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Risk Management Vs Risk Retreat: A Case Study of Child Protection Policy Carriage

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Abstract:

This paper reports on an interview based study on child care and protection policy and legislation in one Australian state. Specifically, it focuses on the ways in which policy officers frame child care and protection for teachers. Four major themes emerged in the interview talk of policy officers: (1) children's rights (2) distinguishing between risk, harm and significant harm; (3) appropriate touch – when, where, how; and (4) strategies for dealing with teachers' heightened anxieties. These themes were contextualized and analysed using two categories of literature. The first set of literature dealt with the changing ecology of childhood, particularly notions of children as paradoxically and simultaneously 'wasted' and 'prized' in these new globalized networked times. The second category of literature dealt with the emotional labour of teaching, as well as the psychoanalytic topic of 'not wanting to know' or be touched by knowledge.

Introduction

Just before Christmas 2003, a thirteen-year-old boy, Daniel Morcombe disappeared from a bus stop on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland Australia. The disappearance ‘horrified the nation and devastated his family’ (Robson, 2004: 43). Because of ‘raised public anxiety over the threat posed by pedophiles and other sexual predators’, there seemed to be a collective belief ‘that things like this just shouldn’t happen’ (Robson, 2004: 43). So many questions about this particular case remain unanswered. Who was to blame for Daniel’s disappearance? The individual bus driver who drove past a lone child waiting at a bus stop because his bus was behind schedule? The bus company because it did not provide explicit instructions to drivers about picking up children in such circumstances? People using the highway who should have noticed signs of potential danger to a young boy? The education system – was a young boy denied the resources to protect himself from potential harm and danger?

Issues about ‘The Not Knowing’ – imagining potential dangers, harm and risks to children, and the ‘Not Wanting to Know’ – denial of such imaginings (individual, community/collective)¹ – are now central to any understanding of child care and protection for education workers (teachers, administrators, policy officers).² The tragic case of Daniel Morcombe in Queensland, Australia speaks not only of his parents’ anguish – ‘The Not Knowing’, but also of the wider community’s anguish about the actions or inactions of others – those who did not ‘want to know’ or think about the safety of a lone boy at a bus stop.

I have organized this paper in two main sections. In the first section, I review literature on the changing ecology of childhood in order to contextualize current legislation and policies on child care and protection. I then explore the concept of framing as a way of theorising what is speakable and unspeakable in relation to anxiety raising issues, such as those concerning the protection and care of children. In the second part of the paper, I analyse interview data collected from policy officers responsible for designing and enacting education policies about child safety and protection in Queensland, Australia. My analysis focuses on the framing of child-care knowledge – how notions of caring have changed, as well as the strategies used to handle what may now be considered sensitive or controversial topics in relation to child protection.

The Changing Ecology of Childhood

Some scholars have described late modernity or informational capitalism as a 'risk society' (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 2000), alluding to the inherent risks produced by four factors, namely: (1) the reduced role of the welfare state in ensuring provision of public services such as education, health, child-care, and aged-care; (2) rapid innovations in scientific and technological knowledge producing fast and continual social, economic and cultural changes; (3) high-speed flows of information, ideas, images, people and money across increasingly porous territorial borders as capitalism goes global forcing people to constantly deal with the unfamiliar and new; and (4) challenges to patriarchal relations, breakdown of the nuclear family, and decline in births in the West – constructing children paradoxically and ambivalently as a 'prized' and/or 'wasted' category (see Castells, 2000; Giddens, 2000). All four factors have produced, and continue to produce irreversible changes in Western societies, particularly in terms of child care and protection (see also Jones, 2004).

Children- Wasted or Prized

Theorisations about the changing ecology of childhood are varied and contradictory. On the one hand, researchers such as Manuel Castells (2000: 162) has argued that large segments of the world's children are being 'wasted' or 'exploited' through the new millennium processes of globalization. The main reason for this 'wasting' of children is because, 'in the Information Age, social trends are extraordinarily amplified by society's new technological/organizational capacity, while institutions of social control are bypassed by global networks of information and capital' (Castells, 2000: 164). These new global information networked processes have resulted in 'a dramatic reversal of social conquests and children's rights ... in the wake of large-scale deregulation and the bypassing of governments by global networks' (Castells, 2000: 162). For example, economic globalization has increased levels of poverty in so-called First World countries such as the United States and Australia so that young children are increasingly working in fast-food industries, not only to subsidise family wages but also to feed their own cultural consumption habits. Children are also potentially vulnerable or exploitable in the emerging global sex tourism industries, as well as the new virtual or electronic forms of pornography (Castells, 2000: 162; see also Dibben, 2004). Various reasons have been offered for the deplorable rise in the global child sex industry. Manuel Castells (2000: 160) offers four, namely, (1) 'globalization of markets for everything, and from everywhere to everywhere', (2) guaranteed anonymity via the electronic home and exotic travel enabling offenders to escape capture, (3) bored affluent professionals desiring sexual excitement via transgression in a 'society of normalized sexuality', and (4) an increase in levels of global poverty fuelling the supply side of this market. Indeed, one of the fastest growing markets for child prostitution is the United States

and Canada, where, in 1996, 'estimates varied widely between 100,000 and 300,000 child prostitutes' (Castells, 2000: 159).

While Castells (2000) has highlighted the 'wasting' of children in these new times, other researchers have argued that children are now a 'prized category' in Western countries (see Edgar, 1999; Giddens, 2000). This prized categorization has emerged because people are choosing to have fewer children, and also leave child rearing to a later age. Indeed, in Australia, because of the decline in births, there will be fewer children in the year 2020 than people aged over sixty (see Edgar, 1999). Writing about the changing ecology of childhood, Edgar (1999: 28) has this to say:

[Children] are highly valued, invested in heavily by parents who have themselves come from small families in which the individual child was paid more attention than in the larger families of previous generations. The investment is more in financial terms than in parental time, though that time is less widely spread across a large number of siblings than before.

While researchers tend to disagree on whether children are 'prized' and/or 'wasted' in these new times, there appears to be some consensus that older institutions responsible for the care and protection of children such as the nuclear family, 'labour unions and the politics of social reform' have either broken down, or been weakened (Castells, 2000: 162). At the same time, alternative institutions for child-care and protection are still in the experimental or embryonic stages of development, thus placing children in potential danger of neglect and exploitation.

In what follows, I review literature on the concept of framing. It will be recalled that the purpose of this paper is to examine how notions of child care and protection are framed in the talk of policy officers in one Australian state.

Framing or Scripting Controversial Issues

I use the term frame here to refer to the maps or scripts of talk dealing specifically with difficult or sensitive topics relating to child care and protection (see Tannen & Wallat, 1993). More generally, the term frame refers to the negotiation of control over knowledge scripts – what knowledge is selected, how it is sequenced, paced, parsed (elaborations, extensions, clarifications), and how acquisition of, and resistance to knowledge is managed (Bernstein, 2000). Macro framing, like the borders of a picture frame, refers to the macro chart or map of a text – what knowledge is included, and how it is organized within the whole text. By contrast, micro framing refers to the internal organization or scripting of texts. Any one text may include several framings of knowledge, and movement in and out of different frames. For example, in discussions about child care and protection, participants may evoke

several frames – everyday anecdotes, fictional case studies or scenarios, legal references, and educational theory. Of crucial importance are the points of connection between these different frames, and the movement along these frames to constitute new orientations to child care and protection, and thus new modes of professional conduct and judgement. Moreover, frames of reference are not static, but are always ‘subject to modification, reinterpretation, suspension and so forth, within and across different communicative encounters (Green *et al.*, 1998: 16). While participants may develop a common set of frames in conversational contexts, there are also likely to emerge clashes between the frames of different participants. In the next section, I examine how potentially sensitive topics about child care and protection may be framed in and out of conversations by turning to some of the psychoanalytic literature.

Framing: Awful, Ugly Imaginings

Psychoanalytic theories which deal with issues of denial, repression and ‘not wanting to know’ add another layer of complexity to the preceding discussion of communication frames. In psychoanalytic views ‘the subject does not learn easily-indeed, resists knowledge’ (Britzman & Gilbert, 2004: 83). Teachers, like other professional groups, do not readily engage with ideas/images/voices that are likely to question and challenge long established or habitual practices. Thus, education officers responsible for policy design and implementation must take into account the worries that teachers have about ‘being affected by knowledge’, and anxieties that ‘knowledge comes too late’ (Britzman & Gilbert, 2004: 88). This resistance to learning, not wanting to know, is an internal dynamic or psychic defense ‘against being touched by knowledge and others’ (Britzman & Gilbert, 2004: 88).

Two issues become important. First, any theory of learning must account for the problem of not wanting to know. That is, every theory of learning includes a theory of not learning. Second, a theory of not learning requires an understanding of ego defenses against or resistance to being affected by the otherness of knowledge (Britzman & Gilbert, 2004: 88-89)

Crises in teacher education, such as heightened anxieties and ‘moral panic’ about the care and protection of children invoke self-doubt, as well as doubt in others. During such times everyone (expert, and non-expert, parent, police officer and teacher) may be imagined as a potential threat to the safety of children. This in turn leads to ‘apprehension and acute worries’ that education and other social institutions are not ‘synonymous with control and mastery’, and also that ‘one might lose self-control and composure, that the crisis will overwhelm all efforts and make knowledge useless’ Britzman & Dippo, 2000: 34)

Awful thoughts erupt. They can remind us of our reluctance to think, our susceptibility to acting them out or projecting them onto others, and maybe even

our willingness to become distracted by technical consolations and functional understandings (Britzman & Dippo, 2000: 34).

Such awful thoughts can remind us of 'the capacity for doubt' and jolt us from 'clinging to certainty' and 'numbing routine', so that 'our thoughts can question their own grounds and then wonder over the relation and difference between thoughts and things' (Britzman & Dippo, 2000: 34).

Awful thoughts should be explored, not repressed or denied, even though having, holding onto, and exploring such awful thoughts is likely to heighten levels of anxiety. In what follows, I examine the framing of knowledge about child care and protection within the talk of policy officers.

Data Analysis: Reframing Teachers' Work

Interview data were collected from nine policy officers (P1-9) working across five separate organizations in one state in Australia. Thus, the interview participants worked in the following fields: an organization set-up to care for abused children; a Catholic Education department oriented to student protection; the Teachers' Union; a non-state school sector department concerned with staff professional development about child care/protection; and the human resources section of the state education department. Each of the interviews (approximately an hour in length) was conducted at the workplace site of the participant. While the interviews were loosely structured, they were at the same time guided by the following set of questions:

- Who is expected to take responsibility for the implementation of child care and protection policy at the level of the school?
- What training/education strategies are currently being used to shift teachers' professional judgement in relation to child care and protection policies?
- On the one hand, teachers have increased responsibilities in relation to the care and protection of children, and on the other hand teachers seem to be working in an increasingly litigious environment. How do you manage teachers' heightened anxieties about pedagogic work in such circumstances?
- What are the most important things for teachers to consider in exercising a duty of care? What advice do you give teachers in relation to touching children?

In the following discussion, I focus specifically on the strategies used by policy officers to frame teachers' heightened anxieties about child care and protection. Thus, the main research question driving the data coding and analyses is as follows. How do policy officers frame teachers' anxieties about 'not knowing' as well as 'not wanting to know' in relation to new child care and protection legislation/policies?

Policy Officers across all five organizations talked specifically about teachers' concerns and heightened anxieties about the pedagogic impact of new child care and protection legislation and policies. However, the framing of knowledge to deal with teachers' heightened anxieties differed across the organizations, and emphasis was placed on different agendas. For example, participants working in child advocacy and support agencies framed discussions from a children's rights perspective, while participants working in teacher union organizations framed talk from a member's rights perspective. Many of the participants also talked about clashes between these frames, as well as strategies used to manage these clashes. How was it possible to assert children's rights and ensure that teachers retained pedagogic authority to teach effectively? At the same time, however, four major themes emerged in the data: (1) children's rights; (2) distinguishing between risk, harm and significant harm; (3) appropriate touch – when, where, how; and (4) strategies for dealing with teachers' heightened anxieties. Only one participant (P5) suggested that the government's policy agenda should shift to focus on where the '*majority of sexual abuse occurs*', namely, '*in the home and not in the school environment*'.

Theme One: Children's Rights

The theme of children's rights and the categorisation of children as 'prized' emerged only in the talk of participants working for organizations with an explicit child advocacy or student protection focus. Thus, for example Participant 2 argued for the importance of '*looking at children as being our most important asset and resource for us as a nation and a species.*' Participant 2, however, claimed that his framing of children as a prized category, and his position of advocating children's rights, clashed with the perspectives of many school teachers. While teachers framed children as 'prized', there was a '*general contention*' that children had '*heaps of rights*'. Consequently, there were clashes during professional development workshops particularly at those points when the talk moved in and out of different frames: children as prized, children's rights and the democratising of adult-child relations. For example, Participant 8 argued that children's rights discourses were being mischievously appropriated by some parents and students with a '*complaint mentality*', and damaging some teachers' lives.

P8: We have had classic cases where people's lives have been destroyed on the evidence of two children. And that poor guy will never be the same again. ... We have got a police investigation where the teacher turned the child's head with his hand like this and said, "look at me" and we have got a police investigation.

Theme Two: Risk and Harm

Many of the participants talked about the general confusion in schools surrounding the terms: risk, harm and appropriate child care and protection. For example, Participant 3 suggested that teachers were expected to protect children from harm:

P3: ... it is immaterial how the harm is caused, so that brings up the psychological and emotional. So we have had allegations in our system from past students in relation to physical and psychological abuse. ... In relation to physical, because it can be sexual as well as physical, ... the biggest percentage of allegations they get is around something physical, touching, pushing, poking, whatever.

The topic of harm was also raised by Participant 1 who clearly distinguished between risk and harm, and between different forms of harm. For him, risk was not necessarily bad or dangerous. Rather, taking risks was a necessary part of everyday life, and risk-taking was necessary for growth and change. The positive aspect of risk relates to the 'mobilising dynamic of society bent on change, that wants to determine its own future rather than leaving it to religion, tradition, or the vagaries of nature' (Giddens, 2000: 42). Moreover, teachers needed to be clear about devising risk minimisation strategies to protect children from significant harm. The negative side of risk relates to the inherent paradoxes of producing knowledge to manage risk. On the one hand, the production of more knowledge and techniques may indeed protect children from potential harm and danger. On the other hand, however, there may be some unforeseen consequences from the increased production of such knowledge, such as heightened or raised anxieties about potential sources of harm to children, and constant questioning of experts and expert knowledge systems.

P1: ... I think that we have got confused between risk and harm, and that is, that children can be put into risky situations, but risk is not necessarily bad. The same with teachers can be put into risky situations but that is not necessarily bad. What is bad is harm. The child protection legislation, that is the context that drives this sort of thing, talks about significant harm. ... Teachers because they are involved with children they may be in a situation where accidentally something happens and there may be some harm to the child, but that is not going to be significant, it might be like if a kid falls over they pick them up instinctively. So if an adult does that without asking permission then the child might be offended but the child is not going to be significantly harmed. So I think there are subtleties that we have lost

Theme Three: Appropriate Touch – Where, When, How

All of the participants talked about teachers heightened anxieties in relation to 'appropriate touch'. The policy officers also suggested that many teachers adopted a 'no touch' policy because of the uncertainties, and unclear policy guidelines on the topic of 'appropriate touch'.

P1: ... I think that at the moment there is still the notion that it is better not to do anything, it is better not to touch. But I think that is an extreme view.

P2: ... *I think there is a real fear amongst teachers about touch, and about what the right thing to do is, and a fear about their own protection and what is going to happen to them if there were any allegations.*

P4: *I think for a lot of teachers the easiest approach to take is: just don't touch the students. In that way if you don't touch them then you will never, or allegedly, you will never get into trouble....*

At the same time, all the participants talked through the strategies that they used to allay teacher anxieties about touching children. These strategies varied across and within organizations, and ranged from providing explicit rules and techniques about appropriate and inappropriate touch to assisting schools devise their own 'practice frameworks' in relation to appropriate touch. Participants working in two organizations talked about the importance of explicating guidelines about appropriate and inappropriate touch.

P8: *Our policy is quite specific in providing exact detail about touching in some of the categories in the notion of preventing employee harm to students.*

P9: ... *there are about 6 pages on what's appropriate touching (laughs.) I have gone to extreme lengths to spell this out. It is not just for teachers, it is for other staff as well. We have actually given examples of what is appropriate and what is inappropriate- it talks about reasonableness in terms of what you can do with children.*

P8: ... *there has been a massive effort over the last five years at least to tell people that some touching is all right, don't be too anxious*

This demand by teachers for explicit rules from the state employing authority and/or teachers' union about appropriate touch is indicative of heightened anxieties surrounding the topic of child care and protection. At the same time, however, the demand for explicit rules or techniques to address a new social issue, that is, the changing ecology of childhood – children as simultaneously prized and wasted, is not likely to lead to long term solutions. As institutions for the care and protection of children are eroding, new support structures have to be forged, and new pedagogic relations constituted. This process requires extensive consultation, discussion and thinking through – dealing with awful, painful thoughts, emotions and feelings about what has been lost and imagining new possibilities of pedagogic care. By framing out awful thoughts, teachers deny themselves the opportunity to explore their own fears and anxieties. By framing out new knowledge about child care and protection, that is, 'not wanting to know', teachers deny themselves a voice in the design of new pedagogic environments.

Participants from two organisations emphasised the importance of assisting and supporting teachers in managing heightened anxieties about child care and protection. Significantly, these participants stressed the importance of not moving too quickly to provide teachers with

quick fix technical solutions, that is, an explicit list of do's and don'ts in relation to touching children.

P1: ... I think we need to look at where is it appropriate to touch and what is the purpose of touch, it is more like exploring that and talking with principals or senior teachers so that the teacher has got a practice framework. ... So within the context of a school, the school might have a philosophy with a theoretical as well as a practical framework, which says, we believe touching is appropriate and this is the way it is done, these are the occasions it is done etc, etc. So if touching is done in a way that is outside that, that's when someone can be called to explain, so ok do you realise what you have done, it is outside of the framework, stuff like that. So you have got the positive guidelines framed, what can be done and then at the same time explains what can't be done

By contrast, participants from other organisations emphasised the need for more explicit guidelines and definitions about appropriate and inappropriate touch.

P4: ... sometimes we will run seminars where we give people further guidance in relation to how they might interact with students. For example, I have got a few points I might use, I like to say to people these are things you won't use in your daily teaching but it might give you something to think about. One might be, that wherever possible that especially male teachers, should not be in a room with a single student in certain circumstances, and maybe highlight say male teachers and adolescent female students and vice versa – female secondary teachers with adolescent male students, where there is just one student and one teacher.. ... We have other hints, we don't publish them as such, but we obviously have some suggestions, which generally speaking may not be required by every teacher, so we start from the point of view of, use your professional common sense in terms of approaching students.

Theme Four: Dealing with Teacher Anxieties

Again, only those participants working in organisations specifically geared to child advocacy and/or student protection talked about strategies and support mechanisms to assist teachers in their day-to-day pedagogic work. The emphasis by Participant 1 was on the emotional labour of teaching. For this participant, teaching was about relationship building and therefore necessitated enormous emotional work, and yet little attention was paid to supporting teachers in this area. Heightened anxieties about touching children were thus viewed as new forms of emotional work – teachers needed to rethink, renegotiate relationships with children/students. And this emotional work needed to be taken seriously with the provision of support staff and implementation of support strategies. Solitary teaching was no longer feasible. New partnerships and networks had to be forged by teachers to engage with the changing ecology of childhood, and the new emotional demands of pedagogic work. Support for such emotional work could not be effectively undertaken with a one-off professional development workshop, but needed to be conducted on a day-to-day or at least weekly basis.

P1: My view about teaching... is that we do not support our teachers enough. What I mean by that is, take our staff here, our staff does a lot of high emotional labour and I think teaching is high emotional labour. And what we expect is that the teachers get on and do their job without some of the appropriate social and emotional support to do that. So there is here for example, regular supervision, professional supervision, management supervision, whatever of each of our staff that occurs on a weekly basis. We have group supervision; we

have external supervisors who come in once a month for the whole group, they work through issues. We actively encourage every person here to have some sort of external supervisor as well, so they can talk about things, about the organisation that doesn't have an impact on their employment. So we try and do all those things to reduce the impact of the emotional labour. My views of teachers are that, that's not done, that's not encouraged ...generally teachers go to work - do their job and go home. And they don't have that collegiality, support and sharing of the emotional burden.

R: *... in a way teachers are in a new collegiality based on fear of, or the understanding if I am with colleagues I can't be accused of inappropriate conduct...*

P1: *Sure, well I think I was talking about more than just safety; it is more about the protection of the emotional state of teachers. So it is looking at, if you have got a teacher who is stressed then they are more likely to do things that are inappropriate or damaging both to themselves and their children. Whereas if we were to be able to support teachers in that highly emotional labour then that is going to keep them happy, keep them teaching longer, giving them more satisfaction and all that sort of thing.*

R: *It is not just the same as gripping on to the person nearby.*

P1: *That is another element of it and also by having more of that reflective practice, by teachers looking at their emotional life and all that sort of jazz. What that does, is it makes us think about teachers' theoretical framework and what's important in the way they go about doing their teaching and the way they interact with their pupils. If they do something, which is inappropriate, it gives them an opportunity in a structured way to reflect on what they did so they can change it for next time. So it is trying to protect them in other ways.*

It could be argued that Participant 1 was concerned with the emotional labour of reflective practice – what work could reflective practice do in terms of changing teacher professional judgements, that is, constituting ‘a different way of feeling, another sensibility’ (Deleuze cited in Worsham, 2001: 229). The use of the term emotion here refers to the ‘tight braid of affect and judgement, socially and historically constructed and bodily lived, through which the symbolic takes hold of and binds the individual, in complex and contradictory ways, to the social order and its structure of meanings’ (Worsham, 2001: 232). From this perspective, schools can be understood as ‘pedagogies of emotion’ which locate and anchor us in a particular way of life (Worsham, 2001: 232). If we are committed to ‘real individual and social change’ then reflective work must occur ‘at the affective level, not only to reconstitute the emotional life of the individual, but also, and more importantly, to restructure the feeling or mode that characterizes an age’ – moral panic surrounding the vulnerability of children in a globalized networked society (Worsham, 2001: 233). Our most ‘urgent political and pedagogical tasks’ then become ‘the fundamental re-education of the emotion’ – our feelings and sensibilities about new ways of caring for, and protecting children during a period of rapid social and technological change (Worsham, 2001: 233). Increasingly the responsibility for this emotional work is placed on schools, as the nuclear family and other social institutions for the care and protection of children are weakened or break down. And yet, teachers are provided with little support or assistance in undertaking this increased emotional work or labour. In the formation of new social structures to replace the withering of old

patriarchal structures – due attention must be given to supporting the ‘pedagogies of emotion’.

The points raised by Participant 1 about supporting, and indeed scaffolding the emotional labour of teaching, were also raised by Participant 2. However, Participant 2 focussed specifically on the strategies used in workshops to deal with teachers’ emotions and feelings in regard to touching children. So for example, Participant 2 argued that in workshops they encourage:

...teachers (to talk) about their own feelings and values and try to build up a bit of an awareness about themselves and why they may be seeking to give a child a hug and all that sort of stuff, so that people are consciously aware of their own interactions and the power imbalance between their relationships and children. And to be aware of their internal process, quite often it is a need being met, there might not be anything criminal in it, or any bad type of intention, but be aware of that and why you think it is appropriate to give that child a touch now. ... we try to get our teachers to think about that, about what it means to the child to be touched.

The crucial point however, is that the work undertaken by Participant 2 was not likely to be effective if it was only offered as a one-off professional development exercise. Exploring the emotional states of teachers, and then supporting the emotional labour of teaching requires investment of time and human resources – it needs to be an on-going activity which requires extensive pedagogic labour. Long term change necessitates changes to feelings and sensibilities and thus professional judgements of teachers.

In summary, the policy officers talked about teachers’ heightened anxieties about pedagogic work in the context of new child care and protection legislation and policies. Specifically, four major themes emerged in the interview discussions, namely, (1) children’s rights discourses – positive and negative uses; (2) the distinction between positive and negative aspects of risk, and the notion of significant harm; (3) appropriate touch and consent to touch; and (4) technical and emotional support for pedagogic work. These four themes point to the democratising of relations as tradition loosens its hold, as well as the reflective questioning of all experts and expert knowledge systems in late modernity (see Giddens, 2000).

Risk, Trust and Anxiety – Design New Systems/Processes for the Care of Children

The changed character or place of tradition (teacher as authority), and the rise of social reflexivity (questioning all knowledge systems and experts) has at least three significant consequences for the changing ecology of childhood:

First, relationships have to be made and sustained much more actively than was the case three or four decades ago, let alone in previous periods of history. This is again connected to the changed character of tradition and the rise of social

reflexivity. ... Second, in the areas of marriage and the family we now live in a society in which for the first time not just men and women, but men, women and children, are equals before the law - and are much more equal on a substantial level than formerly was the case. Relations between equals, have to be negotiated. They depend upon active trust. Third, many contemporary relationships are formed largely through dialogue; they have no other anchor (Giddens & Pierson, 1998: 135-136).

In these new times, teachers must be conscious not only of what they don't know, the 'not knowing', and the anxieties produced by lack of knowledge, but also of their 'not wanting to know', anxieties produced by being touched by certain types of knowledge. If teachers are to be assisted in making appropriate professional judgements in relation to the care and protection of children then they must be supported in the emotional labour of teaching. This requires engagement with new knowledge – and working through both what teachers don't know (the not knowing), as well as what they actively refuse to know (the not wanting to know).

The disappearance of young Daniel Morcombe in the summer of 2003 was tragic. As a community we still don't know what happened on that fateful day. Collectively we were forced to face-up to some awful thoughts. What type of people prey on children? Why couldn't a young child be protected from potential danger?

These issues about 'the not knowing' – imagining potential dangers to children; having and holding onto awful thoughts about the type of community we are constituting; and addressing what we as individuals and as a collective group (community) find difficult to know ('not wanting to know') are central to the framing of knowledge about child care and protection.

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1. I am using the term community here to refer to imagined notions of community – people who may never have met Daniel in person or his parents, but now feel empathy, concern, as part of a imaginary collective – 'parents', 'citizens', 'professionals' who have joined in local, national and global conversations about child abduction, protection and care (see Appadurai, 1996).
 2. In Australia, in recent years child care and protection have become an explicit concern of state education departments. Thus for example, the New South Wales Department of School Education document on Child Protection (1997: 1) states:

Community Expectations:

The community has clear expectations of its schools in matters relating to child protection and abuse. It expects that its children, while at school, will be protected from all forms of abuse including sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect. It expects that children, while at school, will be taught how to protect themselves and to seek help if they are concerned about abuse. The community supports programs which give children the skills to develop positive, non-coercive relationships.

Similarly, Education Queensland, the state department of education in Queensland has produced a number of policy statements on child protection. For example, the Health and Safety HS-17: Child Protection Statement in the Department of Education Manual (Education Queensland, 2000: 2) states:

Children must be protected from all forms of harm, including bullying, harassment and intimidation which is based on gender, culture or ethnicity, or on any impairment the person may have. ...

Employees must ensure their behaviour towards and relationships with children reflect the highest standards of care for children, are not unlawful, and comply with the conduct requirements prescribed in the Code of Conduct and Guidelines for Ethical Behaviour applicable to Education Queensland employees.

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