as they both hold onto the side of the pool at the deep end. Suprisingly though, Cory appears quite reluctant. "I'll swim beside you; and if you get tired you can hold onto the lane rope," says his father. Cory still clings to the edge of the pool. Some more cajoling and Cory agrees to the plan. With gritted teeth he dogpaddles to the

other side, grabbing onto the rope every so often in order to take gulps of air and water. It is clear Cory does not enjoy this activity, for as soon as he reaches the other side he asks, "Can I go on the diving board now?"

Cory prefers the diving board. That is clear. What is not so clear is why he is so fearful when it comes to swimming with his father across the pool. Swimming across the pool is certainly a lot of effort for someone who dogpaddles. But the effort Cory expends is even greater in diving. Perhaps Cory's fearfulness is due more to the fact that he cannot feel his father's presence. Or perhaps this presence is usually a matter of being watched rather than being watched over. Again I refer to Snyder *et al* (1980) in attempting to draw a lesson from this example. They talk in terms of a way of evaluating the child that is also a way of not understanding the nature of the child's activity. Judging what the child does "attempts to coerce behavior" by making the child's sense of activity dependent upon adult approval (p. 171). In Cory's case, he obviously enjoys diving, but to what extent this enjoyment can be distinguished from his attempts to win his father's approval is a moot point. We get the impression as we watch him perform his dives that his risk-taking depends too much upon the gestures and words of approval that follow each dive. We are drawn further towards this conclusion as we note that he is quite reluctant to take a risk at something he feels he can barely do, like swimming across the deep end of the pool. Perhaps Cory's dare-devilishness on the diving board is, like his fearfulness in the water, too much a case of being denied genuine help.

Children need help in order to help themselves. I see my child is afraid to climb the jungle gym. What do I do? Do I let him work it out for himself? Do I cajole him to come down? I may be tempted to say "Look at Jamie. See, *he* can do it. You can do it too." But I know this dare may not work. It may not be

appropriate. I know how high this frame stands for a child. The world looks so far below. And the metal bars are only a precarious connection between the high platform and the safe ground below. I have been a child and I know this fear. So what do I do?

There is, in this questioning of what I should do, an admonition to be with the child as he or she ventures out into the world. I may very well support, guide, instruct and even evaluate the child's activity, however I should realize there are degrees of consideration to each of these types of adult-child interaction. No matter what I say or do, genuine help requires my being present, being in the present, living in the present with the child. Genuine help can be characterized, beyond these terms of interaction, as a committed presence.

I help the child by being with him or her in such a way that risks are seen where, without my help, danger might lurk. I help, not so much by looking out for the child's safety, as by caring sufficiently that his or her explorations can be carried out with an underlying sense of security. Within this perspective we are, for instance, up there on the climbing frame with the child, for that child is like us. Though we stand below with outstretched arms and request the child to "be careful," in the spirit of the moment we revel with the child in the activity at hand. The child takes us up there with him or her, and in knowing we are there, climbing feels secure. "Watch me, Dad! Watch me!" the child says as he shimmies up the climbing frame, drawn like a magnet into the throng of children gathered there. Over the bars he moves, threading himself in and out of this wrought iron maze. Extricating himself momentarily he cries "Are you watching?" Is this a question or a plea? There is a degree of apprehension in this child's voice. He calls again with greater urgency. "Are you watching?" And with our reassuring nod he finds his place among the children.

This child has nothing to show off but himself. He does not necessarily ask that watch what he can do as if intent on giving us a performance. No, the child may want only to be watched, to feel the security of our protective gaze, to know that he is not alone. This cold metal frame full of unfamiliar faces needs a parental warmth.

If the child then becomes a little anxious on the climbing frame maybe we ought not be unduly concerned since this anxiety is part of the child's coming to know the world in his or her own way. The child finds distance between the present context of activity and the world he or she knows. A risk is seen in shadowy outline. Our adult obligation, however, is to ensure that this anxiety does not separate the child from the things that are known, and in particular, from us. For example, we recall the same child on the slippery slide refusing to come down on the seat of his pants, and we remember his plea that we come down with him. And on occasion we would climb that ladder behind him, and then, with him nestling against us we would plummet down that slide. "Do it again" he pleads, but no, we think it is time he tried it by himself, after all, aren't we standing at the bottom ready to catch him? Similarly, we think of the child who will not go upstairs by himself–we must come with him. Do we help this child by laughing at his anxiety? Or does our help require us to go with him, to be with him as he comes to find the upstairs region increasingly familiar?

Langeveld says:

> When we meet a child, the first thing which matters is the intention. And so it is on both sides: the simple fact of the child's helplessness makes an appeal to us. What will our answer be? It need not be given in words. It may suffice that we are there; our presence may be a guarantee of security. It may also be a threat: the child calls on the adult for help, the adult fails to respond and give the child the security he needs thus leaving him isolated with his own resources. The outcome depends on the common experiences of the child and the adult or with other adults. The 'unit of the personal' falls apart. The intentional relation now acquires a

> negative meaning or no meaning at all; and in this case the relation is empty. (Langeveld, 1975, p. 7.)

How should we be there for the child? Does it not depend on the child and on the occasion and on all sorts of factors that cannot be clearly specified and which, when discussed generally, sound like romantic platitudes? Listen to what the child says. "Help me up" he cries out, not even looking for ways he could pull himself up onto the climbing frame. He wants a boost, a reassuring hand, in order to get started.

Pedagogic Presence

Too often it seems risky situations put children at-risk. Even well-intentioned efforts at times deny children that mode of adult presence which would lend security to their explorations. There is a children's story called "Michael is Brave." In this story we see the child Michael enticed up the ladder of a slippery slide by a teacher who thought Michael could assist a little girl who was already stuck at the top. The teacher's plan works, although it could just as easily fail.

> The top of the trees seemed very close now. Would his head be in the sky? He dared not look down. He was near the little girl, but she was too frightened to look around.
> "I want to get down," she kept saying. "I want to get down!"
> Michael went up to the sixth step. He wanted to get down too—down the ladder, just the way he had come up. He took a deep breath, and went up the next step. Now he was very high. It made him feel dizzy. Everything looked so small! He closed his eyes again, but just for a minute, and went up the last two steps.
> He was there! The little girl stopped crying.
> The teacher called up to her, "Now you can slide and I will catch you."
> The little girl looked behind her at Michael.
> "All right," she said. And taking her hands away from the slide, down she went—right into the teacher's arms.
> "That was fun!" she said. "And now it's Michael's turn!"
> Michael was still standing at the top of the ladder. He looked at the long slide stretched before him, and wondered how he was going to get down. Across the playground he could see Andy on the climbing bars. He was as high as Andy now! He sat down carefully, and looked over the slide to the ground below. It was farther away than ever. He wished he did

not have to slide!
The little girl was coming up the ladder again. "I want another turn," she said. "I was afraid before, but I'm not now!"
Michael looked down at the teacher. She smiled and waved up to him. He took a deep breath.
I was afraid too, " he said to no one in particular. And before he could think any more about it, down he went—all the way down to the bottom of the slide!
"Good for you, Michael!" the teacher said. (Buckley, 1971)

The question we might ask of this story is: To what extent does the teacher help Michael? Is it really a matter of Matthew being brave, or is there a pedagogic task that the teacher's smile overlooks?

Might I suggest that being present pedagogically has to do with challenging the child with a mindfulness of how the child encounters the world. It has to do with seeing risk as the child may come to see it. For example, I see Carson standing above me on the platform at Alice's Playground. I see that, whereas before Carson was content to come down the slide that is attached to this platform, the "fireman's pole" situated off to the side has now caught his eye. I ask if he wants to try sliding down it. "No," he replies rather unconvincingly, thereby convincing me he must really want to try it. "Oh, I bet you could do that," I say I move underneath him. "Reach out and grab the pole." Carson leans forward and commits himself. "Now jump onto the bar and I'll catch you at the bottom." This he does. He clings momentarily to the pole, then drops clumsily into my arms. "Do you think you can do it again?" I ask. No, once is enough—Carson wants to do other things—although I feel sure he will return before too long to the challenge of the "fireman's pole."

Jago, a playground worker, provides a similar example.

Another child climbed up the car tires nailed on an inclined tree and no talking I did from the ground could persuade him he could come down on his own. I went up to him and explained I could not carry him down and then arched myself over him. We backed down the tree rather like a circus act with two bears. He could have fallen out through my arms but

> he felt he would not. Two tires down and he dismissed me. Later he was up the tires regularly and sliding down the rope swing. (Jago, 1970, p. 2)

That children return to activities about which they were quite apprehensive, that they will repeat an activity until it seems easy, means something has been gained by these children. They have been helped to see the worth of taking certain physical risks on the playground.

Some time later I am with Carson at Malmo Playground. He has been following some older boys around, hoping to join their chasing game. But now, as these boys leave the area, he turns to other matters. I see him climb up to the platform from which a "fireman's pole" is anchored on either side. He moves to the one closest to where I sit on the concrete border of this playground, and says: "Watch me go down the pole—with nobody helping me!" He leans forward and tentatively grasps the pole, falls against it with his body, hooks his legs around and drops to the ground. "Did you see me?" he asks. I nod. "I'll show you again." A short while later, even before I realize that Carson is again on the platform, I hear him calling: "Come and stand over here. "Why?" I ask. "Because I want you to. I want you to watch me." "But can't I see you from here?" I reply. Carson does not respond directly; he simply requests once again, "Come and stand over here." So I move closer and watch him slide down the pole in one motion. "Do you want to see me do it again?" he asks.

I wonder why I must stand so close. Is this another instance of a child being dependent upon adult signs of approval, or is it an occasion for further reflection on the difference between pedagogic and non-pedagogic modes of presence? Perhaps it is an occasion for self-reflection on our relatedness to the child before us, of where we stand with this child, and on what basis—what common experiences—it is possible to stand close by. After all, as Crowe remarks,

> If we never feel even a twinge of apprehension at the unknown, or if we conveniently overlook the fact or have never faced up to it, the chances are that we shall be unreasonably hard on our children. The more we deny our own fears the less self-awareness and confidence we have—and the more likely it is that we shall be particularly hard on them, wanting them not only to be more confident than we are, but more confident than is reasonable or even possible. (Crowe, 1984, p. 128)

Perhaps it might be of help in our dealings with children if we were to recall our own fears on the playground.

From childhood we recall a newly painted climbing frame, a jungle gym, over in the park. It shares a space with the see-saw, the slippery slide and a few lesser pieces; a space which is defined not only by the ant-bed dirt which has been spread over the worn out ground, but also by the contrast it provides with the rest of the park. This play equipment presides over a large parkland that stretches over a bank to the river on one side and down to the duck pond on the other. To climb this frame is to be king of the castle and indeed the estate.

This climbing frame is what we run to first. Hanging on to the lowest bars is not enough. We have to climb it. Dad stands underneath, arms up watching for the sudden slip while we, through effort, concentration and the occasional assist are soon standing atop the frame. The raised centrepiece then allows for movement around the top. "Be careful, be careful," we hear, but already we are beyond the grasp of the outstretched arms below, and do not want it otherwise. Sometime later the climbing frame loses its attraction. The slippery slide takes our fancy, but now we refuse to come down in a seated position. We prefer to lie on our stomach and hold the sides so that we can brake the slide at will, and so that we can feel the loss and then the regaining of our attachment to the slide. Though they tempt us to come down seated as we used to, it is to no avail, unless they come down with us and even then we are not so sure. So what has changed that we no longer unwittingly climb

so high? No longer do we stand on top peering down as if without a care. No longer do we send a shudder through that adult standing below.

We must come to terms with these playthings in the park. Though they beckon us, it is in a way that might very well pull us away from the adult and that secure place where the adult stands. The climbing frame and the slippery slide look over this place. They afford a view of the one who would otherwise be looking over us—a view which can create a profound sense of distance between us and them. And the higher we climb the more distant we become from the familiar world. Moreover, the higher we climb the more we feel the concern, the pull, of the adult below. The climbing frame and the slippery slide must be treated carefully.

On the basis of these recollections we see children on the playground become aware of the risks of their activity. We look at the hesitancy that attends their movements. We see them become fearful, perhaps even afraid. Children are done a grave disservice if we left the matter there, for their fearfulness is related to our efforts to become mindful of them. In other words, it is not sufficient to say that children become fearful if our observation explains away their actions and avoids the question of our responsibility for their state-of-mind; on the contrary, we imagine ourselves taking a risk when we look at fearful children. We watch as they navigate between the familiar and the unknown, we share in their discoveries, and we share their failures. Their apprehension strikes at the heart of our concern for them. Becoming fearful signifies our relation to children, our fearing for them, and as well, our becoming mindful of how the world appears to them.

We see the child as he or she courts fear. The fearsome object, that which is disclosed as the object of fear, can be approached in various ways. The child responds

in his own way. He swings on the low bars of the climbing frame and controls his fall on the slippery slide. Either way a sense of security comes with these more tentative responses to this playground equipment. And with use the equipment becomes less distant and increasingly familiar. The child's fear of the distant and unknown becomes a questioning of both the world and his place within it. If we close our eyes to this child's fear then there is the danger of his becoming truly afraid, incapable of taking a risk at all. We remember this from the slippery slide where any admonishment serves only as a provocation to which the child is even less likely to respond. This dare to come down the slide only accentuates fear, making him afraid of the slide. We must simply wait for the child to see for himself what the slide involves. To do otherwise is to jeopardize this possibility of self-disclosure and turn attention to those possibilities that encapsulate a fearful state-of-mind and put the child *at-risk*.

Being present for the sake of the child's explorations thus requires not merely helping nor even just encouraging the child's activity, it also requires responding as if through the child's activity we encounter the playground together. This should not be too hard, for in a very real sense seeing children on playgrounds rekindles the fears and trepidations along with the joy, spontaneity and trust in the world which we remember from childhood. Being present pedagogically joins adult and child in a relation that encounters the riskiness of the playground. Consider, in this regard, the young child on the other end of the see-saw. She giggles each time we bounce her into the air and delights us with her happiness. She allows us to see things afresh and shows us a joy in being alive. So we bounce her higher and higher, ever mindful of the limits of her trust. Yet this same child cries and clings to us when we put her on a mechanical donkey at the local shopping mall. This child asks us to

attend to the lived meaning of her activity, to observe the relation that ameliorates the activity's potential for causing distress. And this child asks for something which I think all children ask for in some way or another: that we care for the risky nature of their activity, their playground activity in particular, by re-awakening to the world which the child sees.

Playground Atmosphere

There are probably as many ways of being with children as there are adults and children, and even then it would vary according to time and circumstance. We ignore the child one moment, next moment we allow something he or she does to catch our eye and make us forget what seemed so important such a short while ago. Or we chastise the child one instant and then, realizing that we have jumped to too hasty a conclusion, we take him or her in an apologetic embrace the next. The adult-child relation is in constant flux and riddled with misunderstandings. For heuristic purposes, as well as for the purpose of sketching a relation that is especially mindful of children's risk-taking, it has been useful to talk of certain ways of being with children, certain modes of presence such as supporting, guiding, instructing and evaluating, and to distinguish them from challenging and encountering the child as modes of pedagogic relatedness. In this way it has been possible to see not only that the nuances of the adult-child relation influence the riskiness of the playground, but also that the way the adult responds to the child's playground activity is a reflection of the texture of risk. The particular responses an adult gives have direct bearing on the atmosphere of risk to which playground activity is exposed.

Through reflective awareness of the responses we make and how it is that such responses are possible, we can bring a sense of security to the child's activity and thus create a "pedgogical atmosphere." Rephrasing Vandenberg's (1 sage of this notion, the "pedagogical atmosphere" is determined by the dispositions which children and adults show towards playground activity. These dispositions furnish the medium within which it is possible for adult and child to be open to each other and for them to be attuned towards each other and to the possibilities of risk-taking that the playground affords. The pedagogical atmosphere is felt, therefore, when the child's and the adult's presence together is "ontologically founded in a particular mode of genuine being with (that is, the pedagogic relation)" (p. 38). It is felt when they enjoy the playground together. Challenging the child, becoming mindful of how the playground appears to the child, and seeking to make this playground activity a common encounter, are the determinants of this pedagogic atmosphere. These are the atmospheric conditions of our responsibility for children on playgrounds and the dimensions of our thinking about how children can learn to become responsible themselves for the riskiness of everyday life.

These suggestions as to how we might best help children learn to take risks need, however, to be explored in greater detail. We need to describe the various forms of challenge and the types of encounter that define our playground interactions with children; moreover, we need to see this adult responsiveness to the riskiness of the playground not just in an heuristic way, but in a motivating, guiding, orienting and principling way. Our description should compel us to act pedagogically. Hence, we should ask: How can we be committed to certain courses of action? What is the basis to a pedagogic interest in playground activity? What underlies the approach we take to helping children learn to take risks? How may we be drawn to children's experiences

of risk and how may we know what course of action is best to take in particular risky playground situations? Such questions as these may lead to a better understanding of how risk can become a practical term of our pedagogic relation to children.

CHAPTER V

THE CHALLENGE OF RISK

Children like to be with others on the playground. "Do you want to go to Alice's Playground?" I ask my child. "Yes. But can I go and see if Dorian can come?" He always wants to go with a friend, be it Dorian, Matthew, Paco, or some other child who is currently his "best friend." More so than most other places, the playground is regarded by this child and by children in general as a place of shared experience. This does not mean that children do not act out their own plans when on playgrounds. They co-opt each other into doing things which they would perhaps not try if left alone. They are sometimes obliged to stretch the limits of their abilities. Yet the presence of others does not necessarily signify the loss of self-direction. On the contrary, being with others creates a context in which self-direction is essentially possible. That is to say, the presence of other children calls the actions of a particular child into account. Through others' involvement the child can be defiant, the child can stand up for him- or herself, the child can make a claim to personhood. And thus it makes sense to take a friend, to have a friend to play with—someone the child can trust, someone who understands that the playground presents inescapable, personal challenges that should not be faced alone.

If the child understands the risks of the playground better when in the presence of a trusted friend, then what might be achieved in the company of say, a Lisa or a Lewis, or better still, in the presence of an adult whom the child trusts? How might the risks of playground activity be responded to when the child gains confidence by being with a trusted adult? To answer these questions we need to look more closely than before at the social construction of playground risks, that is, at how children

dare each other and at how the playground itself poses challenges which children articulate for themselves and for others. But most importantly, we need to consider the ways children can be encouraged to respond to risk and the limits to which they can be pushed. We need to show not only that the perception of risk is socially constructed, but also that a positive sense of risk, a *sense of challenge*, can be brought about through the tactful encouragement that comes from a trusted adult.

The Dare

"I dare you to. Go on. Go on. I dare you to. Bet you can't. You're too afraid! Go on—I dare you to." Such taunts are common on the playground as children take great delight in daring each other to respond to challenges. And once a dare is made how can the challenge be ignored? To not accept the challenge contained within the dare is to court possible ridicule, yet to respond to the dare is to risk failure as well as the chance of getting hurt. Either way there is risk involved when a dare has been made.

Sometimes the dare is made the focus of children's playground activity. Children often play a game of 'dares" or some variant of it such as "follow the leader." "Can you do this?" Kyler asks Sophie before jumping up onto the narrow beam beside them. In order for Sophie to stay in the game she must do as Kyler has done. Then it is her turn to try something adventurous which Kyler must follow. She moves over to the swings, climbs on the nearest one, and proceeds back and forth into a higher and higher arc. "I bet you can't go this high!" she yells to Kyler who has already moved around to the adjacent swing. "See if you can get as high as me!"

It is apparent from even the most casual of playground observations that daring, adventurousness and audacity are common properties of playground activity. For instance,

> on the swings in the park, children do not merely sit on the seats and see who can swing the highest, but try [to see] who can climb furthest up the chains while swinging, and who can best twizzle the swing while swinging, and who will jump off his seat from the greatest height, and who, by swinging hard, can leap the furthest off the swing, a sport sometimes called "Parachutes." (Opie and Opie, 1969, pp. 272, 273)

But still, in spite of the inherent dangers of such acts of daring, there is to be found a degree of common sense here to the extent that what one child is dared to do the others must do sooner or later. Daring the child to try some new trick on the swing inevitably requires that those who are watching for now also have their turn. There is, in other words, a common sense of the activity at hand, a sense of sharing in the excitement and being prepared to take up the challenge when called upon. On the other hand, there is as well a different kind of daring, the purpose of which is more to single out a child from the group and to make of him or her an example of that which is only more darkly held in common. For instance, while on a swing a child is pushed as high as possible before those around cry out: "Now! Jump!" And if the child waits too long a torrent of abuse flows in his or her direction. "James is a scaredy-cat!" they chant in unison. The child is now compelled to jump or face the prospect of being totally ostracized by the group. So he jumps, not when they dare him to, but after they have stopped pushing and the swing has subsided a little. And as he picks himself up from the ground he says with a sneer to Eduardo who just happens to be the one standing closest to him, "Well let's see you do it. See how good you are." But his words have little effect other than fuelling the jeers of those standing close by and increasing the misery of James' sense of isolation. These children are now far more interested in picking on James than in

allowing him into their circle and thus being dared themselves. Yet even here, in spite of the unfairness of the situation, there is an underlying distinction between daring and foolhardiness. The children sense that James will not jump when they dare him to; and even if he did, the best he can do is to show that the activity is not quite as dangerous as they thought it to be. James serves to highlight the common sense they have of the danger of this particular activity. Daring him reflects a sense held in common of how difficult the activity really is.

There is, however, a point at which the dare is not only unfair but irresponsible, a point where children overstep the bounds of common sense, when their dares becomes more malevolent than simply mischievous. Here we may speak of the foolish dare and of the type of daring that is fraught with danger. Of the many so-called "daring games" described by the Opies and by Slukin (1981), for example, many actually seem to be based upon the very real possibility of physical harm. Some are mainly threatening, as for example the following game.

> I noticed a few daring games that all involved an element of risk. One of these was a pastime that I have called "falling forwards" since it did not appear that the children gave it a name. One child stood against the wall while the other stood in front with his or her arms outstretched and pointing at the first one's eyes. The daring aspect came in when this child fell forward and only removed the fingers from their threatening position at the very last moment. The child accepting the dare tried hard not to blink or would suffer being called a "scarebaby." (Slukin, 1981, p. 25)

But other "daring games," particularly those that spill over from the playground into traffic areas, carry the distinct possibility of physical injury and possibly death. Such games, in stepping over the bounds of the playground, also overstep the bounds of common sense. In fact, overstepping the bounds of common sense would appear to be their very rationale, and would suggest that they are pursued only by children who are old enough to know what that common sense is and who dare to defy it.

It behoves us to question very seriously the idea of risk-taking that is being invoked in this kind of dare-devilishness. Is it true to say that "these games by their very emphasis on daring, help the majority of children to understand the nature of risk-taking" (Opie and Opie, 1969, p. 263)? To be sure, they show that risk-taking has a daring quality to it, but what they do not show is how a positive sense of risk can be invoked when children specifically dare one another. Although a dare is not the only way a child encounters risk, it is significant primarily because it draws attention to risk and exposes the child to the possibilities of experiencing it. The dare provokes a response. It provokes by suggesting limitations, but it also admonishes the child not to accept limits, or at least to test them out. The dare instructs the child to look more closely at what he or she might be capable of. At the same time, it is possible for a dare to be informed by an understanding of how children might relate to each other. Thus we can see in James' case that his being taunted has a lot to do with his dubious relation to the children, his already being an outsider and someone to pick on. The question to consider is: Can the dare express, a more positive relation?

This is how it might be for Ben.

> Hi. My name is Ben. I am six years old. That means I'm almost grown up. But sometimes things still scare me.
> I took my first swimming lessons this summer.
> On the first day, I was afraid to go into the water. I just stood on the edge of the pool. The water looked awfully deep.
> My brother Tim was already in the pool.
> "Hey, Ben," he called. "What's the matter? You scared?"
> I didn't say anything. I just sat down. I was afraid all right. The water was deep. It was cold too. I didn't want to go in at all. But I was afraid Tim would laugh at me if I stayed out. So I made myself get in the water. (Conaway, 1977, pp. 5, 6.)

There is in this situation a type of dare resulting from Tim having taken the plunge already and his now being in a position to sense his brother's predicament. His words

and indeed his reproachful presence make sense in the context of a brotherly relation; nevertheless, the writer of this story has not really shown how this relation might prefigure a sensible dare. The writer has not shown what form a dare might take when it is premissed by a brotherly sense of responsibility for the other child.

Paco and Eduardo sit astride the beam from which a cargo net is suspended to the ground. They are content for the moment just to perch up there and rest upon their accomplishment. Meanwhile Paco's younger brother, Denny, has come over. "How did you get up there?" asks Denny, seeing no other way up than the steep climb up the cargo net. "It's easy," says Paco. He pauses, perhaps reflecting upon how hard it really was. "Do you think you can come up?" he says, now daring his younger brother. But it is soon clear that the challenge is just too great for Denny. "You're too little. Ha, ha, you can't come up," chants Eduardo. The two older boys enjoy their superiority, although it seems to mean more to Eduardo than to Paco. A moment later Paco tells Denny, as if to explain his superiority, "You're only four, and I'm six. I'm bigger than you." He then asks Denny, "Do you want me to help you up?" Of course, it is important not to be mislead in understanding Paco's intention in daring Denny to climb up the cargo net; nevertheless, in contrast to Eduardo's taunts, there is a benevolent tone to Paco's words that intimates a way of daring another which acknowledges a relation to that other child (in this case, a brotherly relation) and a sense of responsibility for him or her.

I do not mean to imply that a good dare is only possible within a brotherly relation—a relation of fraternity—rather that it is a good dare to the extent that it is based upon a genuine interest in the ability of the other and of the limits to which he or she can be challenged. So the question is: How can this good sense of a dare prevail? How can a dare show a greater measure of empathy for the child? How

might a dare show a degree of sympathy for what the child might achieve?

"Jump! Jump!" Jamie calls out to Cory. We look up to see Cory balancing on the railing of one of the high platforms some few metres above the ground. He hesitates momentarily then leaps high into the air and successfully clears the ladders and poles anchored alongside the platform. Unfortunately he lands awkwardly and hobbles around for a minute or two rubbing his leg until the pain of the landing subsides. Jonathan has been watching all this time, and now he looks on with some concern as he sees Cory attempting to cope with his injury. He chastises Cory, telling him: "You don't have to do what he [Jamie] tells you to." Cory turns to look at Jonathan. With a whimsical expression he answers: "I do. He's my conscience!" Cory seems to even surprise himself with this response. He laughs at what he has said and heads off after Jamie.

Cory has been dared. Seeing the other child perched above him, daring him to jump off the railing, means there can be no backing down, there is no way of ignoring the dare. One might even conclude that his b ess to the situation and to the dangers lurking there yields a blind trust in this other child. Through the dare Cory is subject to the will of the other child. So he jumps and hopes for the best. But is he really blind to the situation, spellbound, as it were, by Jamie's dare? After all, Cory can still laugh at the idea of Jamie daring him to jump. It seems almost as if he wants to be dared, to be challenged. Besides, Jamie's dare to jump from the railing would fall on deaf ears if it did not in some way already impinge upon Cory's inclination to try this activity. If not for Jamie's words to make Cory conscious of this activity, and if not for the relation upon which this dare is premissed, then Cory may not even be challenged at all. Like Denny, he wants an articulation of his inclinations. He wants someone to be his "conscience." The dare is, in this regard,

neither thoughtless nor malicious. We watch as Cory follows Jamie up the ladder of the large spiralling slide. He hesitates at the top, but having seen Jamie disappear down the shute so effortlessly and now hearing him call from below, daring him to catch up, he seems reassured. Down he goes. "I did it!" he cries gleefully. "I did it! Did you see me? I'm going to do it again." This is the first time he has dared to go down this particular slide, and it took a boy his own age to get him to have such a feeling of accomplishment.

The dare is not always articulated in so many words. The child is often dared in other less obvious ways, ways in which the child must be his or her own conscience, ways in which the child must find his or her own way. We need to consider these more subtle dares, provocations and excitements. We need to consider the dare within a broader context of how the challenges of the playground are articulated. Also, in seeing a pedagogy beyond daring the child, we need to say more about what sorts of risks are worth taking and how pedagogically we can bring children to decide. How can we encourage children to take risks that are considered worthwhile?

Encouragement

There is a Norman Rockwell illustration which shows a young boy looking nervously over the edge of a high diving board. This child is on all-fours, gripping the end of the board, petrified it seems at the prospect of being in such a precarious position. And yet as we look at this picture something appears to have been left out. There is no one else in sight. No one stands on the diving platform behind the child, no one can be seen coming up the ladder. This child is alone on the end of

the diving board, evidently experiencing great fear, yet there is no one else present to account for his predicament. We wonder: how can it be that this child has ventured so far out on the diving board? How has this child found the courage not only to climb up to the diving board but also to go right to the edge of the board? Has the board itself become the challenge?

The diving board has indeed become the challenge for Marc. He sees his friends jump off the three-meter board with comparative ease, or so he thinks. They do not seem too worried by it. They try it many times while he stays below on the deck out of the way. "C'mon Marc," says Ben, "aren't you going to do it?" Eventually Marc climbs up the ladder to the board. He holds the railing at the top and looks anxiously over the edge of the board to the pool below. Some children climb behind Marc. He lets them past to have their turn before him. "C'mon Marc!" yells Ben from somewhere down below. Marc peers over the edge. He turns around and heads back down the ladder.

Is this the end of the episode for Marc? Not likely. The diving board has become the topic of his talk at home over the next few days. He mentions it so often that eventually his parents agree to take him and his younger brother, Matthew, to the pool so that he might try the three-meter board once again. Yet, once there, even the presence of the parents is not enough to allay Marc's apprehensiveness about going off this diving board. And to make matters worse, Matthew confidently mounts the ladder and runs straight off the end of the board. Matthew shows very little fear at all of this diving board.

"How deep is the water?" asks Marc. He sees the depth of the pool. He sees straight to the bottom of the pool. The water is so clear, what will stop him from

plunging straight to the bottom? What will give him confidence to jump off this board? Marc backs down once again and looks wistfully at the board as Matthew and the children bounce off it. "Can you show me how to do it?" Marc asks his father. It seems the challenge of the board weighs heavily upon him. But how can Marc be helped to respond to this challenge in the way that he wants? How can his confidence be built up? After all, it is not just a matter of showing him how to do it. He has watched the other children long enough already. No, the help given to Marc needs to be based on a knowledge of the board, in particular, Marc's knowledge of the board. Just as the dare is based upon some commonsense understanding of the riskiness of an activity, so too must the help that Marc wants stem from a shared sense of the riskiness of his activity. Marc wants to know how to jump off the board, starting from where he stands at the moment. He wants the sort of encouragement which allows him to find his own way of responding to the challenge of the diving board.

Tyler and Dorian are not on a diving board. Instead, they can be seen peering over the rim of a plastic casing which forms a partial roof to one of the platforms at Malmo Playground. A few of the older children have been half sliding, half jumping off this casing onto the sand some distance below. Tyler and Dorian have a bird's eye view of this activity from where they lie on a slanted wooden structure that buttresses the plastic casing. They lie in such a way that they can see what is going on, using the wooden beam that attaches the plastic casing to the wooden buttress in order to pull themselves up to gain an even better view of the action and then to slide back down the wooden structure and partly disappear from the view of those who are making ready to jump. At the moment they have pulled themselves up towards the plastic rim and are waiting to see Jonathan jump [illegible]! Do

it!" says Tyler to this older boy. "You do it!" Jonathan snaps back. Dorian pipes in: "He doesn't want to. We did it before." Jonathan jumps. He picks himself up, brushes the sand off and turns to look up at the two younger boys who are now craning their necks to see where he has landed. "That's a cinch, kid!" says Jonathan. But before he can suggest they follow him, Tyler and Dorian have withdrawn from view. After a while Jonathan and his friends tire of this activity. They start chasing each other over the other pieces of equipment on the playground. Now it is safe for Tyler and Dorian to try out this plastic casing themselves. So they climb tentatively over the beam anchoring the wooden platform to the casing, and taking a firm grip on the beam, they try to find a way of sitting securely on the plastic rim. Now it seems they can really appreciate how far Jonathan had to jump to the ground below.

As they sit there leaning back with their arms draped over the supporting beam, becoming accustomed to the height, some of the older children return. Tyler and Dorian find they must shuffle along in order to make room for two of Jonathan friends who have now climbed up beside them. But these children are not there for long. They jump off as soon as they see Jonathan coming their way across the bars that adjoin the platform upon which the two younger children lay only a short while ago. Tyler and Dorain watch closely as Jonathan approaches. As he comes near they retreat to the wooden platform, remembering, it seems, Jonathan's challenge for them to jump after him. They do not want Jonathan to know that they have been considering doing it. Much better to be out of Jonathan's way, to retreat to the platform so that Jonathan does not have his way with them. Discretion is, for the moment, the better part of valor.

A little while later I notice Dorian sitting again on the casing. Tyler is off to another part of the playground to watch Andrew play in the sand with the things he

has brought from home. Jonathan and his friends sit talking under one of the slides. But Dorain stays on the plastic casing, unable to ignore the challenge of jumping off. He sits for a long time, saying things to himself and looking around for the others who are now below him on different parts of the playground. He sits alone above the chatter of the children. There is something grand about the position he is now in—to be in the midst of activity and yet to sit above it. It is a moment to be savoured. Stiil, the challenge is there to jump down. He jumps! Not once, but a second time, and then again. Even so, he has still not done what Jonathan did. Dorian has still to let himself slide off rather than merely lower himself down by hanging onto the supporting beam and then dropping the remaining distance to the ground when his arms can extend no further.

I climb up beside him. "You can go off here, can't you?" he asks me. "I'm not sure. I don't know if my knees can take it," I reply. Dorian comes back straight away: "It's easy. It's easy as one, two, three. See. I can sit here without holding on." Dorian holds his arms up and then, with a bit of a wriggle, he lets himself slide over the edge. Now he can at last do what Jonathan did. "It's cinchy!" Dorian calls to me as he picks himself up off the ground. "It's a cinch," he says again as he climbs up to sit beside me again. Dorian rests for a moment. "You gotta give your hands a rest," he tells me. "They go splat on the ground." He leans forward to see over the edge and then turns to face me once again. "Are you going to do it? It's easy as one, two, three. It's even easy as one." Having shown me how to do it, having shared this newly acquired knowledge with me, Dorian needs to ensure the value of this knowledge by daring someone else who hasn't the knowledge. So he surveys the playground, catching sight of his former playmate. "Hey Tyler, come here and do this!"

No doubt there was a type of dare here—one envisioned in Jonathan's daring and articulated by Jonathan as a challenge to Dorian and Tyler. This dare was, however, not so much a provocation as an enticement, a prompt to look more closely at the situation in order to find ways of doing what Jonathan appeared to do so easily. Whereas Tyler seemed happy enough to leave things as they stand, Dorian appeared from the outset to be caught up in the situation, intent on learning how to do it. For Dorian, Jonathan has thrown down the gauntlet, but this has merely served to accentuate a possibility that was already implied in his being drawn to the plastic casing. The task for Dorian is not simply to respond to a dare; rather, it is to find out ways of jumping to the ground. Here is the pedagogic moment: deciding if Dorian does in fact need encouragement or if he needs to work it out for himself. So I climb up beside him to take the place of Jonathan, thereby ameliorating the tone of his challenge and thus helping Dorian to find his own way of responding to a challenge that goes even beyond Jonathan's terms of reference. Sitting beside Dorian, I have found a place within his terms of reference that allows me to encourage his daring. Here I am no longer a passive observer but now someone who can act in concert with Dorian. Now I have a stake in the activity at hand. Now I feel moved enough to give Dorian a hand. There is in the first instance a pathic response to what Dorian is trying to do. Linschoten (1968) writes:

> When one has urged someone to jump over a ditch and he hesitates it is almost impossible for us to encourage him and *not* at the same time make an initial movement for jumping with him. (p. 274)

When we see Dorian attempting something risky and we seek to encourage his efforts we have already begun "with bodily reactions that follow upon these things" (p. 278). On the basis of this empathy, we feel sympathy for what Dorian is trying to do, and we feel moved to encourage him.

Let us consider more closely the nature of this encouragement. Consider the case of Gerrard who can be seen reaching up to grasp the top-most bar of a series of parallel bars which slope towards the ground. He has already tried a few times to make it all the way to the ground by monkey-swinging from one bar to the next. His last attempt resulted in his getting halfway before losing his grip and falling to the sand below. Now, as Gerrard makes ready to try again, he calls to his mother. "Mom, look here! Watch me do this! Mom, are you watching? Mom! W-a-t-c-h!" She continues to talk with a parent of one of the other children on the playground. For the moment she is oblivious to her son's calls. Meanwhile a couple of the other children, close in age to Gerrard, push him to the side of the platform so they can swing on these very same bars. Gerrard appears frustrated and calls again for his mother's attention. "All right, Gerrard, I'm watching you now!" she says in an exasperated voice. Her tone mellows. "What is it you want to show me?" Gerrard reaches out for the first bar, and with legs kicking wildly, he struggles to grasp the second, then the third. At about the same point as before he tires; he does not have the energy to reach the next bar, and just misses it. Gerrard falls heavily to the ground. But he does not hurt himself. He stays on all fours for a brief moment before brushing the sand off and climbing up the linked tires that lead to the platform from which the bars can be reached. "That was a good try," says his mother. "But I can't do it!" yells Gerrard. "It's too hot! The bars are too hot!" "Well, go and play on something else," his mother chides him. Gerrard suddenly becomes angrier. "Don't say that! You're not to say that!" he screams at her. "Look, Gerrard, if the bars are too hot then go and play on something else. The people here don't want to hear you yelling out all afternoon. Be a good boy and play on something else." Gerrard is in tears. "I told you not to say that!" he cries out for all the neighbourhood to hear.

Gerrard has watched the other children on this set of bars and is anxious to do as they have shown him. He calls upon his mother to watch him, and he becomes distressed, not just because the bars are hot and he cannot yet do as the other children have done, but more because her words draw attention to the possibility of failure. Gerrard is clearly not ready to move onto some other piece of equipment; in fact, at this point in time no other piece of equipment matters to him. He wants to be encouraged to do as the other children have done on the bars. When he says "Don't say that" he means "Don't say that I can't do it. I want to do it and I am not prepared to admit defeat." In point of fact, his mother's words discourage him; and all power to Gerrard, he will not accept defeat so readily. Gerrard needs words of support to literally hold him up so he can find a way of swinging to the ground. There are, of course, limits to this support, yet Gerrard's growing frustration seems to indicate that he has been left neither a way of doing the activity nor a reasonable way out of doing it. His daring has not been sufficiently encouraged to have an appropriate outlet. .

The encouragement given to children like Gerrard is often more than words can say. To encourage means to give heart to the child, to inspirit and animate him or her, to be with the child in spirit and flesh as activity is being attempted. Words are not enough. Too often they are only a means of praising the child, of feigning interest and of thus giving the semblance of our involvement while remaining at a distance. Praise without deed defeats the point of encouragement. We need to feel sufficiently moved to countenance the child's activity and to support the child's way of responding to playground challenges.

Ways Out

But what if the child chooses not to respond to a challenge? Or what if the child seeks to avoid challenge altogether? For instance, on the way to Alice's Playground we pass one of the high apartment towers. Rodrigo has been this way before. He knows about the service ramp at the side of this building. On previous occasions he has ridden down this narrow ramp and shot up it to the road on the far side. Now with Paco in tow he heads towards the ramp entrance. "Wait on!" I call out to the two of them. They have left me behind on their bikes, and I need to check the ramp for obstacles before they disappear down it. The two boys wait impatiently for me to catch up. "We can go down," says Rodrigo, "there's nobody using it." I look to make sure, but before Rodrigo can turn his bike around he sees that Paco has beaten him to the ramp. Paco pushes his bike. He holds onto the handlebars and runs alongside his bike down the ramp and part-way up the other side before having to push it again. Once he reaches the other side he sits on the bike and waits for Rodrigo to join him. "You're supposed to ride down it" Rodrigo calls to him. Next moment Paco sees Rodrigo tear up the ramp past him. "Oh, I should've went down like that," he tells Rodrigo as if to acknowledge his mistake. It is significant, however, that Paco is quite anxious for us to be on our way to Alice's Playground.

On our return from the playground Paco stays with me. "Can we go this way?" he asks, pointing to a different way past the apartment building that had the service ramp. Too late--Rodrigo is already peddling his bike to the side of the building from which going down the ramp is a possibility to be reckoned with. So we follow Rodrigo. But Paco does not follow him down the ramp. He is content to ride around

the pathway skirting the apartment block and to join Rodrigo on the other side. Later, out of curiosity, I ask Rodrigo: "Why do you think Paco didn't want to ride down the ramp?" "I don't know," he says matter-of-factly. For him, Paco's avoidance of the ramp does not matter. Other than indicating some seeming violation of a rule for riding down the ramp, Rodrigo has given no further thought to Paco's reluctance to ride down it. But what of Paco? Doesn't it matter to him? There is a distinct possibility that he has felt himself compromised by not responding to the challenge that Rodrigo articulated in word and action. Even my presence there prevented his finding a let-out, a way of saving face, although he obviously tried to create one for himself by suggesting we take a different route home.

The sequel to this situation comes the following day when Paco and Rodrigo are together at Malmo Playground. The two boys are chasing each other over the playground. During the course of this activity Paco climbs up onto the highest platform. He sees Rodrigo coming up behind him, so he reaches out to grab one of the poles anchored off to the side in preparation for sliding down to escape Rodrigo's clutches. "Hey, this is real high. It's real scarey," he says under his breath as he leans out to grasp the pole. He looks around and sees Rodrigo coming up behind him, turns back, hesitates momentarily, and disappears down the pole. Once on the ground, however, the chase seems less important than it did a moment ago. Instead of fleeing to another part of the playground, Paco takes a few steps back to watch Rodrigo prepare to follow him down the same pole. And he notices that Rodrigo, even though he has done this activity before, still approaches it with some hesitation. "Rodrigo's a chicken! Rodrigo's a big fat chicken!" calls Paco. He laughs and says to me, "Rodrigo's too scared to do it, isn't he?" But Rodrigo does slide down the pole. "You bumped coming down," Paco tells him, apparently referring to the jerkiness of

Rodrigo's descent caused by his gripping the pole too tightly. "I went down really fast," he adds with a bit of a sneer. They both do it again. "I didn't bump that time," Rodrigo says; to which Paco replies: "You did too. I heard you. You went....(He makes a high-pitched sound.)" "Let's do it again, then. Let's see if *you* bump," says Rodrigo indignantly. "No," replies Paco, "how about we play TV tag? You're it!"

As Paco and Rodrigo engage in this banter I cannot stop thinking of the incident of the previous day and wondering to what extent Paco is now playing out the inadequacy I assume he felt at the hands of Rodrigo. To what extent are his present actions related to being denied a let-out when faced with the daunting prospect of coming down the ramp? Is his taunting of Rodrigo some sort of retribution for his own humiliation the day before? And what of my contribution to this situation? To what extent did my presence determine the nature of Paco's responses? After all, Rodrigo thought little of Paco's reluctance to ride down the ramp. Perhaps it was more because of my presence there that Paco became disheartened at the suggestion of his failing to take a risk.

When left to themselves children find their own ways of doing things and their own ways out of doing things that appear too risky. Jesse and Matthew, for instance, are drawn to a hill where they see children rolling down the grassed slopes. Some of these children have found cardboard boxes to pull apart and make sleds. Others seem happy enough to run down at full speed. We watch as Matthew crouches down, buries his head in the grass, flops over onto his back, and then having sufficient momentum, continues on with a few more forward rolls. "Can you do that?" he asks Jesse as he contemplates doing another series. "Can you do this?" Jesse asks Matthew by way of response. He rolls sideways down the hill. In doing so, Jesse has found an

appropriate response to the challenge that Matthew creates. He has avoided a situation where he might not measure up; and in finding his own way of responding to Matthew's challenge, he is well satisfied.

Matthew's father, Tony, watches as the two boys roll down the grassy slope. He wanders over and tells them, "When I was a kid we used to somersault all the way to the bottom. We'd do twenty or thirty in a row. I think I could probably still do that now." He takes off his coat and prepares to give it a try. Matthew and Jesse stand off to the side. Then away he goes, not quite to the bottom of the hill, but certainly a good part of the way down. Matthew tries to follow suit. But Jesse wanders off to see if perchance there are any pieces of cardboard lying around that he can use to slide on. It seems that, for him, Tony has narrowed the choices he has for rolling down the hill. Whereas when it was just Matthew with him, it was easy to ignore the terms of Matthew's challenge and to find his own way of going down the hill, now that Tony takes Matthew's side, the possibility of failure looms larger. The adult's presence gives a stamp of approval to doing "this" rather than doing "that." So Jesse wanders off to find something else to do.

Such an option is often unavailable to children in more formal playground contexts. For instance, Chris tells his parents that today is the day they are going to be doing diving in their Physical Education lesson. That evening, as they are seated around the dinner table, his father asks: "Did you go diving today?" Chris stays quiet. "Did you hear me, Chris? I asked you if you went diving." Chris bites his lips and tears well up in his eyes. "I'm a coward," he blurts out. "All the other kids could do it—and I didn't. I had to sit on the side and watch them." In this situation the child has no way out at all. He is let off the activity only to face the accusing stares of his classmates and the censure of his teacher, and possibly the

disappointment of his parents. How much different it is for the children we see climb up the high diving platform at the Kinsmen Centre. Holding on to the railing, they peer over the edge of the highest platform and decide that this is definitely too high. They descend to the next level and again peer over the railing that borders the rear of this platform. It is still too high, although not so high that they can't step out onto the platform. One of them even lies on the platform, his head over the end, to see where they might end up in the pool. It is tempting. They descend the stairs once again to the second lowest platform. Suddenly the one who was lying down a moment ago runs forward and plunges feet first into the pool. The other one goes to the lower platform and does the same. For both children it seems that what they did was quite enough. Each found a way out of doing what appeared too risky, and yet both responded to the challenge of going off the diving tower.

Clearly children need options when challenges appear too great. And if left to themselves they tend to find their own ways out. This does not mean, however, that children should necessarily be left to themselves, that "you should interfere as little as possible when the child is with other ch " and that the child "must find out for himself how to get along with them and now to accommodate his interests to theirs" (Dreikurs, 1972, p. 56). Having already shown how daring can be mischievous when children are left to their own devices, and having indicated how the child looks to the adult to temper his or her daring, our task is to consider how we can in our dealings with children be especially sensitive to the nature of their "ways out" of playground activity. And we must be especially careful that we do not force responses that offer no way out at all—responses that risk a sense of failure. A poignant example is given by Crowe (1984) of a little girl who, for her own sense of security, carried around a "snake" made up of some cotton reels strung together.

> She didn't need it often, but sometimes we would see her hand slip into her pocket for a reassuring touch—or even hover near her pocket at the ready, in case. But one day she really needed it. We had created three solid steps up to the top of an inverted tea-chest, and the children were queueing up on the grass to climb the steps and jump off the top. Elizabeth was among them and when her turn came she confidently mounted the steps, moved over to the far side of the top—and froze. Suddenly the ground looked a long way down, and we watched her coming to the moment of decision. Risk it or jump? No. Accept the outstretched hand offering help? She hovered then averted her eyes. Turn around and go back? Suddenly she remembered, put her hand in her pocket to retrieve Snake, and with complete composure said "Snake doesn't want to jump today."
> I opened my mouth to say "Snakes don't like jumping, do they?" but suddenly saw two things simultaneously: she didn't need me to make it easier for her to climb down those stairs, she had managed it alone; and I would have blocked any renewed attempt to find the courage to jump later. If snakes "don't like jumping" then next time she climbed those steps it would be assumed that *she* wanted to jump—and what if her courage failed again? (pp. 124, 125)

We need to respect the options children create, and perhaps even view them as possibilities in themselves. To find out the way to ride down a steep ramp, slide down a pole, roll down a hill or dive into a pool, it is sometimes necessary to find ways out of doing it initially. This does not mean avoiding challenge; rather, it means seeking ways of meeting challenge. The child looks for the possible. And it is here, when we look with the child and recognize his or her response as an orientation to the riskiness of the playground, that our encouragement can be most helpful. Here we can become attuned to the ways a child learns to take risks. Here we can see a pedagogy beyond daring the child.

Limits of Challenge

I push a group of small children on a tire swing. As the pitch intensifies they start to chant: "We want a high push, we want a high push, we want a high push...." They chant in unison: "Higher! Higher!" But how can I know how high to

push them? How far can these children be challenged? Here we have a situation where there are seemingly no ways out of the activity, no ways the children may prudently let themselves off the swing if the challenge suddenly becomes too much; yet still the principle of letting children find out for themselves applies to the extent that it is their daring to which we respond. Here, where we are required to stand close to the children and contribute to their activity, we must be especially mindful of the limits of challenge.

Let me indicate the direction of this thoughtfulness. Picture a little girl of about four years of age. And picture her in a make-shift playground, a vacant lot which the neighbourhood children have converted into a play area. I am walking through this lot and approach Sophie. As a come close I see Sophie reaching for the knot on a long rope attached to a tree that the older children have been using as a swing. I pick Sophie up and sit her on the knot. That's all I do. Then she says, "Push me." I haven't seen her on the swing before, so I cautiously push her just out of hand's reach. She had been quite calmly sitting on the knot, but now she is screwed into a tight ball, her face set rigid in terror. I am a little terrified as well, because I don't really want to frighten the little girl and she is obviously not enjoying herself, so I stop her. Relaxing slightly, she says again, "Push me." I wonder what is going on because I cannot match her words with her terror. This time as the swing slows, the terror abates and she looks a little happier, her lips turned up in a slight smile. The third time as the swing slows, Sophie relaxes and even eases back on the rope before again saying, "Push me." Before too long I cannot push her high enough (adapted from Jago, 1970).

Sophie sees a challenge and looks for encouragement. She wants to be lifted onto the rope and pushed, not simply because it is impossible for her to do it alone

but because the challenge requires our complicity. She needs us there to give her the courage to extend herself until she can find her own way; then, when she knows her way, there is indeed no way we can push her high enough. Hence our task is not just to push Sophie but rather to become attuned to the way in which she wants us to push her, which is to say, to the way in which our pushing may eventually become unnecessary. We look to a time when Sophie can do better by herself.

This means taking special care in the way we encourage children like Sophie and being sensitive to the manner in which we implicate ourselves in their risk-taking. Consider the case of four-year-old Tyler. The setting is now a fairly new designer-type playground full of ladders and platforms, bright yellow slides, geometrical climbing frames, assorted tunnels and archways. Tyler and I are standing near the swings—the tires that are suspended by chains from a large beam, and that have a universal joint at the top so they can swing in all directions. However we are not the only ones on this part of the playground. Tyler watches a group of girls not much older than he enjoying themselves on one of the swings. After a while he moves onto the vacant tire swing. He lies across it with his feet scuffing the dirt. Next he runs in a circle still clinging to the tire. Then he pulls himself up, drops his legs through the tire, and stares down as the swing turns slowly round and round. "Can you push me?" asks Tyler. I take hold of the chains, shuffle backwards and release the swing. Then, as the swing returns I grasp the chains again, pull back a little further, and give the swing a little jerk as I launch it into a higher arc. This seems awkward, so I decide to push lower down on the swing, on the tire itself. Now the swing goes even higher, and as it does so, it starts to rotate such that the next time it can be pushed Tyler finds himself looking sideways at me. The swing continues to rotate, and with each push Tyler must alter slightly his position on the tire in order

to keep from falling off. "Don't push me anymore," says Tyler. But I don't hear him since I am too caught up in the job of pushing him into the air. "Don't push me anymore!" Tyler says again, now with a sense of real urgency. This time I hear him. And I see the terror written all over his face. So I step back and watch as the slowing of the swing brings a look of relaxation to Tyler's face. The swing comes to a stop. Tyler sits with his legs dangling down, the swing moving ever so slightly. After a while he looks over at the girls on the swing beside him. He watches as they are pushed higher and higher into the air. Then he turns to me and asks: "Can you push me? But don't push me too hard!"

Tyler wants to do as the girls on the other swing have shown him. He is challenged by what he sees them doing, however he needs a push in order to respond to their challenge. Tyler wants to be pushed like Sophie. He wants to be pushed to the point of not wanting to be pushed anymore, not in the sense of being intimidated but rather in the knowledge that he can now push himself. For the sake of this knowledge, however, he needs to be encouraged, so he continues to ask me to push him as long as I remain in touch with him by not pushing him too hard.

It would seem there are not so much limits to challenge as there is a need to feel moved by children's desires to be challenged, and moved enough even to be able to follow the direction that the challenge takes. There is a need to stand in a physically construed relation to children whereby they can be encouraged to find their own way of exploring the playground risks which entice them and which we think are worth taking. A child's future is literally in the hands of the adult standing by. He or she can be dared, provoked, maybe even led by the words of the adult, but the best way of helping the child respond to challenge is if the adult's encouragement has the appearance of reaching out to the child, of making contact with the child, of

making support palpable. How can this physical contact be achieved? Or better still, how can we remain "tactful" (literally, in delicate touch) in our dealings with children on the playground? Perhaps by looking more self-reflectively at what is happening when children respond to playground challenges, and especially, by considering situations in which the nature of their response is tantamount to a testing of our ability to stay in touch with them.

CHAPTER VI

THE ENCOUNTER WITH RISK

Günther Anders tells the fable of a young prince who was forever stepping off the beaten track to explore the fields, woods and out of the way places where no path exists.

> But since it displeased the king that his son, leaving the clearly marked avenues, made his way across meadows and fields in order to get to understand the world on his own terms, he gave his son cart and horse. "Now you no longer need to walk on foot" were his words. "Now you may no longer do it" was their intent. "Now you no longer can" was their effect. (Anders, 1902)

This parental consideration serves, in the first instance, mainly to bring the child back to the straight and narrow pathway. The child loses the freedom to ply his own way, for now he can only re-ply to the challenges before him in an adulterated sort of way. Likewise, in the discussion of playground challenges we have seen how the adult can constrain the child from finding his or her own way. But the lesson to be drawn from this is not that the child should be left completely to his or her own devices; rather that we must examine more carefully our motives for helping the child face challenge so that we can be better placed to eventually let the child go his or her own way along a path of risk-taking.

In this section of the study we seek a greater measure of self-reflection in our dealings with children. We seek to overcome that indifference borne of long-time experience which keeps us apart from the child's experience of risk and which lets us constrain the child's activity within an artificial safety. Our strategy will be to consider, first of all, situations unfamiliar to both adult and child and to contrast them with the supposed familiarity of the playground. Such a strategy will hopefully enable us to encounter the child's experience of the playground and to deepen the pedagogy of risk

outlined so far.

Apprehension

We follow the path along the top of the ravine, all the while looking for a way down to the river. But each clearing presents a major challenge, with thick vegetation barring the way and steep sides dropping to the water's edge. We must walk a little further before finding an easier access. Before long we come to where an earth slide has covered the vegetation and created a more moderate slope to the river, although we wonder if it is still too steep for the children who are with us. I take a few steps down to test the firmness of the ground, then call for Tyler to take hold of my hand. He says he does not want to come, yet his voice betrays a desire not to be left behind. "Here, take my hand," I tell him more insistently. A few steps further and I become concerned that perhaps this is not such a good idea. The earth is softer than I had thought and it is much more difficult to stay upright. Tyler starts to get anxious as we continue to stumble and slide down the embankment. So I ask him to hold on to a protruding branch while I move sideways into a better alignment for the rest of the descent. But Tyler does not want to let go of my hand. He is visibly upset at this turn of events. At this moment Tyler is afraid; futhermore, it seems that we are in a position where, because of the difficulty of the activity for us both, I cannot be totally mindful of his fearfulness—or so it probably seems to Tyler.

Just at this moment we hear Matthew laughing above us. Turning around, I see Matthew tumbling toward us, earth and stones scattering in his wake. Matthew has decided to throw caution to the wind. If there were any fears in his mind they were

put aside when he left his father behind on the slope above us. The sight of Matthew changes things for Tyler. He laughs with Matthew as his friend comes crashing into us. Suddenly the hill does not appear so steep, so hard, so dangerous. In fact Tyler now wants to career down the slope as well. He wants to do as Matthew has shown him. Matthew's father and I stand and watch as Micheal first and then Tyler scamper down the rest of the slope, giggling all the way to the bottom. Later on when it comes time to leave, we are not so concerned to find an easy way out of this river valley. The first open area we come to seems accessible enough. We watch as Matthew heads off with Tyler close behind. We follow directly after them, since there are places where they need some help to climb up the steep and slippery sections. Yet such difficulties do not worry the boys. Soon we reach the path at the top and stop to catch our breath. Tyler says: "I climbed up all by myself, didn't I Daddy?" I nod in agreement. "Can we do it again?" he asks.

How can it be that a child can be so fearful going down the slope and yet show such bravado coming up? And in what way are we implicated in this child's coming to terms with this challenging place? Perhaps it is significant that Tyler was being led when his fearfulness became apparent, and that he became most anxious when he was left momentarily by himself on the hill. This was also the moment when the accompanying adult felt most concerned about the difficulty of the climb down to the river. This was when I felt least connected to Tyler. Then, just as the situation became charged with apprehension, a child the same age as Tyler shows us how things might be grasped, how Tyler might have been led down the embankment, and how the encounter with risk might have been a fortifying experience for us both. Consider, in this regard, a more dramatic situation, that of leading a large group of children down the slopes of a mountain. On the way down, which is difficult at the

best of times, we are surprised by a thunderstorm. We take shelter while it passes, but now the descent is made especially difficult. Previously firm attachments have become slippery while once safe ledges and overhangs must be negotiated with care. In a very short space of time the storm has changed the face of this mountain. Mount Danger has become a threatening place for us all. As we continue our descent some of the adult leaders seem as frightened as many of the children. One of them, Therese, hangs back at the end of the group. She is literally in tears at the prospect of going any further, and has to be coaxed down by one of her friends. Meanwhile the children are finding themselves increasingly on their own. They are still being led by the adults who stay in front of the group; yet it is the anxiety of those closest to them that makes the way seem so very dangerous.

In many ways the situation of the children on this mountain parallels that of Matthew and Tyler on the slopes of the riverbank. Children become fearful in both situations, however their fearfulness is much more than a psychological state; it is an expression of our own implication in the situation. The children's fears, while having some objective meaning, are more an expression of how we as adults maintain a relation to them in situations that hold risk for us both, albeit in different ways. By way of contrast with these landscapes of risk, consider a much more familiar site, one so familiar that we can easily lose sight of our stake in the child's fearfulness. Serafino (1986) provides the following instance.

> Rachel, at almost three years of age, has developed a fear of taking a bath. During infancy she always enjoyed her bathinette and would playfully splash water around. The transition to bathing in the tub seemed easy for her, and she loved to play in the water with her rubber toys. Because she never had an accident in the tub, such as falling and hurting herself, Rachel's mother is puzzled by her sudden protests, crying, and tantrums at bath-time.
>
> Although some two-year-olds refuse baths as part of the stubbornness that parents are told to expect in the period called the "terrible two's,"

Rachel's resistance has a different source. She has become afraid of bathing. And this *fear arose from incorrect ideas she thought up all by herself that involved extensions of things she had seen.* How did this happen?

A couple of days before Rachel's problem showed up, she was enjoying the bath her father g e her before going to bed. She started to play with the knob that controls the drain, and flipped it to the open position. Because the bath was almost finished, her father left the drain open. As she stood up for her father to dry her off, she noticed that the water level dropped, as she had seen in previous baths when she stood up—but this time it didn't stop! It kept dropping while she stood there, and toward the end she watched carefully as the last of the water began swirling and making a strange noise as it was sucked down the drain. Suddenly Rachel grabbed onto her father, saying "Take me out, Daddy." He hadn't realized what she was thinking, and, since she was dry, he picked her up and carried her off to bed.

What was Rachel thinking as she watched the water go down the drain? Although it may seem a bit absurd, she was afraid that she would be sucked down the drain too! Where would she get such an idea? For one thing, she had seen things flushed down the toilet, never to return. "But these were small things," you note.

True en h. But Rachel did not understand yet that large, solid things don't fit : small holes. (Except, of course, if they are reshaped by extraordinary p ure, for example. But she's probably better off not being informed of . So, as she watched the water drain, she noticed that the original of bath water was "bigger than me," and *it* went down the drain. Also, on earlier occasions she had seen cartoons in which a person (actually, a genie) had emerged from, and withdrawn back into, a small spout. Rachel's thinking may have been faulty, but it seemed very logical to *her*—and that's what counts. Her *thinking* provided the source of her fear. (pp. 58–60)

Now we could help Rachel by pushing her through Piagetian-type stages of rationality, by giving her a watered down scientific explanation, and she would no doubt become less fearful. The trouble is we may overlook the fun of taking a bath, though I guess this happened when the father thought Rachel was just messing around in the bath water and that its disappearance would not matter. Furthermore, this procedure of explaining things to Rachel strikes me as grossly unfair and as a diminution of the child's natural intelligence. Even I as an adult feel some despair at the sight of an empty swimming pool, a pool that has had all its life sucked out of it, a pool in

name only. Also, the beach where I swim is a different place when the tide is out. The outgoing tide creates dumping waves that ruin the experience I was having in the water. I feel robbed of the experience of being present to the world, of being caught up totally within this water. Similarly, when the water drains out of Rachel's tub it takes away that in which she was immersed. And it threatens to suck her away in the process. Experientially, though not according to rational thinking, Rachel is in very real danger of disappearing down the plughole.

These seemingly remote situations—mountains, rivers, and now bathtubs—cast light on the encounters that occur more frequently on playgrounds. In the normal course of playground activity children are challenged, they become fearful, anxious, and find themselves in situations which are fraught with danger. The thing about the playground, however, is that these trepidations often appear to be too much the concerns of children. The familiarity of the playground, like that of the bathtub, disguises the ways we entertain the child's perspective; and yet, like the unfamiliarity of the mountain or river embankment, we might also see the playground anew as offering the possibility of a shared encounter.

Van den Berg says:

> When he [the adult] takes his child for a walk along the streets of the town, he assumes that the child is treading the same streets, seeing the same houses, and observing the same traffic. The distance which divides maturity from childhood makes it hard to remember how he himself experienced his home and the things around it when he was a child. His memories are vague; and besides, they are so intertwined with mature interpretations that they have lost almost all of their childhood qualities. The adult is inclined to think that his own childhood gradually merged into maturity (although the smell of an old book immediately proves how different things really were then, in that vague past which looms up so suddenly), and he presupposes the same gradual transition for his child. If he digs in a sandbox, he assumes that it has a more childlike quality, but apart from that, an entirely identical meaning for the child. When he takes his child to the playground, it does not occur to him that a swing or a slide might have a different meaning for the child, that it might be an

> entirely different thing. Maybe he is surprised for a moment when his child seems to be delighted with the swing, but emphatically refuses to set foot on the merry-go-round; or when he finds that his child has no eye for any of these diversions, but enjoys himself hugely endlessly opening and closing the gate. He will reason away his surprise by remembering that children do have whims. It does not occur to him for a moment that the sandbox looks entirely different—I should say *is* entirely different—to the child, and that the playground, besides being a place of bliss, can be no less a place of fears. And these playthings are *meant* for children. (Van den Berg, 1961/1975, p. 81)

Van den Berg describes in this passage the yawning gulf between adult and child, and the gulf which the familiarity of the playground tends to obscure. Familiarity gives the adult a sense of the continuity of experiences such that children's playground activity appears to be explicable. Thus, when playground activity becomes inexplicable we become surprised, quite unaware of the lop-sidedness of our interpretation, and most unprepared to reckon with the child's fears. For the adult, the playground is a domain encapsulated by a notion of maturity; for the child, the playground is an arbitrary collection of things that call to him or her in differing ways. "The swimmer enters the water because the water is proving to him in a thousand ways that it is prepared to receive his body. The child digs in the sand because the sand cries out to it: dig!" (Van den Berg, 1972, p. 76). The bars ask to be scrambled over; the swings ask to be driven higher and higher; and the slides ask to be mounted, even to be climbed up their slippery and shiny face. These same things speak of difficult things to do and things that often seem to the child to be out of his or her reach. They dare the child. They challenge the child. They make the child anxious, fearful, afraid. And this is how the playground may appear to the child.

The fearful child brings us back in touch with the playground, since our efforts to encounter the playground with him or her require our facing up to the possibility that the playground can be no less a fearful place for us as well. In dealing with the child's fearfulness we might thus consider the way the playground's familiarity

masks our involvement in the child's fear, which is to say, the way fearfulness somehow expresses the way we countenance playground activity. What I am suggesting here is that the child's emotional state (even the supposedly objective conditions of the child's experience) has its corollary in the adult's responsiveness to playground activity. The perspectives of adult and child might even be considered two aspects of the same affective medium (cf. Bollnow, 1970/1988) by which the playground can be encountered. Consequently, when we look at children on the playground and see them become fearful, perhaps even afraid, and it is tempting to pass off this fear as if it indicates a phase through which all children pass, we might also reflect upon how children's presumed fearfulness is related to our efforts to become mindful of them. In other words, it is not sufficient to say that children become fearful if our observation explains away their actions and avoids the question of our responsibility for their state-of-mind; on the contrary, we might well imagine ourselves taking risks when we look at fearful children. We can watch as they navigate between the familiar and the unknown, we can share in their discoveries, and we can share in their failures. Their apprehension strikes at the heart of our concern for them, our fearing for them, and also, our becoming aware of how the world appears to them.

Becoming Mindful

In the previous chapter we have considered situations where children are fearful and where they can be encouraged to overcome their fears. But what if we take to heart the unfamiliarity of the playground—the fact that it is a domain over which we have no certain, fixed knowledge of what might happen there? How might apprehensiveness, which is not necessarily confined to the child, bring us in touch with the child? How might *our* fearfulness make us more mindful of the child?

"What's this for?" asks Paco, pointing to the knotted rope hanging down from the large willow tree in Andrew's backyard. Paco and Tyler have only just arrived and the first thing they see is this suspended rope. "Can you swing on it?" Paco asks Andrew. The presence of these two smaller boys allows Andrew to show something of what he has been up to these past few days of the school vacation. He has strung a rope over one of the lower branches of the willow tree, threaded it up towards the top of the tree, and then tied it off on one of the outer limbs so that it trails almost to the ground and forms the rope swing that Paco and Tyler first saw when they entered the yard. Andrew takes hold of the end of the rope. He mounts the high wooden fence that stands a few paces away from the tree. He then launches himself on this rope, swinging out over the lawn, and with a degree of practised agility, returns to his precarious footing on the top of the fence. "How did the rope get up there?" asks Paco. "Did you put it there all by yourself?" Andrew jumps down from the fence. He moves to the base of the tree, clasps the part of the rope that is draped against it and starts pulling himself up while walking his feet up the tree trunk. Before too long he reaches the first place the rope is secured, and then, entering the thick cluster of branches, he moves steadily towards the second rope attachment higher up. Andrew moves above the level of the garage, above the surrounding houses, until he reaches a spot where the branches are becoming much thinner and no longer press firmly against his movements. He nestles into a vee created in the top-most stem of the tree, and with his back against the more solid branch of the tree stem, settles back to survey the scene spread out beneath him.

"What can you see from up there?" calls Andrew's father who has been sitting all the while with a group of adults only a short distance away from this tree. "Can you see the school?" "Yes," answers Andrew. "And I can see the river, and I can

see the tennis courts." He continues to rattle off a long list of things that can be seen from this perch at the top of the willow tree. As Andrew continues this listing of things within his purview, his mother confides in us that she cannot bear to look at Andrew when he is up in the tree. She says: "It gives me a shiver whenever I see him going up there." And as if to prove her point, she remains seated with her back to the tree, never once turning in Andrew's direction. She is not the only one to be put off by Andrew's antics. Andrew's father is also ill at ease. He speaks haltingly. He is distracted as other adults talk. Every so often he glances up at Andrew who seems happy enough just to sit looking out from his roost up in the tree. "Ah Andrew, I think it's time to come down now," he says at last. But Andrew does not move. "Why don't you come down and show the boys the tadpoles you brought home from school." The ploy works. Andrew starts making his way down through the branches. He reaches the ground, and a few moments later he and the two younger boys disappear around the corner of the house in search of the bucket that contains the tadpoles. Andrew's parents are noticebly relieved, which is understandable, although it is also clear to those who have watched him that Andrew is a very good climber of this tree. After all, this is *his* tree, the tree that he has made safe.

In the situation described above we are aware of a certain fearfulness on the part of Andrew's parents, a fearfulness motivated by a sense of danger, yet a fearfulness that does not necessarily resonate with the child's sense of his own explorations. This fearfulness reflects a mindfulness of the child that seems to fall short or an understanding of what the child is actually doing. Even Paco and Tyler are far more understanding of Andrew's achievement, although it could be argued that they are too young to understand the risk involved. On the other hand, just as

children can watch a circus performance which puts fear in the hearts of adults and makes them avert their gaze at critical moments, perhaps Tyler and Paco are in closer touch with what Andrew is up to. They are not scared, although they are certainly in awe of what Andrew is able to do. Andrew's escapade makes them far less apprehensive than the adults in attendance. The adult's apprehensiveness is a way of denying Andrew's place. Their fearfulness places them at a distance from the things that matter to the child. In truth, they cannot bear to see him up there. It would be best if Andrew came down out of the tree.

Some weeks later while Andrew is away visiting relatives, a fierce storm hits the area. It splits the willow tree in half. Andrew's father is concerned when he sees the damage, and he is saddened at the thought of having Andrew return to find his tree no longer there. Of course it would be easy to dismiss this concern as simply regret for a lost plaything, or even concern for the damage to the landscaping of the backyard, however something more is involved in this fretting over a damaged tree. This damaged tree stands out in his thinking about Andrew. It brings to mind the experience of seeing Andrew perched up at the top of the tree, although not so much the apprehension that was felt at the time, as now a feeling of having been involved in Andrew's explorations.

What was the nature of this involvement? Consider a young child pulling herself up the bars of a climbing frame. Her mother stands behind and holds onto this little girl's waist as she moves ever so cautiously upwards. Upon reaching the top rung, the little girl becomes afraid. She begins to cry. She twists around to partially face her mother, and still being held at the waist, lets go of the climbing frame. Her mother places her down on the ground and smiles as she watches her daughter begin once again to climb the frame. For this mother, there is little to fear in watching her

child climbing. After all, the frame is not very high and she is standing right there beside it. But how different it is for the child! The climbing frame even brings her to tears. Although the little girl is not discouraged from climbing up the rungs, her tears create a striking contrast with her mother's smile. Consider, now, an older child. We watch as Kyler climbs the large frame at Lansdowne Playground. Then, not being content with this achievement, she tries walking across a beam that connects this frame to an adjoining platform. We become a little anxious as we see Kyler so far off the ground, although she moves so sure-footedly that very soon she has safely reached the platform. And as she moves so easily, we wonder about the basis for our concerns. Could it be that she scares us by doing things that we are no longer capable of? Could it be that our first impulse, which is to stop her from venturing out onto the beam, is a fearfulness we would have for our own safety? Perhaps we might extend this concern even further to the situation of watching Andrew up in the tree? The parents' fearfulness, which is so easily explained away as a concern for the danger of the situation, discloses a direction of Andrew's activity which extends beyond the competence of the adult. Andrew might easily have said:

> To me it was so high up I felt I could look out upon my whole world (which then basically consisted of the surrounding neighborhood). With my friends and family below, it left me alone up there to ponder my thoughts and feelings and wonder what lay before me. (Marcus, 1978, p. 38)

Is there danger in such situations. To what extent is it useful to speak of danger at all? Alternatively, how does a sense of danger enable us to see more clearly the nature of our involvement in children's risk-taking?

Sensing Danger

A sense of danger isolates us from the world; and it isolates the child from the world he or she might come to know. Bledsoe (1977, 1978) provides us with a clue in this regard when he reminisces about his own childhood fears of exploring a tunnel system near his home. He recalls "a risk I had once refused to take" (p. 120):

> I remember listening for sounds up ahead. Sound amplifies in such places and the imagination is influenced. I remember listening to the dripping water and looking ahead into the tunnel's darkness—populating it with imaginary creatures. I remember looking back towards daylight and then into the black of the tunnel. Between drips there was an impenetrable stillness. I could hear my own breathing. I could hear the echo of my voice when I yelled. Some thought that I could not fully comprehend was telling me to turn around and go back. The places above and the sound of water running from some mysterious source were not to be my destination that day. The silence and darkness were more than I was prepared to handle. I wanted to make my way further into the tunnel but I was beginning to lose my nerve. I was chicken! I couldn't have crawled up inside that tunnel more than 60 feet at most. Once more I looked ahead up the passageway. Water trickled from the walls. Slowly, I drew backward and began to crawl back down the way I had come. (p. 121)

A risk was not taken, and the child faced the indignity of having to back down the way he had come since there was no other way out. He ran up hard against his fears, lost his nerve, then ran away from facing that uncertainty that was all too alluring.

For the young Bledsoe there was a way out of taking a risk, but it was at the cost of a lingering sense of danger and a fearful relation to the world. As Heidegger said, "what is detrimental as coming-close cloe by carries with it the latent possibility that it may stay away and pass us by; but instead of lessening or extinguishing our fearing, this enhances it" Heidegger, 1960, p. 180). When Bledsoe remembers the tunnel he senses an impending danger, something monstrous standing before him. He

withdraws to a dubious safety, ever more fearful of the dangers lurking there in that monstrous world outside. His sense of danger reminds us of a similar experience another child had of turning back. Instead of the tunnel, though, this child's adventure takes place in a stolen rowing boat.

> I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
> And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
> Went heaving through the water like a swan;
> When, from behind that craggy steep till then
> The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
> As if with voluntary power instinct
> Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
> And growing still in stature the grim shape
> Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
> For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
> And measured motion like a living thing,
> Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
> And through the silent water stole my way
> Back to the covert of the willow tree;
> There in her mooring-place I left my bark,—
> And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
> And serious mood; but after I had seen
> That spectacle, for many days, my brain
> Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
> Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
> There hung a darkness, call it solitude
> Or blank desertio. No familiar shapes
> Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
> Of sea or sky, no colors or green fields;
> But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
> Like living men, moved slowly through my mind
> By day, and were a trouble to my dreams. (Wordsworth, 1850/1959, Book 1, lines 374–400)

But getting back to Bledsoe, we can almost sense how he must have been on the very brink of a great discovery. Now, as an adult, he says:

> The thought of that tunnel has come down to me many times over the years. In my mind I've tried to imagine what it would have been like further up the passageway from where I turned back. The tunnel seems to me to be an inescapable fact from my own biography and the experience is one that I have often remembered. It is a thought that became central to my legend about going into darkness, into places that are shadowy, perilous and beckoning. When I think back on that time, I recall the anxiety—sitting there crouched between light and darkness. Later on, I was to learn that there is a phrase for it, that it is what is known as "the

coming on of the night fear."

> What stands out in my mind is the vividness of my original experience—the encountering of the first crude sense of fear, but a sense of fear that was also tantalizing. For tied up in the memory as well is the not entirely unpleasant sense of latent danger, dark discovery, and uncertainty. (p. 122)

This is not to say that there was no danger in Bledsoe's explorations and that he was not wise to go no further. But these "facts" should not be confused with the inevitable sense of danger that comes with turning back. The tunnel now stands out as a place of danger. What originally led somewhere, perhaps to an opening not far beyond where Bledsoe turned back, is remembered as the closing in of fear, as "the coming on of the night fear." Bledsoe says:

> I carried something back down that sloping tunnel with me. It has existed there in my mind unnoticed, but now and then, over the years, it comes back to me. A shadow crosses my mind sometimes when I lie awake at night and I remember with bitterness that I hadn't gone in that tunnel all the way. I hadn't found out what had been around the first bend. Instead, I had been careful. (p. 122)

Compare the "bitterness" of this experience with the experience of one who dared to go beyond the first bend.

> It was dark in the tunnel—darker the further you dared go in. I knew the Giant Spiders lived there. I just didn't know how far in About ten feet [illegible] there was a second culvert branching off. It was smaller and had metal reinforcing bars covering the opening. These had been pulled back (by the spiders?) and were twisted and rusted....I conquered the spiders eventually and travelled great distances through the tunnels. I conquered countless foes there. I was alone there, but secure, knowing the tunnels connected me with hundreds of others. I was nearly always silent there, but was surrounded by gurgling, trickling water, deep resonant earth sounds, and rustling leaves. (Marcus, 1978, p. 38).

This child's daring led not to danger but to a familiarity with the tunnel system. Although there were surely dangers there, this child's fearfulness was subdued by the sense of security that came with his explorations.

One child fails to take the risk of going any further inside the tunnel. But what did he in fact lose? It would seem that his failure to take a risk has significance for the rest of his life (as is evident from his later recollections of this experience). For him, the failure to take a risk has been a very valuable experience since he now knows something that will help him conquer the tunnel many times over in adult life. He now has a sense of limit: that he could and perhaps should have gone further inside the tunnel. The other child's experience is valuable also in terms of the confidence his explorations have him; but his success did not provide him with a sense of limit. For him, the tunnel does not stand our so clearly as a motive for his subsequent actions. The lesson here is that in failing one can win, which is to say, in backing down from a challenge, in refusing to respond to a dare, the child can be inspired to grasp things more thoughtfully. On the other hand, to take a risk means to push a limit, and in order to push a limit it is necessary to already have a sense of what that limit is and of what it ought to be. So, although without a sense of limit it is doubtful if risk-taking, in a personally meaningful sense, can be said to have occurred, with a sense of limit we can say that the child stands a greater chance of taking risks "head on," by which it is meant that risks can be taken with a sensible, thoughtful disposition to the activity "at hand."

Through the "tunnel" we can now appreciate the way a sense of danger impinges on the normal course of playground activity. Children do sometimes find themselves in situations where they must back down; but as we have seen already, there is more than likely a way out which does not necessarily carry the threat of danger. Where it seems more likely that a sense of danger will be experienced is in situations where the adult undermines, even inadvertently, the child's resoluteness by making a "way out" seem a "way of backing down." Recall, in this regard, the

situation of the mother and her three very frightened children on the slippery slide. Until they felt the degree of her concern they were happy enough to be on the slide. Her pointing out a danger, however, changed the face of this activity. It became necessary to back down from this dangerous place. Consider, then, a similar situation involving a woman following close behind her child up the ladder of a different slippery slide. She holds on tightly to the supporting rails at the side, and with each step we see that she would rather be someplace else. "I think Mommy's too big to sit on the slide," she says partly to the young child who leads her up the last rungs to the top of the slide and partly to herself as if thinking about how to avoid getting any further involved in this activity. She sits on the landing with Matthew in her lap. But as she waits there Matthew starts a faint whimper. "Are you scared?" she asks him. "Do you want Andrew to go down with you?" Matthew begins to cry. "All right, let's go back down then. Andrew, will you let your brother past?" she says to her older son as she helps Matthew get around her so that he can go back down the ladder.

Here, in this seemingly well-intentioned effort to have the child go down the slippery slide, the result has been the cultivation in the mind of the child of an unfounded sense of danger. The child was afraid sitting up there on the slide, so was his mother, and this confirmation of his fear undermined his resolve to go down the slide. Russell (1926) once said, although somewhat patronizingly:

> Rational apprehension of dangers is necessary; fear is not. A child cannot apprehend dangers without *some* element of fear, but this element is very much diminished when it is not present in the instructor. A grown-up person in charge of a child should never feel fear. That is one reason why courage should be cultivated in women just as much as in men. (p. 86)

But he was only partly correct. What he might have said is that the adult should not always reveal his or her fears to the child since it is this disclosure which often

contributes to an irrational sense of danger. The child needs not so much to experience the dangers which our fears magnify, as to "be careful"—to be in a relation of care with one who is mindful of the consequences of the child's activity and is fearful for that child's well-being. To be on a slide with a child requires our being careful, not our sharing fears with the child. If our fears must be made evident, and especially if our fears are well-founded, then really neither the child nor we should be where we are. The situation is in fact too dangerous.

Children know implicitly that a careful relation can mollify danger. For instance, Kyler comes running over from the large slide. "Did you see me? Come and watch me." She grabs my arm and starts hauling me towards the slide, not desisting until I am standing almost underneath it. "Stand right there," she tells me. *"This is a very dangerous slide."* "Why is it so dangerous?" I ask. "It just is!" She goes down the slide many times, so many in fact that soon we must head off in search of drinking water to ease the thirst. "Is it still dangerous?" I ask Kyler, thinking she may now be better disposed to reflect on the activity. But her answer strikes me as somewhat obtuse. "I like that slide," she says. "It's much better than the little one." It seems my question about danger is now irrelevant. For Kyler the danger has past. The dangerous slide is a thing of the past.

The element of danger becomes a significant feature of playground activity not only because we have an implicit sense of it but also because it defines the *sensible* limits of activity and of our involvement in the activity of others. For instance, an after-school playground supervisor walks hand in hand with one of the children in her charge. She stops to say something to a group of young girls, and then she and Eduardo continue on a little further. Eduardo points to the roof of one of the little huts upon which he has seen some children perched not so long ago. "Can you lift

me up?" he asks. His words are ignored, so he breaks free and then tries to pull himself up. But the gap between the ground and the first of the logs that make up this roof is too much for him. He struggles in vain, for he cannot quite lift his foot up onto the purchase afforded by the spaces between the logs. Eduardo looks around at the playground supervisor; and anticipating his request she says: "If you can't get up there on your own, then I think it's too high for you. *It's too dangerous.*"

Eduardo has no sense of danger here, especially after having seen children on this roof only a short while ago; however he is told by the adult standing by him that there is indeed danger here. "If you can't do it by yourself, then it's too dangerous." Because Eduardo cannot climb up onto the roof by himself, then it must be too dangerous. Is this not the same lesson that Bledsoe learned as a child? In a sense the lesson is correct, provided we downplay the significance of having an adult standing by. But if we acknowledge the adult's involvement in the child's playground activity, even the tacit approval shown by standing close by, then we might contemplate the extent to which a sense of danger reflects the feasible limits of our involvement in the child's explorations. Thus, Eduardo can be helped up and he can be supported while sitting on the roof, in which case there is no real danger for him. But this will not satisfy him for long. Soon he will want to try it for himself. He will want to risk the security he has when being helped, to relinquish his ties to the adult for the sake of finding his own way of climbing onto the roof. And it would be difficult for this to happen if Eduardo is told from the start that "if you can't do it by yourself, then it's too dangerous." This lesson only reinforces the child's dependence upon the adult.

Our sensing danger in children's playground activity is, therefore, as much a precaution for the sake of ensuring the child's physical safety as it is a measure of

our sensible involvement in the child's activity. We sense danger, not only when the child is at risk, but also when his or her risk-taking exceeds our grasp. H is too high up in the tree; she balances on a beam beyond our reach. From where we stand we cannot encounter the same things as these children. They have moved beyond us. So we try to understand their movements by questioning their distance from us, and by seeing what they do as taking them even further from us. The trouble is that in making such a summary judgement of danger we fail to see the nature of our dislocation. Danger represents the risk that should not be taken, yet so often it represents the risk we do not wish to see the child take, and thus, the risk we do not wish to take of trusting the child. So, before we conclude there is danger, we might consider the predicament of the child more carefully. We might consider our physical relation to the child upon which our sense of the child's risk-taking is predicated.

A child climbs up the chain holding one of the tire swings to a beam radiating from a central pylon. Upon reaching the beam he manages to pull himself on top of it. Then he sits for a while, his legs dangling down either side, delighted it seems to see people watching him from down below. Next he starts walking along the beam towards the centre, being very careful not to overbalance and fall that great distance to the ground. Upon reaching the centre he stands tall, towering over the playground. Then a thought crosses his mind. His mother should soon be here to pick him up. He hopes she has arrived, "she wouldn't be half-frightened" (cf. Lowenfeld, 1969, p. 223). Is this a "terror" of a child or is it more that this child realizes intuitively that his actions test the limits of his relation to his mother? He wants to frighten his mother not so much to cause her any real concern, but in order to support the sense he has of a conquest being made—a sense of growing independence. There is risk, to

be sure, but it is risk that ought to be taken and will be taken, if not here, then in some other place beyond the playground where real dangers lurk.

> Certainly when children take part in street games it is not they who are afraid of traffic, it is the traffic that is terrified of them; and the children are aware of this, and willing to take advantage of it" (Opie and Opie, 1969, p. 269)

Such are the real dangers of street play. The playground also offers such encounters only now the potential for harm has been greatly diminished. Now, as part of the normal course of activity, the child can risk his or her attachment to the adult. In a far less threatening way, in a far less dangerous way, the child can counter the adult's hold on him or her.

Letting Go

As a very small child Shayle liked to be held in my lap as we sat on a gently swaying swing. As if being rocked in a cradle, on a number of occasions she would fall asleep while being held in my grasp. Now she seems big enough to be put on a playground swing, the type that has a metal bar in front to hold her in place. At first she appears somewhat apprehensive, however she grasps the bar in front of her and seems composed enough for me to begin to move the swing, although not a great deal, but just enough to let her feel the to and fro motion. I keep a hold of her while easing the swing forward and then pulling it back. Then, after she becomes used to this, I let go of the swing. I don't dare push it yet, but merely release my grip on this young child and then catch her on the return. Shayle continues to enjoy this activity, even laughing now as I let go of the swing and then catch it again. I wonder if she may now want a little push to make the swing go higher. Perhaps she might like a bit more of a challenge.

These thoughts about so simple an activity as pushing a small child on a swing disclose something of what is at stake in more risky playground activities. Shayle trusts me, she is happy enough for me to hold on to the swing, and she is confident enough to permit me to let her go momentarily. Her confiding in me brings a confidence to the activity itself. The same holds true for the older child, except that now we realize it is not just the swing we let go of, but the child as well. Now, partly because the activities are so less familiar to us, we along with the child must gain confidence. The older child is being challenged, just as Shayle was; the difference is that now we must sort through our own apprehension, our own fears, even our sense of danger, in order to catch hold of the child again.

To countenance letting go of a small child on a swing suggests a type of response, an *encounter*, with bigger children on much larger swings, climbing frames, slippery slides, etc. It suggests "the experience of an actuality appearing opposite to the person that questions him in his innermost being and before which he must affirm himself" (Bollnow, 1972, p. 311). Here we must confront the possibility of not knowing what to do, since we meet the child at the point at which the child wishes to go his or her own way. The encounter is a two-fold experience. It is a coming face to face with that which must surely diverge. Letting go of the swing is like letting go of the child. It requires the confidence to follow the course of playground activity even to the point of encountering a child who is confident enough to be let go—to be on his or her own way. And thus, in the course of playground activity we must be prepared to let go of our apprehensions, our fears and our sense of danger in order to catch sight of what might be. We must relinquish our hold on the child so as to grant him or her an independence.

PART C

THE EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RISK

CHAPTER VII

THE PRACTICE OF RISK

We have seen through the silences of risk how our questioning of what is the best thing to do with a child leads to the encouragement of risk and to the encounter with risk. We have seen that the way we understand risk is bound up with the way we are present to the activity of children. Such actions in turn rest upon a certain visibility of risk, upon a perception and reflection of action which shows risk to be involved in a testing of the adult-child relation and eventually of its dissolution. The direction of risk-taking discloses our letting go of the child, our realizing his or her growing independence. We recognize, through an awareness of risk, that the child needs to find his or her own way. Accordingly the discussion so far is simply a description of how we might prepare the child to be on his or her own, that is, of how we can contribute to the child's ability to be on his or her own in a humanly significant way.

But the account still falls short of being an educational theory of risk. Langeveld (1966) says:

> The theory of education has to undertake a serious analysis and interpretation of what the child is, what the relations to the child are, what the child's own relation is to himself, what his world is, and what the relationship of the child to self-reliance, to responsibility, and adulthood *means*. (p. 97)

An awareness of risk allows, I believe, for such an analysis and interpretation, however there remains still a further task to be considered.

> In addition, it [the theory of education] has to undertake a serious analysis and interpretation of what the child means to the adult, to the adult as parent, as an educator, as a person living in a given community, in a given society, in a *given world of meanings*. (p. 97, my emphasis)

There is, in other words, the task of showing the educational relevance of a pedagogy

of risk beyond the relevance it has for playground activity. An educational theory of risk ought to resonate with the conditions of current educational practice. It should show the significance of risk for those curriculum practices that constitute the contemporary educational scene. The terms of an educational theory of risk should establish a sense of order, perhaps a standard, against which such practices can be understood and improved.

So let us review the description given so far and seek some educational orderliness to the notion of risk. Let us be careful not to impose a "given world of meanings" upon the sense of risk we have been working out, although this sense of risk is only understandable in light of such meanings; but rather, let us look again at the visibility of risk-taking situations for some principle, some value, some intrinsic sense of order which lends itself to a deeper understanding of current educational practices. To what extent is the pedagogy that is disclosed in our dealings with young children on playgrounds a basis for our thinking about how to teach children in more formal educational contexts?

Tricks

We look again to the child for guidance in this matter. We observe the child, this boy or girl before us who invariably wishes to show us what he or she can do. "Did you see me?" the child asks. "Look here. I'll show you again." The child wants to be seen. Yet with our planned curricula, our premeditated learning experiences, our lessons for children, we tend to lose sight of this initial inclination on the child's part to show us something. Of course, this should not prevent us from anticipating the nature of a situation and thus from planning for it; in fact such anticipation is

essential in order to avoid sensing danger in children's activity and thus cutting ourselves off from the child's experience. But having established a context, having secured the domain of activity, having set the tone of subsequent activity, we must wait for the child to show something of what he or she can do before we can be r a position to see the course of the child's activity.

"Watch what I can do" says Tyler as he hangs onto a horizontal bar at Lansdowne Playground. He hooks one leg over the bar, then the other leg. He brings both legs together, first by releasing one hand, the hand between his legs, and then grasping the bar again on the outside. "Are you watching?" he calls out from this upside down position. Next moment he lets both hands go of the bar, and with the the bar held firmly in the crooks of his knees, he swings freely. He stays in this position for only a moment before reaching up to take hold of the bar once again. "Did you see that?" he asks. "It was a pretty good trick, wasn't it?" Tyler feels a sense of accomplishment in showing what he is able to do. He has done this "trick" a number of times before, even though this is the first time we have seen him hang by his knees from the horizontal bar. We have seen him before on the climbing frame, his knees wrapped around one of the rungs while he reaches down to touch a rung lower down; and we have helped him back up when first he got stuck in such a position. So when he says, "watch what I can do," he already has a certain confidence in what he is able to do. He is giving a performance of an action that is well-rehearsed.

Children who ask to be watched are not necessarily showing-off; rather, they may be attempting something that still carries a degree of uncertainty, a degree of risk. They may be trying something they are not totally confident in. When they ask us to watch th:r they are, in a sense, sharing something with us, and it is this

which distinguishes their request from the "attention getting mechanisms" of the neglected child. In the latter case, hanging by the knees would be something done primarily for the adult. It would indeed be a trick—a feat designed to impress an audience. At worst it would be a deceitful practice, a concealment or a subterfuge, a stunt which overlooks the element of risk in the activity. There is a fine distinction to be made here between a child's showing what he knows how to do and his showing-off tendency (cf. Carr, 1981, on the distinction between "know-how" and "ability"). This "pretty good trick," as Tyler calls it, is something he has worked out for himself, but it is not yet a contained action over which he has a sense of control whereby a performance can be given. He still wants us there to watch him and to help him if things get out of hand. He needs us there to encourage him and to encounter the difficulty with him.

The child's words mislead us, for what he shows us is not really a trick at all. A trick can go wrong, or as we say, "it just doesn't work." One can be unsuccessful at a trick, but as we have seen from risk-taking situations, there is really only a failure to take a risk, and even this is not simply a mistake, an error, but something very personal which the child must learn to live with—a lingering doubt that is worked out in future explorations.

Too often we ignore this riskiness in children's playground activity. Especially when they have something to show us, we are inclined to overlook the possibility that their actions disclose the working out of a certain timidity of movement, or more positively, a thoughtfulness about what they are doing. The riskiness of the playground, because it suggests a limit, brings a measure of reflection to the child's actions and discloses a tangible end-in-view. By acknowledging the riskiness of what the child does, we bring attention to this direction which is implied in what he is able to

show us. The child's words "it was a pretty good trick, wasn't it?" are a request to see with him that which is being worked out even in this seeming display of ability. He asks for some acknowledgement of that which has been worked out so far, and only so far.

"Here, let's see if you can do this one," I say to Tyler. "Do what you just did and I'll show you a really good trick." Again he lifts his legs up over the bar, this time with my help. Again he releases his grip on the bar, only this time I take hold of his hands and begin to swing him back and forth. "Now, on the count of three I want you to let go of the bar. Ready—One—Two—Three—Away you go!" With a look of apprehension, he lands safely on his feet. "Can I try that again?" he asks as he stands underneath the bar waiting for me to lift him up once again. The child is now almost totally in adult hands. I have helped him up, I have set him in motion, and I have brought him to his feet and shown him how to dismount the bar. But is the child any the wiser for this? Like tossing a young child up into the air, or having a child put his hands between his legs so we can give him a flip, there seems to be a far greater reliance on the ability of the adult to show something than there is on the child's ability to take up the action. And while this suggests a degree of trust in the adult, such trust in Tyler's case is in danger of turning back on him and making his activity seem more like a thrill than anything else. His activity attests to a high state of physical excitement which jeopardizes the more controlled emotional state characterizing the initial display of ability on the bar.

Again we must be careful in understanding this development. We recognize a certain potential in the child's activity and we try to draw out this potential by showing the child some new trick which is a little more difficult than what he does by himself. After all, the child is receptive to being shown a new trick, and if left

alone he may well end up looking to another child for ways of extending himself. Here I am not simply referring to one child daring another, but rather to that far more practical articulation of the challenge of an activity where one child watches closely the tricks another child can do. Maybe if Tyler had seen Dorian swinging by his knees from a bar, and if he had had the time to try it for himself, then quite possibly he might have been inclined to ask for my help; furthermore, the trick of landing on his feet might then have made sense to him. He might then have seen how to do the trick (as well as the steps leading up to it). But by simply telling Tyler what to do we risk taking from him the sense of movement that was his motive for action. Recall the child on the slippery slide at Lansdowne Playground. Remember how hesitant Chris was to try the larger spiralling slide, even after I had agreed to come down the slide with her. This encased, spiralling slide, which presented itself to me as a way of showing Chris a "new trick," was for Chris something quite foreign to her earlier experiences. Her backing down the slide illustrates in a dramatic way the consequences of not being attuned to the child's sense of movement. The lesson from this encounter for the present situation with Tyler is that, rather than showing the child some "really good trick," we might better assist the child by encouraging his activity in a way that is mindful of how he encounters the bar from which he hangs. What should be the degree of our assistance? Perhaps the child gives us a lead. After trying the inverted swing and dismount a few more times under my guidance, Tyler has had enough. He does not gain any intrinsic sense of how he might swing upside down on his own, only a sense that swinging upside down is what is being done to him. The dismount from the bar is even further from his physical comprehension, his grasp. So, having seen all he can of the trick I have shown him, he wants to try something else, something by himself. He leaves the horizontal bar and wanders over to the mushroom-shaped climbing frame. A little later

Tyler calls to me. He has lowered himself through one of the spaces in the frame and is now hanging by his knees just like before. "Watch what I can do!" he calls out.

If Tyler could have actually seen the movement, if another child had shown him the "really good trick" by doing it in front of him (even by turning it into a dare), maybe it would have attained more relevance. Yet even in this case, which we have seen to be the case with a good deal of playground activity, the relevance of the trick, the dare, or the challenge would be due to its impinging upon the child's sense of what he is already trying to do by himself. The child wants to be helped, to be encouraged and for us to encounter the playground with him. He does not want to be led too far from the activity at hand, to experience more difficulty than what is already posed by the challenge. Using a term drawn from the teaching of tricks and stunts, perhaps we should say that the child wants to be "spotted" (eg. Boone, 1985). He expects us to look at his activity in a way that is mindful of the direction of his achievement, and that is respectful of the extent of his present achievement. He wants us to watch him up close, to spot him by, say, standing underneath, securing his grip on the bar as his fingers begin to slip, and even by helping him down if he becomes stuck. In effect, our way of helping the child is to secure his hold on the present sense of the activity. Rather than showing the child some new trick, we learn to see with the child what is really at stake when he wants to show us what he can do. We learn to appreciate the nature of his movement—a movement that he first shows us and that we can then help him with.

Repetition

Rather than looking around for some new trick to try, some departure from what he or she is doing, the child tends to follow the path of the familiar. For instance, Tyler likes hanging by his knees, and notwithstanding the enjoyment the subsequent rush of blood to his head must bring, he likes to hang upside down for the increasing familiarity it brings to a topsy-turvy world. He is content to hang there, and when it becomes almost too much for him, he pulls himself up towards the bar into an almost upright position whereby he can again view things around him in a more or less normal way. He is happy enough doing this over and over again. Such repetitive activity seems characteristic of the playground. Of course, children do run from one piece of equipment to another in what seems to be a constant seeking of novelty, however, there are also many times when they seem caught in the spell of a certain piece of equipment. Here on a swing or a slippery slide they will want to be pushed again and again, or to have "just one more turn." Is such repetitive activity an avoidance of the risks of playground activity, or might we see in repetitive playground activity a certain orderliness to the practice of taking risks?

"When a situation has been experienced repeatedly without harm, familiarity kills fear," says Russell (1926, p. 88) in what almost amounts to a truism. But what is really meant by this idea of killing fear through repetition and the subsequent sense of familiarity? If we recall the various encounters we have with children on playgrounds we will remember that it is the suggestion of a child's apprehensiveness that raises fears *in us* for his or her security! We fear for the child. We wish to avoid a fearful state-of-mind where "what one 'is apprehensive about' is one's Being-with the other, who might be torn away from one" (Heidegger, 1960, p. 181).

This requires being with the child such that we might come to see ourselves on, say, the horizontal bar. It requires becoming child-like, re-awakening to the landscape of the child. So when we talk about killing fear we must be careful that our preoccupation is not merely with our own peace of mind. In other words, we need to distinguish between the way a child familiarizes him- or herself with playground things and the way we, on the other hand, become accustomed to seeing what the child is doing. A sense of familiarity might even be the correlate of an increasing insensitivity to what the child is doing. For example, earlier on it was said, following Van den Berg, that the playground, while seeming very familiar to us, can be no less a fearful place for the child. Likewise, the activities which we have become accustomed to seeing over a lifetime can be a source of much anxiety on the child's part. That which seems so unexceptional to us, that which the child tries over and over again, this seemingly repetitive activity can engender an indifference on our part to what is before us and what lies before the child.

Seen in terms of an adult familiarity which kills fear, the repetitiveness of children's playground activity is but a step away from being considered a type of self-imposed drill. Is this how we wish to view what the child does? Is it the rigor and exactness of movement that we want to stress as opposed to its risk and uncertainty? When Tyler tries hanging upside down from different pieces of equipment, we might conclude that he is looking for the invariant features of his activity, that he is mastering a technique of hanging upside down which can be applied further afield. The repetitiveness of his activity may be regarded as the development of a certain technique with which he might do away with risk altogether. Against such an interpretation, I would say that while the language of technique allows for the mastery, control and domination of a situation, it also bespeaks a way of distancing oneself

from the activity at hand. Talk of technique reduces what the child does to our own sense of the logic of the situation, and of a particular logic at that. We tend to lose sight of the physical existence of the child. As Marcel (1954) said when speaking out against the increasing tendency for techniques to become the "dynamic lineaments" of an "abstract world," the real danger is that we lost sight of "organic growth, and I am not thinking of that growth of the body, but of a feeling, of the becoming of the imagination in all its forms" (p. 12).

To view the repetitiveness of the child's activity as simply a step towards the acquisition of technique tends to deny us that involvement and commitment which is the real measure of risk-taking. We see technique as leading in a particular direction and we wish to exert some influence over its mastery. Consequently we try to show the child some new trick, some more difficult way of hanging from the horizontal bar. We lead him through it, and in the process we leave his activity behind. The fact that a child returns to hanging from the bar by his knees when we leave him alone shows us that he does not see any real connection between that activity and the trick we have shown him. He shows us, by repeating his earlier activity, that perhaps he has a different sense of technique, a different sense of progression and order. So perhaps we ought to reconsider what it means when an activity is done repeatedly without harm. Does it simply mean that the child is attempting to overcome a sense of the riskiness of the activity so that he or she can attain some higher level of difficulty and hence some greater level of skill? Or is there some more intrinsically grounded principle of movement at issue here? Perhaps it is not so much the logic of skill development with which we should be concerned as it is the manner in which a sense of risk-taking evolves. To be sure, the repetitiveness of children's playground activity does provide a basis for calculation (i.e. a notion of probability rests upon a

sense of repetition and predictability) and for an assessment of the hazards of future activity; however it also gives the child a sense of the fluctuations of an activity, of its uncertainty, of its riskiness. After all, an activity that is merely repetitive for a child is very soon left behind.

Van den Berg helps bring us back in touch with a child's sense of repetition with the following words:

> In a far greater degree than the adult, the child lives in the present and so is able—in our eyes—to repeat endlessly. We say, "in our eyes," for repetition is not repetition to the mind of the child. The tot who skips up and down the stairs ten or twenty times, does not repeat: it perseveres in the present. If we grownups ascend the stairway it is because we have something to do upstairs. It would be altogether senseless to run up and down repeatedly. Once we are upstairs we no longer need the stairway. But if we should send a child upstairs, to fetch some object or other, it could still be tarrying on the stairs after a quarter of an hour, all taken up with the wonders of the stairway, a stairway such as hardly exists for us adults. The child is altogether taken up, for example, in the experience of going up and down and in the actual experience the object it was sent for is readily forgotten. (Van den Berg, 1959, pp. 28–34).

"Repetition is not repetition to the mind of the child." But neither is it some kind of atavistic play. While children may readily forget an "end" given to them, it does not necessarily follow that they forget an "end" of their own choosing so that they can merely enjoy an "endless" present. We would do better in understanding the repetitiveness of children's playground activity if we saw how action is motivated—how the purpose of the activity is somehow contained within it—how each descent of the slippery slide brings new confidence, each time the swing is pushed higher and higher brings that time nearer when the child will want to try the swing for him- or herself. What seems repetitive at first glance yields to an inquisitiveness on the child's part as we look at the activity more closely.

It may even be the case that when we look closely at the child's activity we lift it out of its repetitiveness. For example, each time on Malmo Playground Matthew

invariably finds his way to one swing in particular. On this occasion the other children are on the far side of the playground, which allows me to take a closer look at the fascination of this particular tire swing. Up to this point in time it has seemed as if Matthew finds this swing when he is tired of playing with the other children. And as I have glanced at him every so often, he has not appeared to be doing much of anything on the swing. "You must like that swing, Matthew," I say to him. "It's the best swing," he replies. But what is so special about this swing, this tire swing that looks the same as the other three beside it. I watch as he pushes the swing back and forth, pushing it as high as he can before letting it drop. Then he tries to jump onto it as it swings back to him; or the swing moves too quickly; besides, it has too much force and ends up dragging him forward with his legs trailing on the ground. A little later I see Matthew pushing the swing in a circle, his legs spinning out on the soft sand below, only this time he manages to lift himself onto the swing. He sits down on the tire and holds onto the suspended chains until the revolutions finally end. He does this again, and again, and again, almost tirelessly. Matthew glances over and sees me looking in his direction. "Look! No hands!" exclaims Matthew as he balances on the edge of the revolving tire. For Matthew and for those of us who care to watch his activity closely, there are subtleties in what he does on the swing. He is not bored; he is not prevented from doing other things on the playground; it is just that the tire swing discloses possibilities of the present that are far from being exhausted. Our interest in Matthew's being on the tire swing draws out the possibilities of movement which the swing allows.

Practice

Can we discover a principle which embraces the seeming novelty of the "tricks" the child wants to show us, the "new tricks" we want to teach him or her, and the repetitiveness of activity which is the basis for the child being able to show us anything at all? Here we might appeal to Dewey's analysis of the relation between interest and effort, particularly what he regarded as the unfortunate juxtaposition of these terms as a direct consequence of assuming that the action to be done exists as an entity separate from the person who is to take it up.

> Because the object or end is assumed to be outside self it has to be *made* interesting; to be surrounded with artificial stimuli and with fictitious inducements to attention. Or, because the object lies outside the sphere of self, the sheer power of "will," the putting forth of effort without interest is the principle of the recognized identity of the fact to be learned or the action proposed with the growing self; that it lies in the direction of the agent's own growth, and is, therefore, imperiously demanded, if the agent is to be himself. Let this condition of identification once be secured, and we have neither to appeal to sheer strength of will, not to occupy ourselves with making things interesting. (Dewey, 1913/1975, p. 7)

Dewey referred to an "*intrinsic* connection as the motive for action" (p. 25); or rather, to the fact that any momentary activity is interesting to the extent that it has "its place in an enduring activity" (p. 42). Thus a trick is amusing only because it is perceived as having some bearing on the activity at hand, or better still, because it extends the present activity in the direction of its own perfection.

The trouble with this formulation of interest and effort is that it reduces the motivation behind playground activity, the motivation behind the "tricks" which children want to show us, to "a consideration of their *powers*, their tendencies in action, and the ways in which these can be carried forward by a given subject-matter" (p. 62). To be sure, Dewey did acknowledge the social dimension to a child's interests, saying:

> This social interest not only, then, interfuses and permeates his interest in his own actions and sufferings, but it also suffuses his interest in *things*. Adults are so accustomed to making a sharp distinction between their relations to things and to other persons, their pursuits in life are so largely specialized along the line of having to do with things just as things, that it is difficult for them, practically impossible, to realize the extent to which children are concerned only as they enter into and affect the concerns of persons, and the extent to which a personal-social interest radiates upon objects and gives them meaning and worth. (pp. 85, 86)

However this social interest still falls short of a pedagogical interest (cf. Vandenberg, 1980, esp. pp. 245; 248-9). Dewey's analysis of interest fails to acknowledge the significance of the relation between adult and child for keeping interest alive and moving in the direction of physical accomplishments—i.e., the pedagogic relation which holds interest in the riskiness of the playground. His analysis leaves us groping for a principle that embraces not only interest and effort as aspects of a child's disposition towards the playground, but also the pedagogic motivation suggested in the distinction between novelty and familiarity: between the tricks we want to show the child and the repetition we see in what the child shows us, between the challenges we articulate and the child's present accomplishments. Instead of appealing to a psychology of interest, we need to draw from the present analysis of risk a pedagogical principle that shows the "intrinsic connection" between these seemingly juxtaposed terms.

Bollnow (1974) provides just such a principle in his treatment of the notion of "practice." He says that, although practice is repetitive, it is not the same as repetition, since "practice is necessary where one is concerned with a special ability which a person is to acquire" and an ability which moves towards its own measure of perfection (p. 65).

> All practice is, thus, a striving after the ability to do, a wishing for ability to do. And because there is in every ability a standard of its own perfection, which stimulates one to reach it or approach it (as in every striving towards expansion and the greatest possible completion of this knowledge), so the wishing for ability to do, to speak like König, is at the same time "a wishing for ability to do ever better," in which the

> person develops himself in his innermost possibilities. König understands this occurrence as a movement which "essentially an experiment and *risk*, seek to approach the latent precision and limits of its own nature." (p. 65, emphasis)

This notion of practice is exemplified particularly on the playground. Consider the situation of Dorian and Matthew playing on a tire suspended from a large cross-beam by means of three lengthy chains. There is a game of sorts developing here. At first the boys are content to push the tire to and fro, for both of them to stand on it as it spins around, or for one of them to pull himself up to touch the beam. As they play, Dorian sees that when Matthew sits with his legs inside the tire, and when he clings to the chains with one leg looped over the tire, they can swing far enough to almost brush against a set of wooden stumps imbedded in the ground. These stumps can also be a platform from which Dorian can leap onto the tire as Matthew maintains its momentum. I watch as Dorian performs this "trick." He stands poised on the blocks, waiting for the right moment to jump. Unfortunately he misjudges the swing, and with a futile attempt to grasp the chain, he falls heavily to the ground. Undeterred, he tries again, and again. Dorian performs a number of successful and not-so-successful jumps until Matthew protests that it is time for his turn. As I watch this activity I see that, to a certain extent, these boys seek to be in control, and yet the risks of the activity mean that more is involved than the simple pursuit of mastery. Referring back to Bollnow, their "wishing for ability to do" may involve technical skill development, however the risk factor means that the practice itself is what truly matters.

> Every individual attempt holds directly a claim to the greatest possible achievement. Along with this the attitude of the person necessarily changes: in the place of interest in the subject-matter or the object to be gained comes pure satisfaction in achieving complete ability in the task. And when this is not achieved, the earlier experience of attainable progress offers a spur to ever renewed effort. (p. 68)

Having rested for a while watching Matthew have his turn, Dorian is now set to try

again. He is spurred on, even by Matthew's attempts, to do better himself.

Bollnow goes on to write about the dangers of this type of practice, namely the cultivation of "soulless virtuosity (technical skill) as a refined form of self-indulgence" (p. 69). He is correct to warn us against turning practice into mere play, however it seems to me that in providing this warning he, too, has a tendency to overlook that which motivates practice. The child who cries out "Look at me. See what I can do" is not dis-playing virtuosity, but is bringing our attention to the risk which makes ability something to strive for through practice. "See that one," exclaims Chris, after bouncing over a speed bump on her bicycle on the way to Malmo Playground. "That's the first big jump I ever did!" "That's not a jump," Kyler snaps back at her, "not a real one." Kyler circles round behind us, and peddling furiously, she hits the same bump and bounces up into the air. Chris follows suit, although not quite as fast as Kyler, but certainly much faster that she went before. She stops peddling just before she reaches the speed bump and braces herself. She hits the bump, keeps control of the bike, and then comes to a stop a little farther along the road. "Did you see?" she asks. "I did a real one!" Kyler looks on in silence, satisfied it seems that Chris has now done a "real jump." Later on, these same children can be seen "jumping" over the edge of the pedestrian path onto the road. They even find a couple of steps to take their bicycles down. "Watch me," Chris says one day. "I can do three steps now!" For Chris and Kyler there is a certain possibility of risk-taking suggested in the way they first encounter the speed bump. A challenge is found in jumping over the bump, and this initial challenge opens up a host of related challenges. Likewise on the playground, there are ladders which the young child sees other children climbing, there are slides she sees children coming down, and there are swings on which her parents put her. The child is introduced to

the playground in particular sorts of ways—ways to which the playground things lend themselves (ways for which they are for the most part designed) and ways which point to future playground encounters. Playground objects, like bicycles and speed bumps, set the child on particular courses of risk-taking. Yet without an aptitude for taking risks, reflected in the kind of encouragements given, such possibilities may very well remain hidden.

There are certainly progressions to the child's risk-taking practices. But the practice of taking risks cannot be explained away by appealing to "skill talk" (Barrow, 1987). For the most part, the motivation behind "skill talk" is a fear of taking risks (Hart, 1978); moreover, the very notion of skills draws from an instrumental reason which is not the practical reason exemplified in risk-taking situations (see Carr, 1981, p. 93). The practice of risk-taking discloses a different sense of progression to the playground activities of children we have been observing. For example, we have seen Gerrard before on the sloping parallel bars. He returns to them again; besides, he has still to make it all the way from the top to the bottom rung. On this occasion we see him as he reaches out, takes hold of the first bar, and letting himself swing forward, hangs for a moment in mid-air. He kicks his legs, jerks back and forth, until the next bar comes within reach. And so one for the next few rungs. Then he misses. It is the second last rung. His fingers [illegible] the metal pipe at the very moment he relinquishes his grip on the preceding rung. Gerrard crashes to the ground below, his energy spent for the moment. But Gerrard is not discouraged this time because now he has almost done what he intended to do. Perhaps he thinks to himself, "if only I can hang on a little bit longer I can surely make it all the way." Just a little more effort, a little more application, and Gerrard will have made it.

Some months later Gerrard is again on this playground. "How are you doing on those bars?" I ask him. Gerrard doesn't answer, although a few minutes later I see him swinging across a different set of bars, one much higher than the inclined rack he had been on before, and much more difficult because all the bars are set at the same height. Gerrard cannot let himself drop down from one rung to the next on this playground equipment; he must use his body to swing forward to grasp the bar in front of him. And Gerrard seems to be doing extremely well at precisely this movement. "How far can you go, Gerrard? Can you turn around and come back again?" With this challenge he's off again.

What is happening with this child who sees so much in sets of parallel bars? For him the challenge is ongoing. On another part of the playground stand the horizontal bars of differing heights. Gerrard has not gone near these bars yet. Will they be the next things to draw his attention? Our thinking about challenges for Gerrard derives from a perception of a progression to his penchant for bars you can swing on. We envisage a direction for his actions which has an effect on his present activity. Our challenge to him is evidence enough of this.

Being in Practice

Getting the child to do something that goes beyond what he or she is already capable of requires our showing the child something of ourselves. Like the child, it is not a question of showing off ability, but rather of showing we know how to enter the spirit of practice. Too often playground activity is seen as distinct from us, which at times it is; nevertheless the riskiness of the playground admits our complicity in the child's sense of activity. In other words, the practice of taking risks shows the

relational quality of risk and gives it a possible educational orderliness. As Bollnow says, although not quite in the same way as is intended here: "the individual practice acquires a significance going far beyond the individual skill it seeks to reproduce" (Bollnow, 1987, p. 108). After all, we take the child to an adult-designed playground, so we must be responsible for the possibilities it offers; and once there our presence with the child on the playground gives tacit consent to the direction the child's activity takes; moreover, our reflective engagement in the child's activity gives purpose to it and significance to the direction it might take. Thus, it is not a matter of showing the child new tricks—that would constitute mere training; nor is it a matter of developing skills—that, too, would deny the potential significance of the child's activity progressions. The risks that play at our relation to the child and which give this relation tangible form require a type of "practical wisdom" (Aristotle, 1925, 1140-1142) whereby the child is guided to new plateaus of achievement. These risks require our being in practice in relation to the activities the child is currently practising.

By way of contrast, recall the situations where children back down. They would suggest a lack of support and a presence of risk that is not ameliorated by the presence of the adult. And how much more serious are those situations where it is the adult whose fearfulness makes the child back down from a seemingly risky situation? Such situations, except those in which danger is the reality, show an adult who is out of practice in responding to the riskiness of the playground. Of course, one can have ability yet still be out of practice. From the child's side, he or she may be physically capable of some activity, yet be in need of encouragement in order to try it. From the adult's side, we may have done the playground activities we see taking place before us at some earlier time in our lives, but we may be quite

reluctant to try them now. Even worse, we may disregard the initial trepidation we experienced when trying the activity as a child and hence overlook the risk the activity now holds for the child before us. Here, again, we are out of practice.

This notion of being in practice should make us very wary of simply confining practice to something the child does, and then regarding what we do in response to the child's activity as teaching behaviour encompassing a multiplicity of playground activities. Just as the child's side can be reduced to physical, or motor, skill development, so too the adult's side can be explained away in terms of generic teaching skills, strategies, and techniques. But with such explanations the experiential order is inverted. Our "teachings" ultimately make sense when they are couched within a situational understanding of what the child is attempting to do. The value of what we teach the child on the playground depends, first of all, upon our acknowledging the primacy of a relation of practice, of our being in practice with what the child wants to do. Our strategies, our skills, our techniques of teaching, like the skills we see children acquiring, are adult constructions of the practical relation which allows us to see risk as a motive for action.

The analysis of risk offered in this study of playground activity can thus provide a deepened understanding of practice as well as a critique of those ways of talking about practice which undermine its pedagogical significance. We can choose to sit on the park bench and feel somewhat responsible for mishaps on the playground (such as was described in "The Place of Risk"); we can observe children at closer range and attempt to support them, guide their actions, instruct them, even evaluate what they are attempting to do (such as was described in "The Atmosphere of Risk"); but it is only through our reflective engagement in the playground activities of children (such as was described in subsequent chapters) that we encounter the riskiness of the

playground with the child, and become aware of our responsiblity for what the child does. This reflective engagement is what the experience of risk calls for. This is what is meant by "being in practice." And this relational quality of risk is what makes physical practices, such as those exemplified on the playground, educationally worthwhile.

CHAPTER VIII

THE POSSIBILITY OF RISK

Risk is a term of our pedagogic relation to children on the playground, however we have seen certain possibilities of this relation in activities beyond the playground. The temptation now is to apply the results of our analysis of the riskiness of the playground to domains of activity that bear a strong resemblance to the playground. Hence we might show the applicability of the practice of risk to say, gymnastics and outdoor pursuits which resemble the playground activities we have observed. The danger of such an extension of the analysis of risk is that it may lose hold of the relational quality of risk for the sake of taking a conceptual grasp on its visibility. Just as the conceptualization of skill development obscures what is at stake in the practice of risk, so the conceptualization of an activity sequence may hide the possibilities intrinsic to the pedagogic relation of risk. Before we consider such logical activity sequences, we should first consider the possibilities of risk as they are suggested in the activity preferences of the children themselves.

The Playing Field

"Do you want to go to Malmo Playground?" I ask my child. "No, I'm busy," he replies. He and his friends have just started a backyard game of ball hockey. The gloves are on, the goalie has padded up with the leggings he made earlier in the day, and the rest of the children are sorting out who is playing where and which team they are facing. Tyler is too caught up in this activity to be much interested in going to the playground.

This game is not a particularly special event, although increasingly it seems there are more reasons for not going to the playground than there are reasons for going. Only when there are no other children around to play with does this child feel inclined to go to the playground. On the other hand, he is only too eager to break off his play at the suggestion of it being time to get ready to play soccer. He will change into his soccer outfit well ahead of time, and then practise the ball around the backyard until it is time to head off to the game. So is this child outgrown the playground? Certainly he is not alone in his current preference for more organized games. Most of his friends, including those who have come with us to the playground on previous occasions, play in the soccer league. So is there a point at which the playground no longer holds such a strong appeal for children? There is still the school playground to be considered, although even here the children's activity tends to spread out from the climbing frames, slippery slides, and swings to the surrounding spaces and playing fields.

It would be too easy to conclude that the child has outgrown the playground, or that the pressures of little league sports intrude upon the child's liking of the playground. A stronger conclusion is that the qualities of the playground can be manifested in activities that draw the child beyond the playground. "Tell me, Tyler, what would you rather do—go to the playground or go to soccer?" "I like both," he replies. "But if you had a choice, which would you rather do?" He is confused by the question. He says: "You mean I can't play soccer anymore? Why can't I play?" He becomes increasingly upset at such a thought. For this child, it is not a matter of alternatives. It seems there is something to playground activity that can be preserved not only in "pick-up" games, but also in little league activities where the overriding considerations often seem to have more to do with uniforms, coaches, inviolable rules

and tournament schedules than with the quality of children's experiences (Orlick and Botterill, 1975). The fact that Tyler still comes back to the things of the playground from time to time shows that there is a certain connection between the playground and the playing field. Tyler can still enjoy the playground in much the same way as before. It is just that he enjoys other things as well.

Our task is to see how the sense of risk-taking that is first acquired on the playground can be transferred to new and potentially challenging contexts, that is, we need to see how the principles that are at work in our coming to terms with playground activity apply to the playing field. Consider how the playing field discloses the possibility of "risk as a term of our pedagogic relation to children" for some of the other children of this study.

Christine

This child whom we have seen before on the playground slippery slide is the only girl on the Malmo soccer team. She is also one of the quieter children on the team and is often overshadowed by the more boisterous ones, some of whom come with ready-made friendships. As if this is not cause enough for her to be a little timid, during the first game Christine is hit in the face with the soccer ball. She holds up well as the coach tries to confort her; however as she is led away by her father we wonder if she will want to remain with the other children on the team. Our fears are unwarranted. Christine turns up in fine spirits for the next game, and although somewhat reluctant to get involved, she seems content enough to be on the field with the other children.

Both parents come to watch Christine play in the last game of the short soccer season. On previous occasions only one parent has come for any particular game. This

time, with both of them on the sidelines, Christine is noticeably more confident than we have seen her before. She sits chattering to her mom and dad when the coach sends her off for a spell, and she is anxious to enter the fray again when it is her turn to replace one of the other children. Her parents look on approvingly as Christine kicks the ball. And though she has still to learn how to take possession of the ball by, for instance, dribbing it upfield, Christine now seems prepared to take the risk of getting involved in the play. "Kick the ball!" her mother challenges her. "Oh, good one. Well done, Christine!" Being on the sideline, Christine's parents are limited in the encouragement they can give, yet on this occasion their presence is enough to help Christine play better than she has played before. Their presence creates an atmosphere of security for their child's endeavours on the soccer field.

Gerrard

"Go hard, Gerrard!" "Run hard! All the way!" Gerrard runs hard. He is the most involved player on the team. Perhaps he is the best player on the team, although this is difficult to judge since whenever Gerrard is on the field the other children tend to move aside to let Gerrard have the ball.

Gerrard is a little hard on these other children. "Heads up," he chides them. After all, this is what the coach keeps telling them. Gerrard has simply taken it upon himself to keep reminding the others of this "rule." By contrast, Stephen, the coach's son, is not too much bothered by this rule. "Heads up," Gerrard tells him, and Stephen wanders around staring at the clouds. Later on, Stephen lies down on the field while the game goes on around him. "Get up, Stephen!" Gerrard screams at him. Substitutions are made and Gerrard comes off the field. He is in tears and weeps in his mother's arms. "He won't play properly," he tells her. "Stephen won't

get up and play properly."

Gerrard is not afraid to get involved, in fact, he is probably afraid *not* to be involved. "It's all yours!" he hears as he takes control of the ball once again. It seems that Gerrard knows only one way to play soccer and that is, as his mother tells him, to play it hard. "Way to go, Gerrard!" And with these words, we wonder to what extent such glib responses to this child's activity may actually gloss over the nature of his experience. What risk is Gerrard taking when being told to play so hard?

Paco

Paco is the leading goal scorer on the team. Although he does not have the same determination as Gerrard, he knows how to get into a position to score goals. For instance, as the opposing goalkeeper makes ready to kick the ball into play, Paco is hovering directly in front of him, ready to pounce on it when it comes his way. And a number of times it will come to him, whereupon he will surprise the goalkeeper by kicking the ball past him so quickly. It is not too many games, however, before goalkeepers learn to kick the ball away to the side of the net instead of directly in front of it. This puts an end to Paco's scoring from directly in front.

Paco learns a new way of scoring. The children cluster around the ball until some child manages to kick it free for a brief time; yet increasingly Paco stands apart from this melee. He waits for the ball to come his way so he can take it upfield with the other children following in his wake. He stands further and further apart from the other children until eventually he is so far off-side that it becomes necessary to teach the children the rule.

"How many goals did you score today?" his father asks him. "I only got two," he tells him. But Eduardo insists that Paco did not get any goals at all. An argument develops between the two boys, and is settled only when Paco's mother arrives and confirms the fact that Paco went scoreless today. Why does Paco lie about the goals he scored? Hasn't he scored enough goals already? Perhaps Paco thinks that scoring goals is all there is to playing soccer. At first it comes so easy to him, but then, as the other children begin to understand the facets of the game, the opportunities which brought Paco early success begin to disappear. Eventually he thinks he must lie to win his parents' approval.

Matthew

Children like Christine, Gerrard and Paco are not concerned solely with the responses of their parents. Their own standing in the eyes of their friends is also important. One notable illustration of this is the constant squabble over who should go in goal. So much fuss does this position create that before too long an order of turn-taking is devised to give each child a chance to *stand out* in goal. "When is it my turn?" Matthew asks the coach. His team has already scored four goals, and with none scored against them, perhaps it is a little odd that Matthew is so anxious to be in goal when all the action so far has been at the opposite end of the field. "Is it my turn yet?" he asks the coach for either the fifth or sixth time.

Matthew eventually has his turn. The coaches of both teams have by this time worked out ways of balancing out the the field of play, and as a result, Matthew finds himself busier than he would otherwise have been. Eventually the other team scores, not just once, but twice. Matthew looks dejected. He asks the coach if he can come off. To be held responsible for letting the other team win, that would be

humiliating. All the good saves he has made so far could not compensate for this possibility of failing in front of his friends. The risk is not worth it.

Matthew has become very aware of the presence of his friends. We recall how on an earlier occasion he did not want to be on the Royal Gardens Playground opposite his school because a group of smaller children were there at the time with their supervisor and Matthew did not want any of his friends from school to see him for fear of being ridiculed. Certainly his concerns in this regard are understandable, but it is unfortunate that his concern for how he looks in the eyes of his friends should become a hindrance to his activity. Like children on the playground who are too influenced by the approbation of their friends and for whom it helps to have a more benign presence, perhaps the coach or some other adult should be there for Matthew so that the risk of going in goal is a risk worth taking.

Dorian

Dorian is one of the biggest children on this soccer team, and at first sight, he looks like he should be one of the best players. It is therefore surprising to see him overshadowed by Gerrard and Paco for most of the games. Although Dorian can easily chase the ball down, often being the first one to reach it, he seems unsure of what to do next. Dorian lacks confidence in his ability to play this game. He sees the ease with which Paco scores and wonders why he cannot do the same. Paco scores once again and Dorian lifts him off his feet as if in celebration, then drops him heavily on the seat of his pants. Dorian's frustration is turning to malice. He longs to score a goal himself.

As the end of the soccer season draws near, Dorian learns an important lesson: he can outrun the other children. If he can break free with the ball then there is

no one fast enough to catch him. Five times during the second last game he breaks away with the ball. And five times he either kicks the ball wide of the net or else straight into the arms of the goalkeeper. Before he can try a sixth time, he is called to the sidelines to make way for one of the other children to come back onto the field. "Did you see me? I nearly scored," he tells his father. "How much time have we got left to play?" Eventually Dorian goes back onto the field. Again he manages to break away with the ball. He kicks it upfield and follows in hot pursuit with most of the adults on the sideline cheering him on, anxious for him to get that elusive goal. Determination is written all over Dorian's face. Now it is his turn to get a goal. Sure enough, he does. This time he kicks the ball firmly past the goalkeeper. Dorian is elated. So are his parents. He finally got one!

Dorian scores two goals in the first half of the last game. As the children come off the field for oranges, Dorain says: "I think I'll get two more." He doesn't, although it is evident in the confidence of his announcement that he has discovered how to score them.

A sense of risk, first evident on the playground, underlines Christine's, Gerrard's, Paco's, Matthew's and Dorian's experience of the playing field. Although not so obviously a place of risk, there is indeed a texture of risk which is apparent in the way these children respond to their parents who sit on the sideline. And because the adults do sit on the sideline (somewhat like the adults who sit on park benches), there are the silences of risk that this distance creates and that give the children the freedom to find out how to take risks for themselves. Children can be challenged—we can encounter this attenuated form of risk with them. In turn, they can become practiced at the cultural form of physical risk-taking called "soccer."

How similar, then, are the risks of the playing field to those of the playground? A clarification would seem to be indicated at this point, since the risk-taking described above would not appear to be of exactly the same kind as the *physical* risk-taking we see on the playground. In fact, the fear of failing, of looking inept, of not living up to parental expectations, etc., would seem to lie well beyond the more physically-rooted fears of, say, falling off the slippery slide. And yet, are there really different kinds of risk involved? Does physical risk simply include those different kinds of risk which have in common the fact that they pertain to certain physical activities, or should we consider that which is "physical" in a far less restrictive manner? Such questions disclose my intention not to lose sight of real physical existence, of the Aristotelian notion of *physis*, the internal principle of movement which is the essence of human nature (cf. Peters, 1967, pp. 158-160). The physicality of risk-taking lies in the realm of growth and maturity and that which fosters such growth. The root *physis* "means the power that emerges and the enduring realm under its sway" (Heidegger, 1959, p. 14).

> We oppose the psychic, the animated, the living, to the "physical." But for the Greeks all this belonged to *physis* and continued to do so even after Aristotle. They contrasted it with what they called *thesis*, thesis, ordinance, or *nomos*, law, rule in the sense of *ethos*. This, however, denotes not mere norms but mores, based on freely accepted obligations and traditions; it is that which concerns free behavior and attitudes, the shaping of man's historical being, the *ethos* which under the influence of morality was later degraded to the ethical. (p. 16)

Accordingly, by talking about *physical* risk-taking in the context of those physical activities undertaken by young children on playgrounds and playing fields, it is intended that our discussion will indicate the more comprehensive "nature" of physical risk-taking: that although evidentially physical, risk is primarily social and ethical, and essentially pedagogical.

The question we now take up is that of the broadly physical and essentially pedagogical nature of risk in activities beyond the playground. It is a question of how the pedagogical nature of risk might unfold as we follow the child beyond the playground.

Beyond the Playground

We stop at Malmo Playground on our way home from the soccer game since Tyler wants to play for awhile. "You're it," he says as he climbs up the ladder to one of the platforms. With these words I am drawn into the game. His call does not allow me to stay on the sidelines. I must enter into the spirit of the game. Here, again, we see the possibility of risk. And it would be tempting to contrast my engagement with Tyler on the playground with being a spectator to his actions on the playing field. One might even appeal to the critics of organized children's sport to show the impoverishment of our relation (eg. Orlick and Botterill, 1975). But just as we had to see beyond a sociology of knowledge of the playground in order to appreciate a pedagogy of risk, so too must we see past a sociology of knowledge of the playing field in order to realize the possibility of risk that exists there. In other words, were we to speak of the playing field only as a socially constructed space, as if none of us had ever enjoyed playing there, then we would deny the place where, like the playground, we were sometimes thrilled and scared, sometimes intimidated and dismayed, yet many times challenged and encouraged to find our own limits. We would lose our grasp on the lived experience of the risks of the playing field and the connections between the sense of these risks and our prior experiences of the riskiness of the playground. We would also fail to see that our adult presence is felt on the playing field through the actions of coaches and referees, and that the playing

field brings the child closer to the adult world by being a place where adults can still be seen to play. The child moves onto the playing field because it seems to him or her a more "grown up" place to be.

So what can we say of the possibility of risk? How should the pedagogy of the riskiness of the playground apply specifically to situations beyond the playground? This study of "Risk and the Playground" leaves the question partly unanswered. After all, this pedagogical question must be taken up anew in each situation in which we find ourselves with children, whether it be on the playground, on the playing field, or further afield. And yet, to simply leave the matter here would allow us to overlook the responsibility we have for directing children's activity. We are the ones to challenge the child, to encounter the playground with the child, and to stay in practice with what the child is attempting to do; and our responses are only possible because of a maturity that anticipates the risks a child might take, and in that anticipation, provides a direction for the child's activity. Thus we could say that the possibility of risk is more a measure of the maturity we have acquired along the lines we presently help the child.

It is not simply how much more experience we have than the child, but of what that experience holds for the child.

> The greater maturity of experience which should belong to the adult as educator puts him in a position to evaluate each experience of the young in a way in which the one having the less mature experience cannot do. It is then the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading. There is no point in his being mature if, instead of using his greater insight to help organize the conditions of the experience of the immature, he throws away his insight. Failure to take the moving force of an experience into account so as to judge and direct it on the ground of what it is moving into means disloyalty to the principle of experience itself. The disloyalty operates in two directions. The educator is false to the understanding that he should have obtained from his own past experience. He is also unfaithful to the fact that all experience is ultimately social: that it involves contact and communication. The mature

> person, to put it in moral terms, has no right to withhold from the young on given occasions whatever capacity for sympathetic understanding his own experience has given him. (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 38)

We stand in relation to the child not only as an adult, but also as a parent, teacher, or a coach, with a sense of the continuity of the child's experience and of the particular forms this experience might take. As we look, for instance, at Marc on the high diving board we see a child who we know to be overly aware of the possible consequences of his activity. We see as well a child who, from his first inclination to step out onto the board, has embarked upon a particular course of activity. Our responsibility is to help Marc along this way and to confront the risks that we know to be along the way. The possibility of risk is, in this regard, an expansion and extension of our motives for first helping the child take risks in his or her present activity on the playground. It is premissed by "a reflective sense of the Good, a sense of the meaning of being human, and a sense of hope for the personal becoming of the child" (Bollnow, 1970/1988, p. 6) which we obtain from these relatively immature risk-taking activities.

The possibility of risk puts greater stress than before on our responsibility for the riskiness of the playground. Even when the child prefers at some point in time to play soccer rather than go to the playground, it must be kept in mind that both the playground and the playing field already bear an adult stamp of approval. This fact should put to rest any thought of us simply following the child from one activity to another. Such undulgence of the child's whims would deny our pedagogic responsibility for the unfolding possibility of risk. As Dewey put it:

> The systematized and defined experience of the adult mind, in other words, is of value to us in interpreting the child's life as it immediately shows itself, and in passing to guidance and direction. (Dewey, 1902/1956, p. 13)

The possibility of risk pertains to such "interpretation and guidance." As a term of

our pedagogic relation to children, it provides a pedagogic logic for a domain of childhood experience. That is to say, the child must find his or her own way, yet a way that always and already conforms to what has been laid down for him or her in general terms. The dimensions of risk are, on the one hand, ways of interpreting what the child does, and on the other hand, ways of directing the course of his or her explorations and disclosing ways of acting which the child would not necessarily follow by him- or herself. The possibility of risk is thus a reflective sense of the connections between the playground and the playing field. But it is first and foremost a measure of the degree to which we can actually challenge, encounter, and be in practice with children, even as they now take up activities leading beyond the playground.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

What is to be made of these reflections on risk? What can we draw from this term of a relation which unfolds in the course of our watching children on playgrounds? In this regard, I look to Spiecker's (1984) delineation of the pedagogical relation as both a conceptual framework and a relation *sui generis*. "This relation which makes human development possible, and which makes it possible to become a person...is highly *practical* in nature: parents are guided by it in their relationships with their young" (p. 208). Risk stands out in this regard as a practical term of our pedagogic relation to children. We see that the playground is not only a place of risk, but that is is also the place where we see evidence of the modulation of the atmosphere of risk to which children are exposed. The silences of risk, in particular, disclose a way of being with children whereby we can challenge them to take risks with confidence. We can see our interventions as stemming from things held in common with the child, from an attempt to relate to the child's experience of things, from a shared encounter with risk. And through this practical engagement, which brings the maturity of our experiences to bear upon those of the child, we can help to define what risks are worth taking and why.

Risk, as a very practical term of our pedagogic relation to children, has also a "contrafactual character," since what are presupposed in our relations to children are precisely those notions and principles that need to be realized (p. 208). Ultimately we cannot value the child's experience in itself because the very sense of a pedagogy of risk (and pedagogy in general) is to lead the child out of childhood. Our pedagogy is, in this regard, intrinsically paradoxical, for it must respect the child in his or her

childness and personhood only for the sake of leading the child out of childhood. One is faithful to a pedagogy of risk in not taking the child solely on his or her own terms.[1] This seems particularly the case in our encounters with children on playgrounds, because in our practical engagement with children the course of their activity becomes apparent to us, and through our reflection upon these situations the question of what we should do can be answered with some degree of confidence. In other words, a notion of risk serves to bring us in touch with the child at the same time as it obliges us to act in certain practical ways on the basis of what we think the child could become. To be sure, the child must inevitably go on his or her own way, but only after the direction has been vouchsafed by the actions we take with the child and on the child's behalf.

These reflections on risk thus serve a very practical purpose, namely that of holding up a notion which might guide the growth and development of the child. But these reflections are not practical in any technical or managerial sense. They serve instead to outline a "communicative understanding" (van Manen, 1977), a knowledge that is "practical" not so much because "it provides for the justification and legitimation of common practices" (p. 219), but more because it establishes a normative sense of how we might approach "common practices" such as those of the playground. So, from this study of risk and the playground, what can we now say regarding the *practical* requirements of the pedagogical relation which are sensitive to risk?

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[1] A more positive term than "paradox" for such an apparent contradiction is that of "antinomy." It is interesting to note that the pedagogical antinomy to which I refer has been extensively considered by representatives of the *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* tradition. Beginning with Schleiermacher and Dilthey, the notion of "antinomy" and the antinomy of the uniqueness of the child and our responsibility for ensuring that the child acquires values held in common even at the expense of his or her individuality, have been at the centre of pedagogical thought (van Manen, 1987).

Practical Ways of Acting

The relation requires close and careful observation of children. The playground stands out as an important place where an interest can be taken in the actions of children. We can see, first of all, that the playground is designed with children in mind. It is designed for their safety. Second, the playground allows for the supervision of children. It allows for more than a passing interest in their activity. Third, and most importantly, the playground allows for children to be observed at close quarters. It is a place where adults can participate in the activities of children and a place where children can take risks in the relative safety provided by having an adult close by.

By observing children closely and carefully, we allow them to show something of themselves. Our teaching is bound by the situation in which we find ourselves with children. Effective teaching requires that we first observe the child's sense of an activity, and that we observe the child as he or she shows something of what is possible. In other words, our interventions are meaningful when they reflect what it is that the child wishes to show us.

The relation requires us to question our approach to each and every child. A pedagogy of risk becomes possible when we see that the playground is not only a place of risk, but that it is also the place where we see how we are implicated in the risky situations to which children are exposed. The silences of risk, in particular, disclose a way of being with children whereby we can come to see how our help can be given. In fact, the knowledge of how to be most helpful to children comes as a questioning silence. There are the silences that accompany our approach, the silences that are necessary so as not to disturb the activity that takes place before us. Then

there are the silences that result from our not knowing what to do, the silences that disclose the tension between our understanding of the activity and that of the child. To these silences we feel the need to speak. We want to see the difference between our respective views of the activity as the basis for coming to terms with the nature of the child's experience. We want to speak of this difference in a way which acknowledges the integrity of the child's experience while pointing the way to more mature forms. So we trust the child, we place our trust in what the child can do, and within these silences of our approach, we see how each child can be best helped.

The consequence of questioning our approach to each and every child who needs our assistance is that we remember what it means to follow children. We follow children who already know how to follow other children. We see children dare each other, imitate each other, and at times give assistance to one another. And we see within these interactions a form of peer teaching from which we can develop a pedagogy. Especially when we observe older children helping younger ones, we find a direction for how we might follow children and how we may, on occasion, lead them.

The relation requires a thoughtfulness of how maturity comes to the child. To the extent that the playground is a refuge for children, we need to consider our actions with children on playgrounds against an understanding of a more general and prevailing atmosphere of risk. This atmosphere is affected by the sense of security which the adult brings to the events of everyday life as they concern the child. The playground, in particular, can be made a secure place between the safety of the home and the riskiness of the outer world. On the playground we can be mindful of the atmosphere of risk by supporting, guiding, instructing the child and evaluating his or her efforts. But we can be truly helpful in bringing a sense of security to the child's explorations when we challenge the child to take risks and when we find within the

terms of this challenge an opportunity to experience the riskiness of the playground alongside the child.

By thinking about how maturity comes to the child, our interventions carry significance beyond the immediate situation in which we find ourselves with children. What we do with children, how we challenge them and encounter the playground with them, has an effect on the child's sense of security not just when he or she is on the playground but also when the child moves into the world beyond the playground. In fact, the relation we establish with the child on the playground brings a certain clarity to our understanding of how we might generally help children become independent in a world which extends far beyond the security of the playground.

The relation requires us to see and articulate the challenges of the playground. We consider the terms of the dare and the level of common sense which a dare contains. Surely, we say, there can be more positive encouragement than this. The hard edge of a dare can be softened. Instead of being pressured into trying some risky activity, the activity can be made inviting. Words can be offered which give the child courage. However the child will often attempt an activity without realizing what it holds. The child may then find some way out of going through with the action. Our words of encouragement should therefore acknowledge the somewhat varied paths that children take in coming to terms with a risky activity. And we should be cognizant of the limits to which a child can be challenged.

By seeing and articulating the challenges of the playground, we instill in the child feelings of self-confidence. The child learns to be responsible for his or her actions, and with this independence comes a knowledge of what he or she can do, for the child's increasing sense of maturity is contingent upon his or her sensing the

limits of challenge, i.e., the limits to which challenge can be responded to, the limits to which one can be challenged by another person, and thus the extent to which an action is something done through one's own initiative.

The relation requires that we know when to leave the child alone. We become fearful for the child, apprehensive about what is being attempted, yet o . fearfulness is, more positively, a way of becoming mindful of what the child can do. Similarly, we sense danger, and yet other than the dangers that come with being on faulty equipment, danger signifies the point at which we do not wish to be concerned any more about the child's explorations. More important than a sense of danger is the grasp we have of the child's activity and the confidence we have in letting the child do something for him- or herself.

By knowing when to leave the child alone, we give the child a sense of self-direction. Although the direction of the child's activity has already been outlined in terms of our earlier responses to what we see happening, there comes a time for the child to feel in charge of the direction of his or her activity. The child needs to move beyond the sphere of direct adult influence and to feel increasingly responsible for his or her own actions.

The relation requires us to be in practice with the child. We look at the tricks which the child shows us, but we also see the repetitive nature of much of the child's playground activity. Out of this interplay of novelty and repetition, however, we can formulate a notion of practice which shows the stake we have in the child's playground activity. This means being or staying in practice, enjoying a spirit of practice with the child by acting with a wisdom borne of experience in those activities which the child undertakes.

By being in practice with the child, we lead the child to movement competence. We bring the child to attend to the demands of playground activity and to the specific action requirements which extend this activity in what are normally called directions of "skill development." There are, for example, the actions of hanging, swinging, jumping, diving, sliding, climbing and balancing which can be perfected, although such actions are, as we have seen, already imbedded in the riskiness of the playground. By being in practice with the child and thus attending to this riskiness of the playground, we do better in inculcating such movement competencies than were we to see them as discrete actions that can be simply extracted from the playground context. The movement competence we want for the child is that of physical confidence in the world rather than simply a technical confidence in what the body can do.[2]

The relation requires us to follow the child in risk-taking activities beyond the playground. The extension of the child's activities from the playground to the playing field and then further afield carries with it a consideration of the more physical dimensions of childhood experience. In fact, the study of the riskiness of the playground might serve as an exemplar for those physical practices that go far beyond the playground. The situations of risk-taking which we have observed and described in this study might be seen as "paradigmatic examples" (Bollnow, 1987, pp. 144, 145) for the much broader domain of physical risk-taking. Risk might even be regarded as a principle of "exemplary learning" (Flitner, 1972) of those cultural forms, namely games,

[2]It is interesting to note that even in the positivist studies of movement confidence on the playground (eg. Butcher, 1988; Crawford and Griffin, 1986; and Griffin and Keogh, 1982) it is admitted that: "A particularly important indicator [of movement confidence] might be the amount and kind of support an individual needs and seeks during participation" (Griffin and Keogh, 1982, p. 234). In other words, it is conceded that a relation to the world, which is first of all a relation to a trusted adult, might be the most important consideration for instilling in the child that sense of movement confidence which we see expressed in particular movement competencies.

sports and physical recreations, which extend this physicality in particular sorts of ways.

Towards a Curriculum of Risk

Within this physical domain of human activity, risk is more than just a term of our pedagogic relation to children. It is the articulation of what is essential to the pedagogic relation. Risk is the essence of the pedagogic relation insofar as the relation holds for that domain of physical activity where risk and risk-taking experiences stand out. Taking risks and being challenged to take risks lead, as we have seen, to self-direction self-confidence, movement competence and proficiency; and these outcomes, these "bodily learnings," especially as they accrue from games, sports and physical recreations which extend the domain of the playground, serve to "enlarge one's lived space, thus increasing its mobility and one's willingness to undertake new activities with positive feelings regarding the probability of success" (Vandenberg, 1988, p. 70). There are, however, other dimensions of the pedagogic relation, other requirements and preconditions for the relation, which are not confined to the notion of risk. Perhaps we should even consider how such notions as "trust," "gratitude," "patience," "hope" and "love" complement the present analysis (cf. Bollnow, 1961, 1970/1988, 1979; Spranger, 1971; Vandenberg, 1975). Still, the point is that even though we started with a formulation of risk as a term of our pedagogic relation to children, we did leave open the decision as to whether risk was the relation itself. Only by following children on playgrounds do we now see the extent to which risk characterizes our relation to them and the extent to which it is *the* term of our pedagogic relation to children.

Risk marks out a humanly significant domain of physical activity. There is, first of all, the physical space of the playground, that place of risk where a fundamentally human relation can be defined. This place provides us with a conceptual space for reflecting upon the significance of our relation to children. The domain represented by the playground becomes even more significant when we see it in light of the world which the child must come to know. For instance, we consider those things in the region of the world to which playground activity lends itself. We consider games, sports and physical recreations which take the child beyond the playground and that are, in turn, connected to the wider world. But the question to be drawn from the present study has to do with how we can best help the child to enlarge the space of the playground. How can the child gain self-confidence, self-knowledge, movement proficiency and feelings of self-worth in activities such as games, sports and physical recreations which lie beyond the playground? That is the paramount curriculum question for this pedagogy of the playground.

And what shall we call this wider domain of the possibilities of the playground? Shall we look to current practices and call it "Movement Education," "Physical Education," "Adventure Education," or maybe even "Outdoor Education"? Such labels as these may make the child's experiences of risk the subject of deliberate, formal learning; nevertheless, while it is important to plan and organize such learning experiences for children and to provide a rubric for acknowledging their place, our efforts are for nought if in the process we lose sight of the relation which makes these experiences meaningful. Risk is fundamentally a term of our relation to children. It carries certain possibilities of physical experience, so long as these possibilities play out the relation which we first observe on the playground.[3]

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[3]Yerkes (1988) has recently called attention to the risk-taking quality of children's playground activities and has argued that "the ever present playground of nursery

A problem arises at this point, for we want to reconcile our analysis with current conceptualizations of the domain of physical activity where risk is prominent, and yet we note a disparity between the pedagogics of the playground and our curriculum formulations of that type of physical activity which lends itself to risk-taking. Do we then agree with Macdonald (1986) that "the domain of curriculum is grounded fundamentally in the boundaries of the activity of schooling, and influences outside the action context are only relevant as they can be observed and/or inferred from this context" (p. 212)? Do we see the playground in the shadows of the school curriculum? Or should we see the school curriculum as more the "presence of an absence"? "Present is the curriculum....Present is the window. Absent is the ground" (Grumet, 1988, p. xiii). Absent is the playground. Isn't this our task: To bring to our thinking about curriculum an understanding of the critical ground for what we do with children, even in more formal situations of physical activity? Shouldn't what we do with children on the playground for the sake of their maturity, how we treat the riskiness of the playground, be seen as the "lived curriculum" (Aoki, 1985) as well as the critical ground for understanding the more formal and systematic designs, plans or curricula which one might wish to develop for the benefit of children?

The task that remains, I suggest, is to extend our analysis of the domain of the playground into the more conceptual domain of the curriculum. Further reflection needs to apply itself to an understanding of how we might practise this pedagogy that arises on the playground. We might look favourably, for instance, at how the curriculum of "Movement Education" challenges the child, at how the equipment we use in following

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'(cont'd) schools and day care centers remains a potentially powerful but neglected educational tool" (p. 22). Her claim seems to be that those who advocate "experiential education" and emphasize its risk-taking dimension (eg. King, 1988) might well look to the playground activities of young children as providing a sound basis for curriculum development.

this approach resembles the equipment found on the playground, and at how the "limitation" and "indirect" methods of teaching (Kirchner, 1988, pp. 116-120) allow children to discover the nature of an activity for themselves. But here again, the most significant curriculum questions we can ask will stem, first of all, from attending to the experiences of children. What is the child's experience of the riskiness of physical activity? What can we do to improve upon the quality of these experiences? Can we structure them in such a way that all children might experience what only a few experience if left to their own devices? Then we ask: What language, what terminology, will allow us to extend a child's range of experience in ways that lead to a maturing of movement? What language justifies the improvements we seek to make? Can our designed lessons, our formal curricula, allow for this pedagogical direction? Can we structure the child's experiences of the riskiness of the playground in pedagogically significant ways?

We structure children's physical experiences by the space that is available to us—the playground, the playing field, the gymnasium, the swimming pool, etc. This structure already brings an adult frame of thinking to bear upon the child's experience. In this way, we put a curriculum border around children's experiences. Then, within this framework, we further structure children's physical experiences by the way we interact with them. Consequently, our task is to keep returning to the landscape of the child so that we can continue to see things with the child in mind and so that our designs for the child's learning can be in tune with the nature of the child's experience. This, after all, is the message for playground designers, however the message runs deeper than this application. My contention is that the playground provides critical ground for understanding the curriculum designs we have for children and for making these designs pedagogically appropriate. Thus, the ongoing task of this

research study is to show how risk, as the term of our pedagogic relation to children in physical activity contexts, can be used to make sense of the teaching that occurs in more formalized physical activity programs which we design for children. For this we need to look anew at the experiences of children, especially as they disclose this possibility of a pedagogy of risk in activities which extend beyond the playground. What we have sketched out as the possibility of risk now needs to be explored in much greater detail for us to continue to talk about a curriculum that extends the riskiness of the playground.

CHAPTER X

TEN THESES

1. Risk is a social phenomenon.

2. Risk is a fundamental term of our pedagogic relation to children.

3. Risk is a term for observing what happens to children on the playground.

4. Risk suggests a practical response to what we see of playground situations.

5. Risk means lending a sense of security to the child's playground activity.

6. Risk means knowing what challenges are worth responding to.

7. Risk means knowing when to leave the child alone on the playground.

8. Risk implies a practice of playground activity in directions considered to be educationally worthwhile.

9. Risk is an essential term of our pedagogic relation to children in that domain of activity represented by, yet not confined to, the playground.

10. Risk is a term of fundamental significance for the school curriculum.

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