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SUBJECT CHILD:

The everyday experiences of a group of small town
Aotearoa/New Zealand children.

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This study required a considerable level of input from the eighteen children who participated as research subjects. These children welcomed me into their lives and added my requirements, in terms of the activities I needed them to complete for the research, into already busy lives. I am deeply grateful for their efforts and for the positive welcome they always gave me when I worked with them. I would like to thank them for not only sharing their lives with me for the twelve months of fieldwork but also for my return visits to check out my interpretations. Without them the project could not have been completed. I would also like to acknowledge the generosity of their parents and the school for allowing me access to these children, and also for fitting my needs into their busy schedules.

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Jackie Sanders, 2004

Abstract

This thesis presents an ethnographic account of everyday life for eighteen healthy and safe, small town, Aotearoa/New Zealand children aged between ten and eleven years. It undertakes a social constructionist analysis of five domains of the children's lives; self and identity, their relationships with each other, their relationships with adults, time and space, and safety and risk. These domains reflect the intersection between the children's own lives and their wider contexts. The approach taken is consistent with the new social studies of childhood perspective that has been articulated over the past 15-20 years. This approach, developed in response to a perceived over-determinism in the developmental accounts of childhood, brings to the foreground the need to document more fully children's standpoints.

The children held a sense of themselves as good people and their thoughts about the future, relationships and themes of stability were prominent areas of self-development for them. Their friendships provided important social and emotional resources. Making and sustaining friendships involved delicate processes of positioning and while they provided emotional sustenance they could also be a source of confusion and anxiety. Intense friendships were important for both boys and girls. Relationships with adults were critical and time was an important component of good relationships.

The children thought about time in a variety of ways, but the linear progression of time from the present out to the future was not a strong component of this. Home was important place to the children, home as stability, as a place for time with parents and for free time were prominent themes. It was also a place of self-care for a number of the children. School time was experienced as time to play with friends and socialise, and schoolwork time. Social time was more prominent in the children's thinking than work time. Global discourses about risk and safety played a powerful role in influencing the ways in which the children spent their time, particularly the ways in which they utilised public spaces.

The children were keen to participate in the research and were insightful social commentators demonstrating a passionate interest in being able to express their views and to think about the way that different dimensions of their social worlds influenced the things they were able to do.

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- Chapter One -

Introduction



Animals and children tell the truth, they never lie.

Which one is more human?

There's a thought now, you decide.



So sang the group *Savage Garden* during 2001/02. *The Animal Song* was in many ways an unremarkable song and it went the way of similar songs in popular culture, being played intensely for a while and then fading from memory. However this phrase, possibly unwittingly, highlighted the ambivalence that surrounds our cultural paradigms about childhood, and it also seemed to rather poignantly summarise the history of adult thinking about children (see, for instance, Heywood 2001; Hill and Tisdall 1997; Lee 2001; Lesko 2001; Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers 1992; Zornado 2000).

This chapter elaborates upon the two layers of thinking that gave rise to the topic chosen for this thesis. It begins by discussing matters at a structural level that prompted me to consider the ways in which society thinks about and deals with children. The ways in which two key pieces of legislation construe what it means to be a child are discussed as examples of the contradictory discourses about children and childhood. I then move to consider how my own personal and professional thinking about children, as a parent and a family researcher, evolved over the time when I was undertaking this study. In many ways, my personal and professional point of departure was the same as that of the legislation in Aotearoa/New Zealand. That is, I maintained a somewhat unclear and contradictory position about the extent to which children were similar to or different from adults and what such similarities or differences might mean in everyday terms. However, by critically addressing the assumptions I brought to my daily interactions with my own children and

those I worked with as a researcher, I moved to a markedly different standpoint; one that recognised the complexity and contradiction suggested by *Savage Garden*, but which concluded that a child-centred perspective¹ provided a viable strategy for advancing our understanding of children's experiences and childhood more generally. Before exploring these matters, however, the research topic is outlined in order to provide a context for this discussion.

The research topic

This study seeks:

1. To provide an ethnographic account of the everyday experiences of a group of healthy and safe, small town, Aotearoa/New Zealand children, aged between ten and eleven years. This account is informed by a 'new social studies of childhood' framework across several domains identified as a result of both local data collection and a review of the literature
2. To generate a locally embedded understanding of the experience of childhood for these children
3. To draw conclusions about what these experiences mean in terms of broader discourses of children and childhood
4. To consider the implications of these findings for the ways that adults relate to children both at a personal and at a structural level.

The research context – structural issues

As noted above, *Savage Garden's* chorus highlights the contested nature of childhood and as Valentine (1996, p. 581) has succinctly suggested, throughout history children have been seen variously as "angels" or "devils". These contradictory understandings flow through into everyday discourses about children and childhood and inform both policy and practice in a wide range of domains. This ambiguity, conflict and contradiction not only characterises our daily interactions with children and the thinking that underpins this, but also our political and policy approach to them, as well as our theorising and research around children (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 1-5). Our relational practices are embedded in sets of socio-cultural beliefs about what it means to be a child (and by implication, what it

¹ That is, an approach which places priority upon actively involving and listening to children's own accounts of their experiences and then acting in relation to that information.

means to be an adult) and many of these beliefs are crystallised in institutional practices and the many pieces of legislation that define what constitutes a child² in markedly different ways.

This section considers two examples of Aotearoa/New Zealand legislation that define children and childhood in very different ways. Touching on the debates that have taken place over these statutes draws attention to the challenges we face in trying to create frameworks that balance adult and child interests and that consistently recognise children's need for protection at the same time as advancing their participation and involvement. These pieces of legislation both came to prominence as I worked on this study. While the children who participated in my research were not subject to abuse or neglect, and so in a sense neither piece of legislation directly touched their lives, it was difficult to ignore the fact that many of their peers were influenced by these Acts³. The contradictory definitions of what it means to be a child, reflected in these Acts, of course, were a part of daily reality for all children in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

In 2001 and again in 2003 the New Zealand Labour Government chose not to repeal Section 59 of the Crimes Act (1964⁴). This legislation allows for the physical punishment of children by their parents (or adults acting in loco parentis) on the grounds that at times children require physical punishment to assist them with their growing up. After much deliberation, and advice to the contrary from the Minister of Social Welfare and officials, the Minister of Justice, (Hon. Phil Goff) announced that having surveyed 1000 parents and finding that a majority wanted to keep the right to physically punish, the government would retain the status quo⁵. A cynical view of this decision would suggest that having surveyed adults it was clear that repeal of the legislation was electorally unpopular; there were no

² Even a casual examination of the way in which children are defined in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand law will reveal contradictory criteria used to assign child status. Consider, for instance, the different points at which maturity and/or personal responsibility is assumed in the age of consent laws for adolescent females, the age at which a driving licence can be obtained, the age at which the purchase of liquor is permitted, the age at which young people are permitted to leave school, and the age at which parental income is no longer considered relevant for the purposes of having independent access to tertiary funding. All these pieces of legislation set the point of 'maturity' and/or 'personal responsibility' at different ages.

³ Similarly, while the children in this study were well-cared for, the same could not be said for many of their peers. For instance, in 2002 it was noted that 30% of the children in this country were living in poverty (Blaiklock et al. 2002) and a UNICEF report identified that Aotearoa/New Zealand was third among 27 OECD nations for child homicide (UNICEF 2003).

⁴ Although towards the end of 2003 the Government did signal that it intended to repeal this piece of legislation sometime in the future.

⁵ Interview with Hon. Phil Goff, Minister of Justice, Morning Report, National Radio, 25 February, 2003.

votes in it. More important, however, was the fact that over this three-year period no-one in the Government attempted to ascertain children's views on this issue despite having a ministry of state (the Ministry of Youth Affairs) established to encourage just this sort of participation, nor to publicly debate why it was that parents required more legal protection when relating to their children, than they required when relating to each other⁶. This process of legislative review draws our attention to the critical issues children face in being heard and to having their concerns recognised as legitimate and distinct from those of adults (see, for instance, Smith, Taylor and Gollop 2000; Stafford et al. 2003). Not only are they not voters, but the adults charged with making their world a better place see no problem in continuing with a policy framework that accords the family pet greater protection than children have⁷. Qvortrup (1994b, p. 4) asserts that children are seen as "human becomings" rather than human beings; in other words as not quite human yet. The dominant view of children as morally incompetent has been challenged (Hill, Layborn and Borland 1996; Mayall 2001a). However, it is this sort of view that has fuelled adult resistance internationally to repealing legislation similar to Section 59. Valentine (1996, p. 587) contests the developmental account of childhood because of its equation of social with physical development and the related belief that age and stage work together in a more or less neat fashion:

The reality once again is that many children have to demonstrate maturity and responsibility at an early age...; whereas some adults are perpetually immature.

The justification for Section 59 is that adults need to retain the capacity to physically restrain or correct children because they lack competence. Hitting is considered to be an important corrective for children who lack the knowledge and capacity to control themselves⁸. Comparing the developmental account with the new social studies of childhood account, Mayall (1996, p. 65) contends:

⁶ Here I am referring to the fact that the law provides protection to adults in situations where they are exposed to physical violence, yet Section 59 of the Crimes Act (1964) expressly allows parents to use a level of force to correct their children that could constitute an act of assault if inflicted on another adult.

⁷ The Animal Welfare Act (1999) provides animals with legal protection of an order that is not currently available to children when their parents seek to physically reprimand them.

⁸ For instance, in accepting Section 59 as a defence, in 2000 a jury in Napier dismissed a case against a father who had lain his 8 year old son face down on a bed, removed his trousers and hit him repeatedly on the buttocks and back of his legs with a piece of kindling wood. [Queen v M. T002487, District Court, Napier, verdict 21.02.01]

The psychological approach is, ultimately, concerned with the promise children show, how children develop towards adulthood, rather than with the here and now. From a sociological point of view, we are concerned with the here and now, with children participating and contributing now...

While Section 59 perpetuates the view that children need considerable and significant input from adults to become competent, the Children, Young Persons' and their Families' Act (1989) takes a different view of children, their competence and capacity to act intentionally. Under this Act (Section 272), should a child over the age of ten commit a significant crime, they will find themselves held to account for their actions as if they were, indeed, an adult. So clearly, when the occasion warrants it, key social institutions are willing to accept that children do have the capacity to act intentionally and with mature forethought. These examples highlight the very different senses of being a child that underpin our everyday working models of childhood. These conflicting views of children, which co-exist side by side in discourse, have significant consequences for how research agendas, policy and practice concerning children have traditionally been framed. Importantly, for research, the view of children as not competent has meant that historically they have not been considered as valid and reliable research subjects and so knowledge has been generated on and about them, but not usually with them as active research participants (Butler and Shaw 1996).

Building on from these general observations about our conflicting social understandings of children and childhood, it is also important to explain the wider context in which I worked upon this thesis. If anything, this project was an attempt to understand a particular set of childhood experiences that were located in a particular place and time. Context is therefore important. During the course of this study several important things happened which had relevance for both this project and for our life as a nation, as parents and as children. In close succession during 2000, two very young children came to public attention because they had been subjected to horrific beatings and other physical and sexual abuse. One died, the other spent a long time in hospital and now lives with significant disabilities that are attributable to the beatings. Aside from the absolute horror of these incidents, their significance lay in the fact that it became clear that these were not isolated incidents, aberrations of some sort. Since 2000, more children have hit our headlines as a result of abuse at the hands of the adults charged with the responsibility for their care. The ensuing

public debate has focused upon a search for understanding, and for apportioning blame, for knowledge of causes and ideas about how this situation could be changed. Interestingly, Section 59 of the Crimes Act was publicly debated throughout this period⁹ but a linkage was **never** made between the values espoused in the legislation and the behaviours of the adults charged with caring for children.

This reality, then, formed the backdrop against which I tried to connect and understand the experiences of the eighteen safe and healthy children involved in my study. At the time the children reported in the media were being abused, I was observing children in classrooms, at play, at swimming lessons, playing rugby and netball. Because of this, I was regularly able to sit and watch adults and children managing their relationships and interaction in a variety of ways; some creative and empowering for children, some not. While doing this I reflected upon the differences and similarities between normal and abusive adult-child interaction.

Reflecting upon the possible reasons why violence against children seemed so prevalent, and watching adults attempting to build task focused and productive relationships with children, I began to wonder what there was in our everyday lives with children that made it easier for the extreme abuses to occur. I came to think of these not as isolated incidents but as one end of a continuum of relationship possibilities. From that point I began to look for other possible types of relationships that allowed children and adults greater scope for constructive engagement. So part of this thesis is inevitably a search for understanding of the ways we might be more effective as adults in constructing expansive sorts of relationship possibilities for the next generation of parents, teachers, coaches and others who will influence the life course of future children. It is also, importantly, an attempt to document the interpretations children themselves have of their relationships with adults and their experiences of their world more generally.

⁹ In the middle of 2003, another child was murdered by an adult responsible for her care. At this time Aotearoa/New Zealand was also the subject of a critical United Nations report on the status of children which particularly drew attention to the difficulties posed by Section 59 in relation to children's rights. Under significant international pressure, the Labour Government announced that it believed that Section 59 would be repealed, but not yet. The Prime Minister, Helen Clark indicated that such reform was probably two years away, placing it sometime after the next general election.

The research context – personal and professional issues

Personal issues

While there were functional reasons for embarking upon this project, my choice of topic represented a mix of personal and professional interests and, as noted in the preceding section, some quite troubling reflections on the nature of my society and the position of children within it. Initially I posed the question: is becoming eleven significant for children? My sons were rapidly approaching this age and decisions needed to be made about schools. I was thus becoming very interested in what was available educationally for children in this age group and in how these educational possibilities might link in with my children's other needs and interests.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand there are several options available for children in the middle years of schooling. Full primary schools offer education for children right up to the point at which they move to high school (at about age thirteen, which is year nine of their schooling). Others offer primary education between ages five and ten (years one to six). After this children may attend an intermediate which provides schooling for years seven and eight (approximately ages eleven and twelve) and, less often, there is the option of attending a middle school which caters for children between years seven and ten (approximately ages eleven to fourteen). The intermediate and full primary options were available to my children.

As we approached the transition point, my eldest son asked if he could go to the intermediate school we passed every day on our way to the city. However, this was not the school I first approached as I began to investigate options. The school I initially approached was a full primary school. The idea of keeping my children together at the same school for as long as possible appealed to me, and I also felt that the presence of younger children offered by the full primary school might mean a more gentle introduction into 'being big' which my son's view of turning eleven held the promise of. My son's view, however, was entirely different. When I reported back on my market research, he said:

But I don't want to be around babies anymore. I want to go to the intermediate where there are only eleven and twelve year olds.

His statement did two things for me in terms of this research. It suggested that my initial topic might be a valuable area of inquiry as he clearly felt himself to be at an important point. But more importantly, it threw into stark relief the possibility that children see the world through very different eyes. I had not understood the fullness of his preference; it was not just any local school. It was **that** local school, the one that ‘big kids’ went to. It was the one he had looked at every day on his way to the city. It was the school I barely noticed as I stopped at the pedestrian crossing. This was the school that had meaning for him. I had not listened, or if I had listened, I had not understood. The words used by my son to talk about the school he wished to attend had other meanings layered behind them that I only found out about, in this case, by making mistakes.

A later conversation with my son pushed my thinking further. During the summer holiday I tried repeatedly to encourage him to ride his bike with me on the route between home and his new school. In exasperation, I demanded to know why he would not co-operate in what seemed to me to be a perfectly reasonable project. His response was:

It is just typical of adults. Kids don't want to prepare. Can't you understand that I can work it out when the time comes, I don't want to think about next year until it happens.

This raised for me the worry that maybe issues of transition were more adult than child concerns and that therefore my initial focus on the transition to eleven might be of little relevance to the children. I very much wanted my study to be child-centred and so a topic that was relevant to them was very important.

At the same time as we were exploring the educational options for our eldest son, his school asked us to give consent for him to participate in someone else's PhD project. I was asked to allow him to participate in a series of tests designed to identify how children learned maths. I readily agreed to his participation (it was notable that my son's consent was not sought by this researcher) being keen to support another person's research in much the same way I was hoping the parents of the children to be in my study would support me. I spoke to the researcher at the outset and asked what was to happen to the results, would we learn anything from our child's participation and why was he not seeking consent from the children? The researcher was surprised to hear me express an interest in the results of

the maths testing, and genuinely startled that anyone could seriously expect a ten year old child to give consent. He suggested that the class teacher would tell me anything if they thought I needed to know. But the researcher himself saw no need to communicate anything to my son, who was after all being 'tested', nor to me, a parent endlessly fascinated with my child's growing abilities. I discovered later that my son did not even know when he actually participated in this research. As a result of this experience I made several decisions that helped with the development of the methodology and the process of engaging with the children for my own study:

1. The children, as well as their parents, would consent to participation in the research
2. The children would help set the agenda for the research, and they could decide what they would and would not do for me
3. The research would involve the children in as direct a way as possible, so that they knew when they were participating and why they were being asked to do different things
4. I would keep parents informed during the fieldwork so that they knew what their children were doing when they were with me
5. As much as possible I would share the results of my work with the children during the fieldwork so that they could see how their participation flowed into my project, and how critical their participation was to my work
6. I would seek the children's consent to use materials they had shared with me when I wanted to use it in public.

Professional issues

The professional dimension of the project grew out of my work as a child and family researcher and as a senior manager at Barnardos New Zealand, a major provider of family and early childhood services. For a number of years my research projects had focused on the issues faced by whanau¹⁰/families who were struggling to meet their children's needs and the types of services that made a difference to these struggles. While this work was always fascinating and satisfying, I did often wonder what life was like for children who did not live in stressed and stretched whanau/families. The research I was undertaking also began to gradually change from an exclusive focus in the early 1990s upon parents as the

¹⁰ Whanau is the Maori word for family. Such words are used, where relevant, throughout this thesis in recognition of the dual cultural heritage of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

representatives of what happened within whanau/families, to the recognition that children and young people also had important information to communicate about how whanau/family life worked. In reading around my research topics, I gradually became aware of 'the new social studies of childhood', studies that seemed (like mine) to be concerned about the way our research appeared to ignore, problematise or segment childhood. A particular turning point for me was the work of Hill and Tisdall (1997), which laid out so clearly the issues that had been troubling me, and provided compelling new ways of thinking about children and childhood. The new social studies of childhood highlighted three important matters which came to form a set of central reference points for me as I finalised my research proposal:

1. Childhood was a permanent social position worthy of study in its own right, rather than a transitory phase of interest only in terms of what it contributed to adulthood. Understanding of everyday, unexceptional and untroubled childhood is required in addition to knowledge of the exceptional, troubled and problematic
2. Family/whanau was more complex and needed narratives other than simply those of parents
3. Children and young people were competent social actors who could and wanted to contribute to the generation of knowledge.

Graue and Walsh (1998, p. 99-100) also propose that we approach children as competent, active research subjects who have a vital contribution to make to our knowledge:

All kids are smart. They know how to get along in the world they inhabit. They know what works there, what does not work. The only way to get as smart as they are about their world is to learn from them. All kids make sense. What may appear from the outside to be dysfunctional activity, from the inside, to those involved, makes sense. The only way to understand how these actions make sense is to listen and observe very carefully.

As I prepared my proposal I moved into schools to find children to talk to about my topic, and the time-present (Mayall 2001b) focus of children's frameworks became clearly apparent, as did their capacity to be independent, active research participants. The more I

talked to children, the more the sense of childhood as nothing more than ‘ages and stages’ began to recede and to be replaced with a sense of childhood being lived in a particular place and time. The goal of the research then became to produce a situated account of the everyday experiences of childhood for a group of children who were living in relatively untroubled circumstances.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured in the following way:

Chapter One

This chapter provides an introduction to the topic of the thesis and the motivations that underpinned it. It outlines some salient issues in the structural context as well as in my personal and professional life that came together to focus the study.

Chapters Two - Four

These three chapters provide an overview of the empirical, theoretical and methodological aspects of the thesis. Chapters Two and Three outline the thinking processes that underpinned the project. The new social studies of childhood form the focus for Chapter Two. Here discussion highlights the forces that gave rise to this new paradigm, and provides an overview of key thematic areas given attention by contemporary writers.

Chapter Three discusses epistemological and theoretical matters, and in so doing, focuses upon social constructionism and interpretivism. This chapter also identifies my ontological positions and the values that I bring to this research.

Chapter Four addresses matters to do with the research process. The ethnographic approach adopted is outlined as are ethics and issues of difference, methods of data generation and analysis. Specific research methods are considered and an outline is provided of the procedures used to select participants, generate data and complete the analysis.

Chapters Five - Eight

These chapters explore the data generated during the fieldwork. They address key domains around which investigations in the new social studies of childhood are commonly structured. Chapter Five considers the children who participated in the research, the

community they lived in, their families, their interests and the ways that they thought about themselves and the wider world. Chapter Six addresses the children's experience of space and time, while Chapter Seven considers the children's reflections on their relationships with each other, and Chapter Eight explores the way in which they experienced relationships with adults.

Chapters Nine and Ten

These two chapters provide an analysis of data presented in Chapters Five-Eight. They seek to align what is learned from attending to the experiences of the eighteen children who shared time with me, with the experiences of other children reported in the literature. They identify points of convergence and divergence with the literature and considers the implications of these findings for both the nature and experience of contemporary childhood and also for the nature of relations between adults and children. The chapters start with a discussion of material relating directly to children and then move out to consider relationships and experiences in wider contexts. Chapter Nine focuses upon self and relationships, while Chapter Ten highlights matters to do with time and space. As would be expected, there is a considerable degree of overlap between these two chapters and the distinction between them has been somewhat arbitrary (Holloway and Valentine 2000, p. 774). The linkages and overlaps reflect the way in which childhood is a socially constructed position and the ways in which the children worked with both their own unique selves and the layered social contexts of their daily lives. The separation between self and relationships, and time and space, and the ordering of discussion beginning with the children and then moving out to their intersections with wider contexts is not intended to imply that the children's experiences, or even the material they generated for this project were so simply and easily divided up. These divisions have been made to facilitate discussion.

Conclusion

Chapter Eleven draws conclusions about the implications of the findings for the nature and position of children and adults as members of society. This discussion attends to both the everyday nature of their relationships and experiences, and also to wider policy and practice implications of the findings. It also reflects upon the research process in terms of methodological learning gained from the project and suggests areas for further research.

- Chapter Two -

The new social studies of childhood

Introduction

This chapter provides the conceptual framework for the thesis. It discusses the key works that provided academic reference points as I developed the proposal, and which then guided me as I completed the fieldwork and analysis. The term ‘the new social studies of childhood’ (Holloway and Valentine 2000; James, Jenks and Prout 1998) has been used to refer to a diverse group of works that view childhood as a social construction, and thus which seek to explore particular manifestations of childhood. In doing this, they attend to both the ways that individual children experience the status of child and also of childhood as a broad social category in particular societies at particular times. While the chapter concentrates upon those works that fit under the rubric of the new social studies of childhood, it also draws upon other works that either contributed to the development of my thinking or provided a counterpoint to my work.

Discussion begins with an overview of the emergence of the new social studies of childhood, a relatively new field of academic interest. An overarching theme in this research, and within the new social studies of childhood more generally, is the impact of adult power upon the ways that children experience their worlds and the way that they come

to understand their positions within it. The particular ways in which adult-child relations are configured are a significant focus of these new childhood studies. These matters are considered first in the following discussion. This is followed by a discussion of the concept of a 'generational order', which is a new way of theorising relationships between adults and children, and for considering the position of childhood within the social structure more generally. This concept is seen as being of a similar order as the concepts of gender and class. In these three sections, I also touch upon issues to do with the moral competence of children. This is a matter which is central to the debates about children's position and experiences, touching as it does on their capacity to participate as active agents in the social structure and to contribute substantively to debates about moral and ethical issues (Hill et al. 1996; Matthews 1980; 1984; Thomson and Holland 2002). Discussion then moves to peer relationships and friendships. Following this, the focus shifts to the two key institutions within which children spend the bulk of their time; the whanau/family and the school. Consideration is next given to the ways that children use space and time. The final section focuses upon the way in which broader patterns of cultural, social, political and economic change influence the way in which childhood is experienced in different places and times.

The emergence of the new social studies of childhood

While children have been the objects of research since the 1840s (Alldred 1998, p. 150), children as subjects are relative newcomers as a focus of academic interest (Christensen and Prout 2002, p. 480-481). As Qvortrup (1994a) notes, children's needs and interests have historically been thought of as synonymous with those institutions, such as the whanau/family and school, in which they spend much of their time. As a result, they have rarely constituted the unit of analysis in social research. When they have been the focus, it has often been because they have drawn attention to themselves in some way (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998; Thorne 1987; Williamson 1996). This has meant that knowledge about children tends to problematise childhood; to generate a sense of childhood as exceptional or unusual. For example, there is a significant body of research on both 'gifted' and 'deviant' children, and relatively less on children who exhibit neither of these characteristics.

The dawn of the 20th century, when traditional theories of childhood were first articulated, can be seen as a critical time for the establishment of the disciplines of education and psychology, and also as a time when post-enlightenment, scientific thinking began to assume a dominant position in both academic and everyday discourse (Butler 1996). Borland et al. (1998) in their study of middle childhood suggest that traditional developmental and psychological perspectives provided limited recognition for the everyday character of individual childhoods¹¹ and instead conceptualised children as passing through a series of typical stages. This developmental account suggested that in each stage certain features predominated, which meant that children in any particular stage were assumed to be more like each other than they were to children in other stages. Each stage also provided a foundation upon which the next stage would be built. Further, these theories assumed that children as a group had more in common with each other than they had with adults. Much of the knowledge generated here was produced under controlled, experimental circumstances and ignored the experiential and meaning component of children's lives¹². Rather than conceptualising childhood as a state of being in its own right (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 9; Hill, Laybourn and Borland 1996, p. 130), such works have viewed childhood as principally preparation for adulthood.

To the extent that they are concerned more with the identification of unifying principles than with individual variation, these approaches have also focused upon the search for the universal child, or a definition of the parameters of "normative childhood" (Mason and Falloon 2001, p. 102). Further, work in these traditions has also tended to exclude "children as knowers" (Mason and Falloon 2001, p. 102), emphasising instead adult interpretation of events and experience. Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (2001, p. 1-2) argue that traditionally

¹¹ It should be noted here, that, as Hill and Tisdall (1997, p.11) point out, there is a relatively minor tradition within psychology that focuses upon the social worlds and daily lives of children. Some of the issues which characterise this field are also discussed by Morrow and Richards (1996). Work in this field tends to emphasise the strengths and abilities of children (see, for example, Garling and Valsiner 1985) in contrast to the focus upon limitations which characterises the work of those exploring ages and stages.

¹² Although not all work undertaken in these two traditions is of this nature. For instance, Piaget's key works involved quite small samples and were undertaken from a broadly interpretivist standpoint (Hill and Tisdall, 1997). However, he nonetheless conceptualised childhood as a clear progression through a series of stages that led to adulthood.

childhood has been approached as if its status was stable and self-evident yet, they suggest, this is far from the case. Their review of the literature indicates that the status of childhood is not inevitable, biologically or socially. They assert that childhood is a social status, the precise features of which differ across contexts, cultures and times. Other writers (Heywood 2001; Lesko 2001; Valentine 1996) draw attention to the contested and contradictory nature of childhood and suggest that, rather than searching for universals, research should be exploring the diversity and complexity that characterises childhood.

Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn (1998, p. 692) writing from within the new social studies of childhood, draw attention to the impact the developmental paradigm and its search for the ‘universal child’ has had upon the capacity of adults to understand and empathise with children’s experiences:

Traditionally social scientists conceptualised childhood primarily within the socialisation paradigm, in which children were seen as adults in the making whose experiences were only worth investigating in so far as they shaped adult attributes or life chances.

Sociology, which had provided considerable impetus for theoretical critiques of the position of marginalised groups such as women, was comparatively slow to investigate the experiences and subordination of children and the invisibility of childhood (Oakley 1994; Thome 1987). Many writers (for example, Alldred 1998; Mason and Falloon 2001; Oakley 1994; Thome 1987) have noted parallels between children’s position and the position of women. Feminist writers over many decades have argued that processes of ‘othering’ (Lunn 1997) systematically silence social groups by reframing, or redefining their experience. Similar ideologies and powerful interests have driven our understandings of children and childhood as those that influenced the position of women, with similar results. Furthermore, the two places where the children most often enact their moral competency (with friends and with family) are both in the private sphere and this exacerbates the silencing process. Mayall (2002, p. 111) argues:

The adults who know most about children's moral agency – mothers – are weakly positioned to speak for children. The power lies with psychological formulae...and with influential professionals – doctors, social workers, health visitors, teachers, the legal professions – who rely on psychological descriptions as a basis for their work on, for and with children.

Qvortrup et al. (1994) have linked the low status of children in sociology to their low status in society more generally. Children, in this sense, may be seen as the quintessential minority group, defined by and through their subordinate relationship to the dominant group (adults).

Hill and Tisdall (1997, p. 12-13) suggest that the work of Qvortrup et al. (1994) was important in establishing the extent to which children had been marginalised in adult thinking and action, pointing to the restrictions on children's access to attention, places and resources that this created. The exclusion of children was justified in developmental terms, emphasising their immaturity and dependency, and their resultant need for adult protection. However its effects were paternalistic. The idea that children are morally incompetent has now been successfully challenged, and continuing to trouble the view of children as incompetent has subsequently been a significant focus of the new works on childhood (Alderson and Goodey 1996; Hill, Laybourn and Borland 1996).

Qvortrup (1987; 1990; 1994a) and Qvortrup et al. (1994) have argued that it is important to see children as an integral part of society, not simply occupying a preparatory position. They point out that this requires a fundamental rethinking of the way in which matters as diverse as urban planning, statistical analysis and social policy construe their mandates.

The landmark work of James and Prout (1990a) emerged from these sorts of critiques of traditional approaches to the study of children and childhood. They (James and Prout 1990a, cited in Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 12) proposed a new paradigm, which included the following key features:

1. Childhood is socially constructed – it is shaped by the cultural and structural context in which particular children and adults live¹³
2. Children’s social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right
3. Children are not passive subjects of social structures and processes, but actively contribute to their own social worlds, and
4. Childhood is differentiated by factors like gender, ethnicity and class.

The early interpretive approaches (during the 1970s and 1980s) to the study of childhood analysed how adults portrayed and treated children and so, suggest Hill and Tisdall (1997, p. 12), continued the adult-oriented focus pioneered by psychology and education (see, for example, Denzin 1977; Dreitzel 1973; Jenks 1982). Despite this increased interest, however, Butler (1996, p. 2) contends that works during this period were predominantly concerned with “adult myth-making about children” rather than a genuine attempt to come to a grounded understanding about what childhood meant to children. Hill and Tisdall (1997, p. 12) argue that:

During the 1970s and 1980s, a small number of sociologists were interested in childhood, though little attention was given to children themselves and the main emphasis was on analysing how adults portrayed and treated children.

Hill and Tisdall (1997, p. 12-13) among others (see, for instance, Brannen and O’Brien 1995; Butler 1996) suggest that the beginning of the 1990s was an important period when issues for children and childhood began to assume a prominence in their own right. These new perspectives on the nature of childhood developed within a range of disciplines and converged during the 1980s and 1990s into a broadly based social constructionist perspective, which James, Jenks and Prout (1998) described as the ‘new social studies of childhood’.

¹³ For instance, in drawing on historical studies, Aries (1967) argued that medieval society had no conception of childhood.

It may be useful at this point to summarise the key differences between developmental/psychological theories of childhood and the sociological account. Hill and Tisdall (1997, p. 13) suggest the two different types of approaches can be characterised in the following ways:

Table 2.1 Differences between developmental and sociological theories of childhood

Developmental views	Sociological critique
Focus on the development of individuals as they grow older.	Focus on children as a social group with low status and power.
See childhood as biologically driven.	See childhood as socially created.
Childhood is divided into relatively fixed and universal stages.	Childhood is seen as evolving in diverse ways.
Children's thinking and behaviour are judged as part of a process leading towards adulthood.	Children's thinking, behaviour and cultures are judged and valued in their own right and on their own terms.
Children are viewed as 'deficient' in terms of adult capabilities.	Children's positive competencies are emphasised.
Young children are regarded as moulded through adult socialisation processes.	Young children are regarded as active participants in socialisation processes which are reciprocal.
Features such as age, gender, sibling status, ethnicity and social status are seen as discrete variables with consistent implications once other factors are allowed for statistically.	Features such as age, gender, sibling status, ethnicity and social status are regarded as social constructs, whose impact depends on meaning and context.

Key themes considered by the new social studies of childhood

Power

The literature talks of power as a ubiquitous feature of relationships between adults and children, while Burr (1995, p. 62-78) notes that power is a significant focus for social constructionist writing more generally. She particularly draws attention to the way in which different manifestations of power generate different sorts of social structures and processes in different contexts. It is not surprising, therefore, that it constitutes such a significant focus of thinking in the new social studies of childhood. Here, power is seen as a multi-dimensional and interactive matter rather than a one-way, linear process of adult power over children (see, for instance, Alanen 2001b; Mayall 1994a; 2001a). Punch (2001, p. 24 and 34), while recognising the greater weight of adult influence, nonetheless suggests that adult power is subject to resistance by children. She declares that children use their resourcefulness to stretch adult-imposed boundaries to limits that they find more acceptable (Punch 2001, p. 33-35). Robinson and Delahooke (2001, p. 82) agree:

Children, like others, have a continuing capacity to subvert the ways in which adult others in particular construct and deploy material objects, as well as attempt to condition how and when they may be used.

However, the extent of the boundary stretch is constrained by adult definitions of what are appropriate ways for children to behave. Mayall (2001b, p. 121) drew attention to these features of adult-child relationships when she noted that:

Children strongly voice their recognition of adult power and their mixed reactions to it, ranging from unquestioning acceptance, to tactical activities, to instances of resentful resistance. But overall, obedience and acceptance are commoner than resistance and rejection. Children say that they lack power, choice and autonomy, but that these are not components of the social status of childhood. The upsides of childhood are protection

and provision, freedom from responsibility, free time and opportunities for fun.

Mayall (1994a, p. 125) further highlighted the strongly contextual nature of power in adult-child relations. She suggested that children were constructed in different ways at home and at school, for instance, and talked of children at school as being “essentially projects for adult work” (Mayall 1994a, p. 125) rather than as individuals with particular needs, views and contributions to make. She drew attention to the overwhelming power that adults had in settings like schools to determine the quality of children’s experiences. Oldman (1994a; 1994b), taking a theoretical approach, developed the notion of children as objects for adult work. He considered childhood to be a mode of production and adult-child relations to be class relations. Because the tasks associated with raising children have progressively become adult paid work, the priorities and needs of adults, rather than children, predominate (Oldman 1994b, p. 163):

It is a big claim to make, but it amounts to saying that the quality of life enjoyed by adults is enhanced by their control over the process of growing up that constitutes the activities of childhood and that the quality of life for children as they grow up is thereby reduced. That is the nature of exploitation of one class by another.

The fact that children provide the raw material for much adult work has consequences for the nature of relationships that can be developed between these two groups. In this connection, Gersch and Nolan (1994) found that stressed teacher-pupil relationships were high on the list of factors that precipitated pupil exclusion from school, and therefore concluded that it was incorrect to assume that exclusion was always simply a result of inappropriate child behaviour. The quality of the interaction between adults and children in these situations was an important, but rarely considered, precipitator of exclusion. Of course, given the way in which schools are usually structured, the power and responsibility for defining how relationships between teachers and pupils are managed rests firmly on adult not child shoulders. However, when things go wrong in these settings children usually carry

the responsibility, and the consequences for them in terms of spoiled life chances can be very significant (Gersch and Nolan 1994).

There is clear evidence that the quality of the relationships adults create with children are a critical ingredient in the quality of the experiences that children are able to have (see, for instance, Hill and Tisdall 1997; Kovarik 1994; Phadraig 1994). The ways in which children represent these relationships provides insights into how they understand themselves (Lieblich and Josselson 1994, p. xii). Thus, the way that power relations play themselves out in the daily lives of children are often a theme that underpins discussions of children's worlds in the new social studies of childhood. In fact some authors have suggested that it is misleading to even consider home as a homogenous sort of relational context and, as an example of this, point to the very different way in which children speak of their relationships with their mothers and fathers (see, for instance, Mayall 2001b, p. 118). Adult-child relations appear to be highly differentiated and research needs to take account of this.

Generational order

While social researchers have discovered the agency of children, and as a result recognised the importance of hearing their voices as consistently different voices to those of adults, less attention has been paid to theorising this agency (Prout 2001b, p. 199). Alanen and Mayall (2001) consider that viewing adult-child relations as generational relations provides a conceptual mechanism for doing this. It is their contention that by taking a structural approach to these relationships, it becomes possible to critically analyse children's experience of their position in the social order. In much the same way that feminist analysis was advanced by defining relationships between males and females as gender relations, by viewing child-adult relations as generational relations, the social practices and institutions that create and sustain different experiences of childhood can be analysed.

The term 'generational order' is used to refer to the (Prout 2002, p. 70):

...systematic patterning of social relationships between adults and children within which children are located and constituted as a social

group. Its parallel is with other key dimensions of social differentiation such as class and gender.

Alanen (2001b, p. 11-22) suggests that childhood is constituted through the particular way in which generation is understood, in both a structural and a relational sense. The analytical task then becomes to link the individual manifestations of children's experiences of childhood to both social structures and the individual relationships they have with adults. This can be done by considering how they experience concrete relationships with specific adults in their lives and connecting these sorts of experiences to the wider institutions and social practices or contexts in which they are embedded (Edwards and David 1997).

These new approaches to understanding child-adult relations have built on Mannheim's notion of generation as a cultural phenomenon created by a group of individuals passing through the same historical period and, as a consequence, developing a common identity (Alanen 2001b, p. 14). Building on developmental frameworks, Alanen (2001b, p. 16) notes that adolescence has traditionally been identified as the critical point at which new generations are forged. She questions this assumption and asks why generational relations could not be forged when children first begin to experience relationships, rather than later in adolescence. As has already been noted, the developmental account suggests that children, by definition, lack moral competence (Alderson 1993; Hill, Laybourn and Borland 1996; Morrow and Richards 1996) and perhaps this is the reason why traditionally adolescence has been seen as the time at which generations are formed.

Alanen (2001a) explored children's representations of their position in the generational order by considering the patterning of their everyday activities. Her data indicated that their daily lives could be divided into four key domains; family, friendships, school and personal interests. Children who were strong in the family domain expressed a clear sense of themselves as children, while children strong in the other three domains were (Alanen 2001a, p. 137):

...plainly uninterested in having conversations on the topic at all, and found it difficult or irrelevant to position themselves on some generational scale.

However, Mayall (2001b, p. 117), studying nine and ten year old children in inner London, found that her participants were very clear that they were children and were comfortable with this label being applied to them. Clearly then, different children view their generational location in different ways. Furthermore, at different times and in different places particular children may experience and define this position differently. Gilligan (1999, p. 77-78), for instance, confounds this notion of generation by highlighting the different sorts of roles that grandparents and teachers can play in children's lives¹⁴. Punch (2001, p. 23), in this connection, raises the possibility that generational relations need not necessarily be framed in terms of an independent (adult)/dependent (child) dichotomy and instead proposes that they are interdependent. Thinking about children as citizens, Cockburn (1998) similarly argues for the value of conceptualising generational relations as interdependent. Allowing both parties agency in this way provides a way out of the double-bind identified by Mayall (2001b, p. 125):

To the extent that children are denied the opportunity to exercise competence, they are likely to be less competent and through processes of mutual reinforcement they are especially likely to be regarded as lacking in competence.

Understanding generational relations, then, requires attention to the reciprocal nature of relationships between adults and children, and consideration of the fluid way in which individual children will experience them depending upon the particular contexts in which they commonly engage in relationships with adults.

¹⁴ This issue is explored in more depth in Chapter Nine, Relationships between children and adults.

Children's friends and peer relations

The following section provides an overview of research relating to children's friendships and peer relations. The ambivalence about the nature and significance of these relationships is a consistent theme in writing on this topic and the discussion touches upon this matter. Consideration is also given to what the literature tells us about issues such as loneliness and loss, groups and gangs, gender patterns and popularity.

(I) THE NATURE AND MEANING OF FRIENDSHIP

Much research on children's friendships and peer relationships has considered either the outward manifestation of children's friendships (for example, Fine 1995) or the way that they contribute to development (for example, Dodge et al. 1986; Hartup 1992). Gottman (1986, p. 84), himself a developmental researcher, suggests that developmental models need to give consideration to emotional issues in research involving children. Other commentators have suggested that friendships among children can be dangerous. For instance, Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 284), in foundation work on children's social worlds, cautions us about accepting children's friendships because:

The peer group tends to undermine adult socialisation efforts and to encourage egocentrism, aggression, and anti-social behaviour.

Overall, the literature has adopted a somewhat ambivalent stance on the issues of the personal significance of friends to children and also in terms of whether or not friends play a positive role in their lives. Relatively little attention has been paid to the way that children experience these relationships. Even in the new social studies of childhood much of the focus has been upon the developmental significance of peer relationships and friendships (Robinson and Delahooke 2001). In this connection, Kovarik (1994, p. 118), citing the work of Frones (1988), draws attention to the importance of the peer group in the socialisation process and in the development of communicative competence.

Fine (1995, p. 294) pinpoints the ambiguity and tension adult theorists feel when trying to identify whether or not children's friendship patterns are reducible to external categories when he notes:

[patterns in friendship] will differ according to the friendship needs of the individual child, but this answer, though possibly correct, makes social behaviour idiosyncratic and less dependent on developmental regularities than some would admit.

Robinson and Delahooke (2001, p. 81) are clear that friendships provide important, independent resources in the development of children's identities and personhoods that are not available from other sorts of relationships. Their argument blends the more traditional developmental emphasis upon the role of childhood experiences in the creation of the emerging adult, with a new social studies of childhood framework that highlights the impact of different sorts of childhood experiences on children's everyday realities. Their work is interesting because it suggests the potential for linkages at an empirical and theoretical level between these two different perspectives on childhood.

Working within the new social studies of childhood, Borland et al. (1998, p. 26), contend that children's most significant relationships are still largely family based. However, they also recognise that friendships are important to children:

Friendship and being part of a peer group was central to living a full life and feeling good.

Rubin (1980, p. 16), contradicting Hartup (1992), suggests that friendship provides important emotional resources to children:

Children, then, provide valuable resources to one another, and these do not duplicate what is obtained from parents.

The role of adults, particularly parents, in children's friendship formation has also been explored and this work links in with the more general focus upon the way in which childhood experiences equip children to function as socially and economically productive adults. The capacity of parents to positively influence friendship choice and to model good relationship management strategies has been recognised as an important component of the emotional health of young people, and is also associated with enhanced developmental outcomes (see, for instance, Blum 2002; Dishion 1990; Steinberg, Darling and Fletcher 1995, p. 446-447; Wentzel 2002).

Brown and Gilligan (1992, p. 102) approach the matter of parental and adult involvement in children's relationships from the perspective of children's own experiences. Focusing upon the way in which girls experience these relationships, they observe that:

Although friendships can be a place for girls to experiment with strong feelings and disagreements, a place to feel painful feelings and to test truth and falsity without too great a personal risk, these girls describe how adult women – mothers and teachers – appear at times of relational conflict to mediate girls' disagreements, to protect girls' feelings.

They conclude that such mediation is usually motivated by adult concerns that girls behave in particular ways; as 'nice girls'. However, rather than assisting them with the development of their own relational styles, such intervention usually interrupts their relational learning and can undermine their capacity to enjoy interpersonal relationships and trust their own intuition. Furthermore, such mediation may, in fact, be counterproductive. Rizzo (1992, p. 102) argues that disputes between friends are an important part of friendship development and that conflict is a predictor of relationship longevity; friends who argue with each other tend to be friends that endure.

Franco and Levitt (1998) remind us that friendships make an important contribution to children's sense of themselves as valuable people. After all, they note, friends choose you as much as you choose them, but you do not get to choose your family. Being chosen, as a

friend, as a monitor, to sit a national exam, to be a house captain, to participate in a research project, makes an important contribution to the validation for children that they are worthwhile people right now. Friendships, unlike the other experiences of being chosen, however, are intensely personal and provide children with relationships they can develop autonomously. Gilligan (1999, p. 80) draws attention to the symbolic value of relationships such as friendship for children. Given the few domains of life over which children can exercise direct control (see Ganetz 1995, p. 85-87; Haudrup Christensen 2002, p. 85-87), the choice element in friendship is likely to be an important component of friendship for children.

Recent developments in the new social studies of childhood alert us to the importance of attending to the meanings of friendship and to the emotional significance of these relationships to children, while they are children. This work also raises questions about the relevance and appropriateness of some of the developmental frames of reference used to structure the generation of knowledge around children (Davis 1998). Brown and Gilligan (1992, p. 53, 69 and 106) draw attention to the diversity in children's experiences and the ways that they make relationships with each other. They highlight the way that children's relational worlds are complex, context specific and subject to ongoing change. In a similar vein Savin-Williams and Berndt (1990, p. 277) talk of the diversity of friendship relationships and the particularly individual way in which they are usually configured. Research agendas then need to actively accommodate this diversity.

(II) LONELINESS AND LOSS OF FRIENDS

There is clear evidence to support the conclusion that children (as well as adults) associate loneliness with unpleasant emotions (Renshaw and Brown 1993, p. 1271). These authors focus upon school-related loneliness in middle childhood and, not surprisingly, establish that withdrawn social behaviour, lower peer acceptance and fewer friends is associated with children's reports of loneliness. Loneliness in middle childhood is a "stable phenomenon located in a complex web of interrelated aspects of social functioning" (Renshaw and Brown 1993, p. 1271) and for some children difficulties in establishing friendships can persevere over years.

The result of the developmental emphasis upon friend relations as training devices (for example, Hartup 1992) is that adults tend to regard them as if they are a commodity, something that can be accumulated and dispensed with, with relatively little impact. For instance, Cullingford's (1991) discussion of friendship suggests that these relationships pass easily through children's fingers. He asserts: "Given the large number of acquaintances they can change companions easily" (Cullingford 1991, p. 50). In a similar vein, Herron and Peter (1999) argue that the experience of making and losing friends provides children with opportunities to learn valuable social skills they will be able to draw on in later life. The conclusion seems to be that because children spend a lot of their time in large groups (at school, for instance) it is easy for them to find, make and change friends¹⁵. Hartup (1992), in this regard, suggests that children's friendships can be seen as developmental advantages rather than necessities because they can be substituted with other relationships, principally those that are located within the family¹⁶. He further notes that other authors have suggested that friendships should be regarded as "affiliative relations rather than attachments" (Hartup 1992, p. 2). These sorts of perspectives on the nature and significance of children's friendships and peer relations have a profound impact not only on research-based understandings, but also upon everyday discourse and specific institutional practices in educational and welfare settings (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998, p. 692).

Erwin (1995, p. xx-xxiii), reviewing the literature on the collapse of children's friendships, suggests that, while particularly difficult during adolescence, such losses are not considered to be so significant for children. He (Erwin 1995, p. xxiii- xxiv) further suggests that external events (such as moving) which disrupt children's relationships can be a cause of distress, because of the limited scope they have to control these events and to compensate for their impact. For instance, they cannot usually go and visit a friend independently once they have moved to a new location. The critical factor that causes the distress, he suggests, is the difficulty in breaking into a new network not the loss of the friend relationship.

¹⁵ For instance, on a different topic, in a recent radio interview, a researcher who has explored the migration experience of immigrants and refugees in New Zealand suggested that school aged children settled more easily because of the ready availability of peers. The suggestion was that the greater numbers of interactional opportunities presented by the school setting meant that children were more easily able to integrate (Noel Watts, speaking on Morning Report, 3.12.02 regarding the New Settlers research programme).

¹⁶ This conclusion can be questioned given the diversity of children's experiences within their whanau/families.

The literature that deals with social and emotional support programmes does address the impact of friends-loss on children because, of course, one of the things that service providers regularly have to deal with is the damage caused to children (and adults) as a result of grief and loss that has not been recognised (see, for instance, work by Crompton 1980 on this topic). Rubin (1980) also chronicled the effect of friend loss in the lives of different children. He concluded (Rubin 1980, p. 89):

The ending of a close friendship, whether because of physical separation or psychological disengagement, usually represents a crisis of some proportion in the child's life.

While it may be true that learning to manage loss and to develop new friends and other relationships is good learning, the impact of loss and feeling excluded or rejected does need to be recognised and dealt with sensitively. The preoccupation in research and practice with the way in which experiences such as loss might contribute to the eventual development of well functioning adults should not preclude a serious consideration of the impact that experiences, such as grief over a lost friend, have upon children in their daily lives. Such experiences can be expected to colour the way in which children behave and interpret the actions of others around them, and need to be taken into consideration as valid and real in their own right.

(III) GROUPS AND GANGS

Children's friendships have been found to be characterised by either chumship or group/gang membership (Fine 1995, p. 294). Dodge et al. (1986) considered group joining behaviour and found that children who stood back and responded to the interests and activities of others tended to be more readily accepted into new groups while children who tried to push in and take control risked ongoing exclusion. Essential components of the friend-making process included making a good impression and being able to get along with others (Herron and Peter 1999).

It has been suggested that preadolescence is the “gang age”¹⁷ (Fine 1995, p. 295-296, citing Furfey 1926). This is thought to be particularly so for boys, who are believed to prefer group to individual relationships. A preadolescent gang, in this context, has been described as (Fine 1995, p. 296):

...a group of children in frequent and intense interaction, generally outside direct adult supervision.

This definition draws attention to the two factors that are known to facilitate the development of a preadolescent gang: the opportunity for frequent and intense interaction among a group of young people, and the absence of adult supervision. Preadolescent gangs have been studied extensively in the literature and have been a cause of concern because of the perceived risk associated with young people spending significant amounts of time away from adult supervision. Kovarik (1994, p. 118), in this connection, suggests that gangs offer opportunities for children to test resistance to adult authority. Young people in this age bracket, it is argued, are beginning to have their first experience of independence and as a result are seen as vulnerable to excess and in need of regulation (see, for instance, Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 284). This concern is reflected, to some extent, in the focus of research on boy-gangs, which has tended to highlight their involvement in aggressive behaviour, their indulgence in sex-talk and to a lesser extent in sexualised behaviour (Fine 1995).

(IV) GENDER DIFFERENCES IN FRIENDSHIPS

The literature is ambivalent about whether or not there are consistent differences in the nature of children’s friendships that can be effectively explained by reference to their gender, and if they can be, what the key factors are which differentiate girls from boys. For instance, as far back as 1975, Waldorp and Halverson (1975) suggested that there were important gender differences in friendship patterns that saw girls preferring intimate dyadic

¹⁷ It should be noted here that I am using the term ‘gang’ to refer to preadolescent gang behaviour and that as such it should be clearly distinguished from other sorts of adult gang behaviour. I am, however, using the term gang in preference to group, because it seems to me that the issues in the literature relate, in fact, to shared activities by boys that are more significant than the term group implies, being focused as they are on quite intense identification with a specific subset of young people and the development of a specific idioculture (Fine 1995, p. 303), rather than the more loose patterns of association that characterise group membership.

relationships while boys favoured extensive friendship networks, as exemplified in the archetypal boy gangs (see previous section). However, even earlier, Gruenberg and Krech (1959, cited in Fine 1995, p. 294) suggested that individual matters played a determining role in friendship patterning. More recently, research has suggested that boys' relationships tend to be instrumental in nature, organised in hierarchical ways and to focus on team games and other group activity¹⁸. For instance, Fischer, Sollie and Morrow (1986) found that boys' friendships in the preadolescent age bracket were often composed of loosely structured, large, boy-exclusive groupings. In these groups, alliances were often temporary and changes of membership were common. These groups were thought to be more concerned with meeting the activity rather than intimacy needs of boys. It has further been suggested that boys tend not to have special friends to the same extent that girls do, and that girls prefer to relate in small groups and to have individual friendships that are quite intense (Hartup 1996).

The gendered patterns in friendship, noted above, are believed to reflect more significant differences in the emotional needs of boys and girls (see, for instance, Ganetz 1995, p. 88; Matthys, Cohen-Kettenis and Berkhout 1994), or that children are sensitive to peer pressure around gender-role conformity (Sandberg, Meyer-Bahlburg and Yager 1993, p. 125). Individual relationships are thought to be more meaningful for girls than is the case for boys. It has also been suggested that either boys' relationships are simply less emotionally intense to begin with, or that individual relationships are less important to them, the comradeship of the group being more significant than any individual relationship. So, for instance, Rubin (1980, p. 103) notes:

While boys tend to view the group as a collective entity, emphasising loyalty and solidarity, girls are more likely to view the group as a network of intimate two person friendships.

However, others (Hill et al. 1985) have suggested that the gendered patterning of children's relationships works in the reverse way; intimacy looming large in the characteristics boys

¹⁸ For an overview of the literature, see Hill and Tisdall 1997.

value in their friends and instrumental matters playing a dominant role for girls. It is possible that the difficulty in coming to clear conclusions about gendered differences in friendship may in fact arise from the concern to emphasise developmental regularities at the expense of individual particularities. Such works have usually used large samples of children that do not easily allow for attention to the interplay between individual meaning and experience, and local structure and context. As Hill, Laybourn and Borland (1996, p 129) note in such studies childhood experiences are drained of much of their subjective meaning.

Taking a different approach by utilising secondary data in the form of historical records, Lesko (2001) argues that many of the assumed characteristics of boys' and girls' relational patterns are, in fact, cultural constructions that have roots in late 19th and early 20th century concerns about the state of British and American youth, particularly young males. She connects, for instance, the preference suggested in the developmental literature for boys to associate in large, loyal groups, to efforts at nation building, and particularly to the need for a steady supply of soldiers to resource these nations' expansionist activities. Her work points to a concerted effort by national leaders to construct a particularly useful sort of ideal boy. This was a boy who was physically and emotionally tough and willing to do his 'duty'. The similarity between the "boyologists'" (Lesko 2001, p. 45) definition of the ideal boy, and current developmental theories about 'boy nature' is remarkably strong. In fact, Lesko's (2001) work suggests that a century of academic thinking about the nature of boys and girls rests upon a set of cultural constructions that were particularly useful for the societies of that earlier era.

On balance, the literature does seem, however, to conclude that there are significant differences between the friendships of boys and girls that extend beyond the superficial and easily observable differences in activity and structure. The consensus seems to be that these surface-level differences are the manifestation of deeper differences between boys and girls that relate to their emotional make-up and consequently to their relational needs. In an overview of the literature on this subject, Hill and Tisdall (1997, p. 98) indicate a broad consensus that:

From middle childhood onwards, girls' relationships are usually more intensive and boys' are more extensive (Hartup 1992). Most girls spend more time with one or two particular friends towards whom they have intense loyalty sometimes interspersed with sharp conflict (Waldorp and Halverson 1975; James 1993; Ganetz 1995). Boys tend to form larger but looser friendship groups, sometimes hierarchically organised. This is partly linked to their keen interest in team games (Archer 1992).

Given the differences in boys' and girls' patterns of play, and thus the ways in which their friendships may represent themselves to external observers, it is not surprising that many have concluded that these differences reflect more profound distinctions in friendship for boys and girls. However drawing conclusions about the internal meaning of friendship and its emotional significance from observations of play behaviour, should be viewed with caution, and more information is required about the meanings boys and girls attach to their friendship experiences. In this connection, Borland et al. (1998, p. 27) identified that while children were aware of the stereotypes pertaining to boys' and girls' friendships, when asked to comment on their own experiences, they described a range of friendships and disputed the accuracy of the stereotypes. In short, while recognising the cultural currency of the stereotypes, the children viewed their own relationships as more diverse than a simple intimacy/instrumental, male/female classification would suggest.

(V) POPULARITY AND FRIENDSHIP NETWORKS

While acknowledging the individual nature of the friendship experience, Medrich et al. (1982) established that the absolute number of friends that children had did not relate directly to their sense that they had enough friends. Rogoff (1990) noted that, while not a universal characteristic of friendship, children in western industrialised countries tended to play in closely aged-matched groups, reflecting the large amounts of time they spent in age-ordered settings such as schools. Mannarino (1995, p. 47), reviewing the literature on popularity and friendship formation, noted that research had not adequately distinguished between these two variables:

The most extensively studied childhood social variable has been peer group acceptance. In order to demarcate clearly the boundaries of friendship, there is a need to distinguish empirically these two concepts [popularity and friendship]. This task is not easy to accomplish as the sociometric techniques designed to measure peer group acceptance or popularity are repeatedly used, albeit in a somewhat modified fashion, to assess friendship formation.

He concluded that it was important that popularity among children was not confused with friendship because the intimacy and emotional sustenance provided through close friendship was not gained through popularity. He also noted that bi-directionality and reciprocity, important components in friendship, did not play a role in popularity (Mannarino 1995, p. 50). However, Savin-Williams and Berndt (1990, p. 281) linked popularity and friendship closely together: “[C]hildren with many friends tend to be popular” highlighting the confusion in the literature about the difference between popularity and friendship.

As with other dimensions of friendship research, there has been a tendency in the literature to define popularity and rejection as a matter of little concern to children. Cullingford (1991, p. 50) captured the essence of such analyses when he concludes:

If they are not popular, they know it “I am not really popular”, “I get picked on”. And they do not seem to be particularly concerned.

More recently, others have taken a more critical stance, rejecting any sense in which being picked on or bullied might be dismissed as just another aspect of growing up (Borland et al. 1998, p. 142; Smith and Sharp 1994).

Children’s relationships with each other are complex and diverse, reflecting as they do the combination of their own unique needs and characteristics, social expectations of what it means to be a particular sort of child in a particular setting and the various contexts they find

themselves in. Understanding children's everyday lives, then, inevitably means attending to the interplay of these different forces.

Children and parents

Family relationships, particularly parent-child relations are a significant focus of attention for childhood researchers. Gibbons' (1995, cited in Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 49) middle childhood research on the characteristics of effective adult-child relationships, for instance, found that children highlighted their strong wish to be loved and cared for, and to be valued. This author found that children primarily wanted parents to spend time with them, to be reliable and predictable, and also to provide them with protection.

Other studies have confirmed that children value a combination of support and expectations from the adults who care for them, and that these should be applied with flexibility and the acceptance of difference (Noller and Callan 1991). Research has also clearly identified that, if given the option, children would choose to have more attention and more time from the adults who care for them, and that they also wish to have their deeper feelings of distress recognised (Hill et al. 1995, cited in Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 49). Children also express a need for better explanations of adult actions, worries and conflicts, and more open communication (Lindon 1996). In particular they resent being excluded from knowing key information that affects their parents and other significant adults.

Mason and Falloon (2001, p. 112) found that children had a primarily positive orientation to their parents even when they came from abusive families. They suggested that this was because, in contrast to institutions such as the school, adult control at home was balanced out to some extent by caring and long-term commitment. This meant that children had scope to negotiate and exercise some agency in their relationships; something they perceived to be missing from their relationships with adults in other contexts. Citing Mayall (2000b), Prout (2001b, p. 198) also noted that children in the United Kingdom reported seeing their parents

in mostly positive terms and looked to them for care and also as role models and providers of moral guidance¹⁹.

Recent parenting literature has also suggested that the combination of intense support, expectations and demands are characteristics of effective parent-child relationships. Darling (1999, p. 1-2) identified a cluster of parenting tasks that were similar to several of the good parent characteristics identified by the children in the literature. She defined this as an authoritative parenting style, which she contrasted with authoritarian, indulgent and uninvolved styles. Authoritative parenting had the following components:

1. High parental demands that were clear
2. Strong, positive emotional responsiveness, and
3. Recognition of child autonomy.

The new social studies of childhood and the current parenting literature, then, have converged on these three dimensions of effective relationships.

The issue of parental (and indeed adult) availability for children is another matter that has featured in the literature and also in everyday discourse about parent-child relationships. This matter is complex and often misunderstood as simply meaning quality time. Munford and Sanders' (1999) work, however, suggested that there was considerably more involved than this. Availability involved a mixture of capacity (able to parent) as well as emotional and relational readiness. These matters were undermined by the impact of external stressors. Parents found it difficult to be available to their children in this more complex way when they were overwhelmed by the impact of things such as high external demands or significant emotional crises. Such pressures undermined adult capacity to engage relationally with children in a sustained and ongoing way.

¹⁹ It should be noted that this discussion is not intended to convey the impression that all children everywhere experience parents and whanau/family in this positive, constructive and enabling way.

Several recent studies in the United Kingdom (Fuller et al. 2001; Haudrup Christensen 2002; Mayall, 2001b) have also highlighted the profound significance of routine, active engagement by parents with their children; again drawing attention to the inadequacy of the notion of “quality time” (Haudrup Christensen 2002). It has been suggested that children seek a type of family life where parents are physically and emotionally present and that they resent the way that parental work demands intrude into family time (Mayall 2001b, p. 119). The qualities of time are argued to be more important than simply quality time (Haudrup Christensen 2002, p. 78-80) because children’s needs for time input involve more than the provision of special activities. For instance, rather controversially, Kovarik (1994) found that watching television together as a family was a form of time-sharing that many children valued. He also suggested that the structure of daily life; organised as it is in the western world around school and work, fundamentally addressed adult rather than child needs for meaningful contact and interaction. Psychosocial time was argued to be a very important yet devalued type of time (Kovarik 1994).

Although conducted with an older age group and with a different focus, recent research (McNeely et al. 2002) has drawn attention to the importance of attending to matters such as context and gender when seeking to understand the nature of parent-child relationships. These authors suggested that girls and boys took different meanings from their communication with parents and that parents communicated in different ways with their sons and daughters. This work draws our attention to the contextual nature of interactions between children and parents, and further suggests that context and relationship work together to create different sorts of experience and meaning. Thus, while the friendship literature is equivocal about the presence and significance of gender differences, there appears to be greater consensus about gender differentiation in other areas of children’s lives.

Children at school

While schooling and educational achievement has formed a significant focus of developmental and psychological research, the new social studies of childhood have sought

to understand the way in which children experience these settings²⁰. In this connection, several commentators suggest the need for a fundamental reconfiguration of schools to allow children to participate in these pedagogical encounters as active and engaged subjects rather than objects (see, for instance, Christensen and James 2001; Mayall 1994a; Oldman 1994a; Prout 2001b; Stafford et al. 2003). The professional notion of the teacher is seen to reinforce the object status of children and the consequent discounting of their individual needs and experiences. Mayall (2001b, p. 122-125) suggests that rather than fostering autonomy and active engagement, the emphasis placed in schools on children behaving independently should be more properly understood as an expectation that children comply with adult demands.

Christensen and James (2001) contend that the lack of priority given to children's social and emotional needs in schools arises from the pressures to accommodate an increasingly demanding curriculum. The greater the demands and complexity of the system, the less able it appears to be to respond to the wider pedagogical needs of students. Oldman (1994b) concurs on this point, but argues that this has more structural causes. He suggests that the lack of priority given to children-as-subjects in schools results from the combined forces of employment, gender and generation (Oldman 1994b, p. 160). Pianta (1992) considers that the apparent unresponsiveness of schools to these broader needs of children is a product of the developmental paradigm that informs the ways in which schools operate.

Recent work in Aotearoa/New Zealand has highlighted the improvements in literacy and numeracy that can be achieved when pedagogies allow children agency (Phillips, McNaughton and MacDonald 2001). However, such knowledge does not, as yet, appear to have made significant inroads into daily school practice or broader educational policies. Children usually see school as a place where the possibilities for active engagement are few and where they have little control over the process of their own education (Oldman 1994a; 1994b). Because of this they tend to see class time as a largely undifferentiated block of time

²⁰ There is also a small but growing body of literature in the sociology of education that explores children's agency, identity and difference in schools (Dixon 1997; Nash 2001; Paetcher 1998; Riddell 1989; Skeggs 1991).

that lacks a consistent or valued set of meanings. They often have difficulty in recalling what occurs in class and experience much of this time as boring and meaningless (Oldman 1994a; Thomson and Holland 2002). Lack of control and engagement will usually generate a response of some sort, as Fook (2002) suggests, where there is power, there is also resistance. At school, it has been suggested that children mostly use covert strategies to cope because of the limited opportunities they have to exert direct control (Christensen and James 2001, p. 83).

The social significance of school for children should not be underestimated because it provides a very important source of comradeship (Mayall 2001b, p. 126). Cullingford (1991, p. 49), in this connection, talks of the “hidden curriculum” at school that includes all the social interactions and relationships children have as well as the meanings that they attribute to their school experiences. Developing this theme beyond the school yard and play times, Christensen and James (2001, p. 75) suggest that the peer dynamics of classrooms also have a profound impact upon the capacity to function as effective learners. Their work reinforces the observations of Pianta (1992) who argues that the pervasiveness of the developmental paradigm in school management results in children’s emotional needs being accorded lesser significance than the more obviously educational matters. Matters such as seating arrangements in classrooms and the suitability of partners allocated for collaborative work are far from neutral in their effect on children. Rather, they can play a critical role in the capacity to be ready to learn (Pianta 1992). However, schools appear to pay little attention to the influence that these critical social concerns have upon the configuration of children’s educational and learning experiences (Christensen and James 2001; Pianta 1992).

In contrast to the classroom, research suggests that children see the schoolyard as a richly varied social space. It has been studied as a site of informal socialisation, recognising the greater scope children have here to exert some control over what happens. This other strand in school-based research has identified clear gendered patterns of interaction. For instance, Sluckin (1981) and Boulton (1992) suggested that boys played games that used larger amounts of space, preferred physical team games and competitive activity. James (1993) found that boys pushed girls’ play to the physical margins of the playground. Girls are also

considered to prefer games with a higher verbal content, such as skipping, than are boys (Opie 1993). These findings are believed to reflect differences in the emotional content of relationships as well as the differing emotional needs of boys and girls noted earlier. Given the amount of children's time and energy that is consumed at school and the different sorts of experience it has been shown to generate, this setting was an important area of focus for the current study.

Time and space

Discussions in the academic literature, reflected in the popular media (see, for instance, Gibbs 2001; Kirn and Cole 2001), suggest that children's 'free time' should be organised and structured by adults through venues such as after school care, holiday programmes and organised extra-curricular activity. The range of formal programmes made available to children under the age of twelve years reflects adult concern to have an impact upon children's overall social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and to prepare them for an uncertain world through structured activity (Petrie 1994; Ying 2003). Others, however, argue that independent access to unsupervised, free space and play-time is an important component of a well-balanced childhood (see, for instance, Matthews, et al. 2000). The following discussion considers current understandings about play and the use children make of the outdoors. Throughout this discussion, the influence of the competing discourses about what it is that children should do with their spare time (should they be busily occupied, or should they be able to use this time in their own ways?) will be seen. Children's time related thinking in relation to their understanding of themselves is also considered.

(I) PLAY

Writers such as Robinson and Delahooke (2001, p. 81-96) and Hill and Tisdall (1997, p. 100-101) speak of the problematic nature of the concept of play. These authors suggest that play constitutes important work for children and that work (as in school-work, or house-work) can be experienced as play (Robinson and Delahooke 2001, p. 83). The concept of play, then, is troubling when considered in the context of childhood. Hill and Tisdall (1997, p. 100) draw attention to the confounding nature of this term:

Play is also one of those words whose meaning most of us take for granted but whose precise definition is remarkably elusive. It refers to activities associated with fun, relaxation or even frivolity, and which do not have obvious immediate functions in terms of survival. Play is often contrasted with work, a serious business concerned with making or sustaining a living. Yet the same activity may count as play in some contexts and serious paid employment in others.

James (1993) considers play to be a critical way in which children establish their identities, especially in relation to one another. Ennew (1994) argues for an understanding of children's play as a source of creativity and sociability, while Huizinga (1949, cited in Mayall 2002, p. 132-135) underscores the in-the-moment value of play as an enjoyable thing to do. In adopting such frameworks for understanding play, Robinson and Delahooke (2001, p. 84) suggest that play constitutes the "formal curriculum of childhood". These writers focus upon play as interaction between children, rather than more general manifestations of play as non-formal learning or work-related activity undertaken by children alone or with others. In blending developmental accounts with the new social studies of childhood they, like James (1993), suggest a need for a consideration of children's daily lives as essentially social and concerned primarily with the construction of particular identities and a sense of self.

As far back as 1953 researchers were interested in the role of shared fantasy play in the development of children's understanding of the world and their relationship to it (Fine 1995, p. 304, citing Sullivan 1953, p. 251). This emphasis upon the role of play and fantasy in development reflects an adult-centric (Mason and Falloon 2001, p. 99), utilitarian view of childhood that distracts attention from play as an enjoyable and engaging activity. Robinson and Delahooke (2001, p. 84), critiquing their own approach, identify this risk when they argue for recognition of children's agency in play, and the sense that play is something that children do for and of themselves and which represents their own unique folklore. There are, therefore, paradoxes at the heart of current adult debates and concerns about play and these reflect a more general confusion about the nature of childhood (Heywood 2001). By seeing play as children's work, the special nature and sense of time in childhood disappears and

instead childhood becomes, as the developmental account asserts, merely preparation for adulthood. Robinson and Delahooke (2001) also suggest that, despite the fact that contemporary thinking about play places a value on creativity and imagination, there is comparatively less comfort in allowing children to construct their play themselves, in their own way, away from adult supervision.

Smith (2000b), among others (see also Kovarik 1994; Oldman 1993; Phadraig 1994), has suggested that contemporary adult approaches to the issue of how children spend their own time reflects a more general adult view of children as objects of adult work and adult beliefs that children should be kept busy. These authors have argued that adult agendas and expectations rob children of free time and, as a result, create a highly institutionalised experience of childhood. Gill (1999, p. 67-69), discussing “play work” during middle childhood, argues that childcare providers, who increasingly manage children’s lives, need to provide a full range of quality play opportunities, including roaming and exploring. In this way, he seeks to create a middle-ground between the realities of contemporary western childhoods, characterised as they increasingly are by institutional experience, and the description by Matthews et al. (2000, p. 141) of the “rural idyll”. These debates, and the confusion and ambivalence they exhibit about what children should be doing in childhood, focus our attention on the complex ways in which wider social, economic and political structures influence particular childhood experiences at particular times.

(II) USE OF OPEN SPACES

Towards the end of last century, Moore (1986, p. 12) described the years between ten and twelve as “the apex of childhood”; a time when children had the greatest capacity to explore their environments on their own and with their friends. The ways that children use the formal spaces set aside for them, such as parks and playgrounds, as well as the informal spaces which they colonise for their own enjoyment, have been extensively researched, possibly because of the way in which notions of children in the outdoors link into discourses of the ‘ideal childhood’.

When asked, children often identify a desire for ‘untamed’ areas where they can construct their own games and has a large measure of control over how they play (Matthews 1992;

Opie and Opie 1969). Wasteland, riversides and other abandoned areas are therefore more attractive to children than those areas designed by adults for children's play (Hart 1979). These types of free spaces, sometimes called the fourth environment, which are particularly attractive to children, are often in short supply (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 106-110). However, Matthews et al. (2000) suggest that children's play preferences cannot be so easily summarised and, in addition to untamed areas, children and young people also prefer play spaces that enable them to easily connect with others of their own age. Hillman (1993) and Katz (1993) report gendered differences in children's use of outdoor places, girls experiencing more restricted access than boys. Erwin's (1995, p. ix) work found that both the nature of the physical environment and the gender of children played important roles in the use they made of their physical environments:

With preadolescent boys, neighbourhoods with high social densities promote play in large groups and team sports; there is also an increase in the spontaneity of social interactions.

Research in the United Kingdom and Aotearoa/New Zealand (for example, Halliday 1997; Matthews, et al. 2000; Roberts 2000) has also identified the diverse ways in which children use their physical environments and the influence adult actions have on the access and usage that children make of such spaces. For instance, McCormack (2000) concluded that children's views of the countryside were conditioned by either nature-based or agricultural-based understandings and, further, that these understandings closely reflected their broader experiences of the outdoors. This meant that children raised on farms were more likely to see the outdoors as a place where productive, economic activity occurred while their more urban peers saw it as recreational and environmental space in the sense of representing places that could be enjoyed but which needed to be protected.

Contrary to popular assumption, children living in rural areas do not have larger territorial ranges than their urban peers, and furthermore, their time is not spent roaming the countryside, or even utilising the public open spaces close to home (Matthews et al. 2000). Research suggests an "adult hegemony" (Valentine 1996, p. 593) over public spaces. This

arises from implicit beliefs that public space belongs to adults, that children's use of it conflicts with their needs and that children pose a risk to adults or are themselves at risk, when they play together in public spaces (Holloway and Valentine 2000; Morrow 2000). Having created places that are dangerous for children, adults then seek to manage these risks by reducing children's spatial freedoms. This raises some interesting questions. To whom does public space belong? If children can only have access to these spaces on adult terms, what remains of the free and unfettered roaming that is often seen as integral to the 'ideal childhood'?

Developing the theme of access to outdoor spaces, Mayall (2001b, p. 120) suggested that children's use of local facilities and public spaces was contingent upon parental willingness to give permission and to facilitate access. These processes of negotiation structured the ways in which children were able to use time and space. Reneau (1997), in this connection, considered that adults tended to underrate children's abilities to manage themselves successfully in outside spaces because of their own observations of the way in which public space was used and fears about what might happen to their children when they were out of sight. These factors worked together to reduce the range and quality of experiences children had in the outdoors and, in a self-fulfilling way, further reinforced adult views of children as incapable of being responsible for themselves and of the risks public spaces posed (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998).

(III) TIME RELATED THINKING

There is a diverse group of works that explore children's understandings of time as a concept, and the connection between sense of time and sense of self. Here work has suggested a time-present orientation and, in contrast to adults, that children do not have a strong attachment to time in the sense of linear movement forward (Barglow 1994, p. 198-200; Jenks 1996, p. 15). Blending a new social studies of childhood approach with developmental accounts, Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (2001, p. 5-6) suggest that the process of moving from childhood through adolescence is lived in the present, and is intimately connected to delicate negotiations and positionings around identity. Hallden (1994), among others (Rogers, Mikel Brown and Tappan 1994; Steedman 1982), have argued that

mothering and family themes structure girls' future thinking, while boys' future thoughts are more concerned with challenging the status quo and having fun.

Edwards and Alldred (1999, p. 263) suggest that the project of the self (Giddens 1991), or the project of one's own life, is a key activity of childhood. Hill and Tisdall (1997, p. 45-46) argue that sense of self and the development of secure identities are critical issues for children. Mayall's (2001a) work is interesting, in this connection, because it indicates a clear cultural differentiation in the time-orientation of children. This multi-cultural sample of inner London children indicated that, for most, the project of the self had a predominantly time-present focus. The exception to this was children from Muslim families where parents actively engaged with their children over preparation for their futures. As a result, these children spent very little time in self-directed recreational activity, and their sense of self was very future-focused. Time thinking and sense of self then cannot be assumed to exhibit universal characteristics in children, and is clearly connected to discourses about what it is that children should be doing in childhood.

Rogers, Mikel Brown and Tappan (1994) explored the phenomenon of loss in ego in girls between the ages of twelve and fourteen by examining their relationship and future-related narratives. Their work suggested that at the younger age the girls were "cognitively sophisticated and able to entertain different perspectives on their experiences" (Rogers, Mikel Brown and Tappan 1994, p. 14-15) and both willing and able to challenge. By the time the girls were fourteen this openness and resistance had been diluted, and covert acts of resistance and challenge had replaced the more overt acts that had been evident two years earlier. Their analysis suggested that the girls had begun to distance themselves from their own immediate experience and, as a consequence, to lose the strong sense of self that they had possessed when twelve years old. At twelve years of age, these authors found that girls had complex and varied narratives about their futures that included ideas about relationships, activities, interests and employment. There is comparatively little information on boy's future thinking and its relationship to identity. Hallden (1994), however, suggested that having fun and resisting authority were key dimensions of boys present and future thinking

and, therefore, it might be concluded, that boys' future thinking would exhibit a strong sense of agency.

The impact of wider forces on the construction of childhood

The role that wider social, economic, political and cultural forces play in shaping childhoods has been a particular focus of the new social studies of childhood. What has been important about these works is the moderating effect they are beginning to have upon the conceptualisation of childhood as a predominantly developmental, relatively uniform process. In terms of the current study, two sets of works have been of particular relevance:

1. Changing patterns of economic activity by parents and consequent changes to the shape of family/whanau life and the nature of children's temporal and spatial agendas
2. The role of new technology in childhood, both in terms of its use and meaning for children and its application by parents as a risk-management tool.

This section begins with a discussion of the three major social processes (institutionalisation, individualisation and familialisation) that many argue shape contemporary childhood. It then moves to consider the impact of changing patterns of economic activity and new technology on the nature of contemporary childhood.

Institutionalisation, individualisation and familialisation

Many commentators (Brannen and O'Brien 1996; Edwards and Alldred 1999; Prout 2002, p. 69-70) have suggested that three powerful and contradictory processes pull contemporary childhood in different directions. These processes are individualisation, familialisation and institutionalisation. In the context of childhood, institutionalisation refers to the formal organisation of children's time through care and educational settings, and also through the provision of protection and containment. In western societies, childhoods have been increasingly characterised by participation in these formal contexts rather than in informal and less structured settings (Edwards and Alldred 1999). An important consequence of this

has been that an increasing proportion of the time in childhood is now subject to direct adult control and oversight.

Individualisation poses the child as a social actor (Edwards and Alldred 1999, p. 263) and, to some extent, facilitates the acceptance of new social studies of childhood arguments regarding children's agency. Individualisation demands that children become increasingly responsible for making informed choices from an ever increasing array of options while, at the same time, this expansion of choice generates greater confusion about what the future may hold (Ganetz 1995, p. 77). Children are thus faced with the challenge of constructing meaning from confusing and contradictory experiences. On the one hand, individualisation has provided an impetus for the increased participation of children in decision-making and the recognition of children's rights as legitimate (Edwards and Alldred 1999, p. 262-263; O'Brien 2000; Prout 2001a, p. 193; Roche 1996; Shier 2001; Stafford et al. 2003; Walker 2001) and, indeed, the development of UNCROC²¹ can be seen as an important development from these sorts of discourses. On the other hand, as Bruce, Lloyd and Leonard (1995, p. 97) have noted, policies that promote the expansion of individual rights and economic interests do not usually serve the interests and needs of children well. Despite increased recognition of children's agency and capacity to participate, they remain largely dependent upon adults to gain access to critical social, cultural, economic and political resources.

Familialisation locates the responsibility for the safety, wellbeing and upbringing of children fully and squarely upon parental shoulders (Edwards and Alldred 1999, p. 263; Valentine 1996, p. 585), and to some extent serves to render children's needs and issues as distinct from those of the family (or parents) invisible (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 93; Makrinioti 1994, p. 268). Individualisation and familialisation contribute to the myth of the self-sustaining family (Valentine 1996). The discourses that surround these social processes underpin broader social structures such as welfare to work policies (Atwool 1999; Frame and Berrick, 2003; Frasch, 2002) that expect that families will be economically self-reliant.

²¹ UNCROC is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

Changes in the nature of economic activity

A number of key writers explore the way that macro social processes, such as those discussed above, influence the construction of childhood and the nature of whanau/family life. Oldman (1994a; 1994b) argues that children's experience of school life is largely determined by adult agendas and priorities. Kovarik (1994, p. 111) suggests that the nature of children's contemporary pre- and out-of-school lives have been significantly influenced by the economic needs of society. In this connection, strategies for covering those times when parents are not available to provide care have formed a significant focus of research attention.

Children's experience of self-supervision has been explored internationally and these works have highlighted the contextually embedded, socially constructed nature of childhood. The sensitivity children have to wider discourses about what it means to be a modern child with working parents, and the connections they make between this and their own very personal experiences of being a child can be seen from an examination of these findings. For instance, international comparative research (Phadraig 1994) concluded that children in Norway understood self-care as an opportunity for autonomy. They saw these times as offering them scope to entertain their friends, eat the food they liked and wear the clothes they preferred. On the other hand, in the United States, it was associated with high levels of fear, a sense of isolation and feelings of boredom. The impact of different cultural discourses about childhood as dependency (United States) versus childhood as a time of exploration and growing independence (Norway) can be seen from these findings.

Solberg (1990) also researched Norwegian children's experience of self-care. She found that notions such as dependence and independence varied less in relation to chronological age than they did in response to the impact of employment demands on the family unit. Thus, irrespective of their age, children in families where the care-giving adults had paid employment took on a wide range of responsibilities for domestic tasks including caring for their younger siblings. Solberg (1990) also concluded that Norwegian children were not necessarily spending more time unsupervised than had been the case for previous generations. Rather, it appeared that in the past mothers had spent greater amounts of time at

home while children spent the bulk of their non-school time outdoors and out of sight of their home-staying mothers. Increased workforce participation had taken mothers out of the home and, in vacating this space, it was colonised by their children. Overall the level of direct supervision of Norwegian children by their mothers in the middle childhood years did not appear to have decreased significantly (Solberg 1990). Hillman and Adams (1992), considering the Anglo-Saxon context, suggested that the average age at which children were allowed to move about independently had increased by 2.5 years between the 1970s and 1990s, and it was unclear if this was because children had become less competent in managing themselves in public spaces, if the risks they faced had, in fact, increased or rather, if adult intolerance of both risk and children's unsupervised presence in public spaces was the cause.

Others suggest that economic and social pressures that push parents into employment pay scant regard to children's needs to be able to access their parents in a timely fashion (Haudrup Christensen 2002; Phadraig 1994). The Child Poverty Action Group (2003, p. 33) suggests that paid employment is the key to citizenship, implying that if whanau/families wish to be able to socially participate, engagement in the workforce is critical. Yet, many face having to choose between being available emotionally and physically to their children and participating economically and socially. Important implications flow from the increasing levels of participation by parents in the workforce. To date, these have not been systematically addressed either in the literature or in the development of social and economic policy. The experiences of children and whanau/families where employment demands make it difficult for parents to provide adequate care and supervision are largely un-documented in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Blaiklock et al. 2002) but the dominant policy discourse none-the-less holds parental employment as an important goal (Maharey 2004) and parents as largely responsible for the upbringing of their children (Atwool 1999).

Sharpening the focus upon the impact of wider social changes, such as increasing workforce participation by mothers, upon the configuration of adult-child relationships, in the Northern European context, Phadraig (1994, p. 97) describes the emergence of a "symmetrical" family form. In such families caring is separated out from companionship because non-

parents take over the responsibility for providing day-to-day care and the attendant socialisation and child-development activities. Christoffersen (1989, cited in Phadraig 1994, p. 85) further suggests that symmetrical families strengthen the extended family bond through use of things such as grandmother care. All other things being equal, relative care seems to confer some advantages at an emotional level for children because of the pre-existing and wider relationships that relatives bring to these care situations (Phadraig 1994). However, relative care can cause conflict and tension for parents because of different generational values and priorities, particularly in relation to child-rearing practices (Phadraig 1994, p. 92). These authors consider that the separation of care from companionship may be producing more egalitarian parent-child relationships.

Thinking about the way in which risk and the use of space and time influence the understanding parents have of the expectations attached to their role, Valentine (1996, p. 585) asserts that not only are:

...parents being held increasingly responsible for turning out 'good' children but also for protecting their 'angels' from a growing number of risks.

Parental conceptualisation of many of these risks are inherently spatial (Valentine 1996, p. 590) and they manifest themselves as concerns about safety on the streets and a lack of confidence in other adults to control public spaces in safe ways for children. The parental response to the increased burdens attached to social definitions of what it means to be a 'good parent' coupled with the emotional impact of 'terror talk' (C. Katz, 1995) has seen children retreat from the free use of open space and from being able to move autonomously around their local areas (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998). Parenting as risk-management and its impact upon the nature of childhood is also given some attention in the parenting literature (see, for example, Jackson and Scott 1999). However at this stage this is primarily at a theoretical rather than an empirical level. What discussion there is, also suggests that the primary adult response to the perceived risks relating to children's use of

the outdoors, is to progressively curtail their freedom of movement (for example, Hillman, Adams and Whitelegg 1991; Hillman and Adams 1992).

Safety and risk management are emerging as major themes in international writing on childhood (Holloway and Valentine 2000; Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998). Of particular concern in these works is the way that broader discourses shape contemporary childhood, the impact that such shaping has upon the richness of childhood experiences and the way that they influence how children come to understand their world and their relationship to it (Matthews et al. 2000; Moore 1986; Valentine 1996). These matters are nested in much more globalised discourses about security and wide ranging academic and popular debates now thrown into prominence as a result of the growth of the Internet and increasingly fragile international relations. The increasing number of sociological analyses of risk and globalisation attest to the impact that such discourses now have upon everyday life (see, for instance, Beck 1992; Furedi, 2002; Lupton 1999; Wilkinson 2001). In relation to childhood, these debates highlight contradictory and contested understandings of childhood in late modernity (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998, p. 689):

...contradictions between recognising children's autonomy and the increasing emphasis on child protection; the paradoxical perception of children as both at risk and a potential threat to other children and to social order.

The role that children's experience of unsupervised time plays in the development of their autonomy, sense of self and social competence has also been explored (Pringle 1980; Ward 1995). Roberts, Smith and Bryce (1995) and Borland et al. (1998) found that parents negotiated rules and limits around the ways that children used free time and unsupervised space in order to manage the risks they perceived these activities held. McNeish and Roberts (1995) highlighted that while the rules negotiated might be well understood, children none-the-less adopted a degree of flexibility in terms of how they managed the boundaries of these agreements.

The expectation that parents carry sole responsibility for the successful rearing of children (Englebert 1994; Valentine 1996, p. 585) combined with decreased parental, particularly maternal, availability for care and supervision, and heightened concerns about children's safety when away from home, has resulted in quite significant changes to the way in which childhood is experienced and how family life takes place. For instance, Smith (2000a, p. 3-4) suggests a re-patterning of children's social interactions that are a consequence of matters such as increasing parental anxieties about safety. He points to a considerable reduction in opportunities for unsupervised and informal interaction, and a related increase in quite formalised and institutionalised arrangements through which children engage in social interaction with each other.

Many writers have observed that increasing societal intolerance for children, children's needs and children's time and spatial agendas contributes to the particular patterns of activity and experience of contemporary children (Holloway and Valentine 2000; Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998). For instance, changes in town and architectural design across the western world (such as the reductions in numbers of footpaths in cities) have been identified as making it difficult for children to autonomously access public spaces (Gill 1999; C. Katz 1995; Matthews 1992; Matthews et al. 2000; Valentine 1996). It is also seen in the increasing dependency of children upon adults as reflected, for instance, in the increasing age at which children are able to move about freely by themselves (Hillman and Adams 1992). These broader social forces work together to push children back into home and institutional settings. Children's time and space use is also shaped by the local context and in so doing reflects back adult expectations of what is appropriate and levels of tolerance for the presence of children in public places.

The role of new technologies in shaping childhood

Another area where the impact of broader social changes upon the particular experience and construction of childhood can be seen is in the development of new technologies. Over recent years, there has been a significant growth in independent and home-based access to new technologies by many middle-class children. One possible reason for this phenomenon has been advanced by Boyden (1990), who notes that middle-class children are often

shielded from public life as their parents take them to and from school and other structured activities. As a result, their spatial horizons shrink and become characterised by formally organised places when they move beyond home. Perhaps compensating for these shrinking spatial boundaries is this unprecedented presence in middle-class homes of new technologies which children use for play and to shape their worlds. These trends suggest that the home may be being experienced in new ways and taking on new meanings for many children. Instead of being a base from which they go out and explore their world, home would seem to increasingly constitute the site at which they accumulate much of their experience. Solberg (1990, p. 130) talks of children as the “new homestayers”. This conceptualisation of children provides radically new ways of seeing them in familiar spaces.

Solberg (1990) and others (see, for example, Kovarik 1994; Roberts, Smith and Bryce 1995) have noted the use of technology to child-mind as an increasing trend internationally. Drawing on the theme of electronic activity as risk management, Facer et al. (2001a, p. 22) suggest that digital freedom is believed by many parents to compensate children for restrictions on their physical freedom. However, they also note that, in practice, the complex social interactions between parents and children that arise around accessing and using these technologies means that being able to engage in techno-leisure is far from easy and straightforward. The internet problematises in another way the potential of electronic media to afford protection for children, by keeping them at home, because it brings the outdoors inside and so re-sites the location of stranger-danger. In this way, home can become as risky as the outdoors. The international research then highlights the way in which use is structured within families and, in so doing, suggests that the electronic freedoms theoretically offered by electronic media do not always materialise and fail, as a result, to compensate children for restrictions on their spatial freedom (Facer et al. 2001a).

There is a growing debate in the literature about the many different ways in which the electronic media in all its forms (television, videos, console and computer games, and the Internet) influences children and childhood (for a discussion of this debate, see Attewell, SuazoGarcia and Battle 2003; Buckingham 1994; Holloway and Valentine 2000; 2001; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 2001; Oswell 2001; Selwyn 2003; Thrift 2003; Valentine and

Holloway 2002). These authors explore the different ways in which children actively create their own meanings from electronic material and the many and varied roles these media play in their lives, individually and within groups. Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (2001, p. 3) talk of the centrality of technology as a mediating factor in the “cultural presences of childhood”. In particular, they suggest that, at a national level, the use of electronic technology and games by children is linked to the overall level of ‘adult-free’ time children have and therefore, it can be assumed, to the particular ways in which childhood is experienced in different places and times. In a rather circular way then, it would appear that a higher level of electronic game use is both facilitated by and a product of lower levels of parental/adult time and input.

Cultural studies have explored the meanings that individuals attach to experiences such as television or video viewing and electronic game playing (Buckingham 1994; Oswell 2001). Suss et al. (2001, p. 34) found that not only do children use these new technologies, both alone and together, but that game playing also stimulates and facilitates wider shared peer interactions, and in so doing constitutes the currency of many social exchanges for children who regularly play. Casas et al. (2001, p. 42) suggested that video game consoles were considered to be children’s affairs and, more specifically, that they were often understood to be the preserve of boys. Their work indicated that children often felt that they could not speak to their parents about their games, with the result that the only dialogues they had about these experiences were with their peers. This could have important implications for the nature of adult-child relations in general, and parent-child relations in particular, if game use continues to feature as a significant component of children’s lives. However, it should also be remembered that certain dimensions of children’s play have always occurred outside of adult involvement. What current patterns may simply do is bring this into sharper focus because children actually engage in their play within the confines of their homes rather than outdoors.

Some writers focus upon the facility children have to adapt to new technologies and their active desire to engage with these. Others, looking at the role of new technologies in educational settings, suggest that, like adults, children do worry about and resist the use of these materials, but that they are worried by different issues (Valentine and Holloway 2001,

p. 73). While adults often approach new technologies with fear of the unknown coupled with a recognition of the critical role they will play in the tomorrow of their children's lives, children approach them with concerns rooted in their everyday social reality and seek to find accommodations between the imperative to become competent users, while at the same time not compromising their own identities (Valentine and Holloway 2001, p. 75). These matters are of particular salience, they argue, for girls who perceive they have the most to lose from being seen to be clever users.

It is also suggested (Facer et al. 2001b; Valentine and Holloway 2001, p. 62) that children relate to new technology primarily as a recreational resource rather than as a potential vehicle for securing their futures. This is especially so if technological competence conflicts with their sense of themselves in the present. From these works, the complex ways in which broader societal changes and adult understandings of that changing world intersect with children's own social realities and experiences can be seen. Adult future orientations collide headlong with children's time-present understandings. Because of the pervasiveness of new technologies, traditional adult-child relationships can also be recast when children become more competent than the adults around them (Valentine and Holloway 2001). These matters are of significance in this study because of its emphasis upon the ways in which children construct and experience the everyday, while at the same time balancing the impact of adult expectations and demands.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered a broad range of literature relating to the experiences of children and childhood. It has outlined the development of the new social studies of childhood, a multi-disciplinary approach to building contemporary understandings of childhood. This new paradigm poses the child as a social actor and, accordingly, asserts that the study of childhood should be more than an analysis of problems and progression through stages. The developmental view of children as incomplete, or lacking competence, has been used to justify their exclusion from both effective participation in the shaping of those institutions that most influence their lives, and from having a voice in the creation of knowledge about

them. Finding spaces for children's voices to be heard as separate and distinct from parents, teachers and other professionals whose livelihoods are made out of children, has been a challenge that researchers have only comparatively recently taken on. New theories and rights-based discourses re-cast children as active, knowledgeable and competent to express views and suggest strategies for their meaningful engagement in decision-making processes, and considers childhood as a social status similar to that of adulthood.

The new social studies of childhood are diverse, and sometimes it is difficult to clearly identify the boundaries that demarcate them from more traditional developmental or psychological works. Factors that are common across this new field are the emphasis they place upon collecting and analysing children's own representations of their experiences and the meanings they attribute to these matters. In this sense, these new studies seek to 'normalise' childhood. They demonstrate that children can provide valid and meaningful information about their worlds and that they have a unique contribution to make to effective decision-making, policy and practice. These works provide the conceptual framework for the current study.

The literature adopts a somewhat mixed stance on the matter of children's friendships. It is variously considered as a potential threat to the effective socialisation of children or as valuable training in relationships, but not essential to a full childhood. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the role of friendship in children's wellbeing and to their happiness and satisfaction with their worlds on a daily basis. Differences in boys' and girls' friendships have been observed and some commentators have concluded that these imply deeper gender-based differences in children's emotional makeup. Popularity and likeability have also been considered as significant dimensions of children's peer relationships, but findings on these matters are unclear, partly because of the measures used. However, commentators have suggested that children are somewhat philosophical about popularity.

Research clearly establishes that children have a strong and consistent desire to experience whanau/family as a place where they are loved, nurtured and protected. Alongside this, children also express a need for adults to have expectations of them and to be supported to

achieve their goals. Reliability and predictability are things they seek from their parents as well as explanations for decisions made and participation in processes that have an impact on them. Routine and meaningful contact between themselves and those caring for them is very important, and here children challenge adult conceptualisations of things such as 'quality time'. They suggest that the quantity of time parents spend with them is very important. In these things, their views coincide with the parenting literature that has pointed to parental availability; a combination of time, capacity and relational readiness. Parents appear to interact differently with sons and daughters. Thinking about the way in which adult-child relationships are configured within whanau/families, it is clear that children perceive greater possibilities for being active, engaged subjects than they do in any other institutional setting.

School is another key area of research focus. Contemporary work highlights the contradictions in children's school experiences and the way that these contradictions undermine their capacity to be effective learners. The prevailing pedagogical approaches of schools locate children primarily as passive objects of teacher attention and, in this process, the potential for children to be active engaged learners is lost. However, not all schools nor all teachers operate in this fashion and there are accounts of teachers who create engaged relationships and these appear to produce very positive learning outcomes and experiences for children. A relatively recent development in the literature, that pays attention to the way in which children report their classroom experiences, indicates that insufficient attention has been paid to the ways in which both peer and teacher-child relationships are configured.

Research has also focused upon schoolyard experiences and found that this latter setting provides rich opportunities for children's active engagement, with the result that they often report their non-learning experiences in considerably more detail than the learning encounters. Some work also suggests a clear gendered differentiation in boy and girl play patterns and concludes that these reflect more deeply seated differences in their emotional and relational needs. For instance, boys' attraction to team games is thought to reflect a preference for extensive more surface-level relationships, while the girls' tendencies to play in pairs is considered to reflect their preferences for intimate relationships.

The paradoxes that lie at the heart of our understanding of childhood are perhaps nowhere more clearly seen than in the way in which contemporary childhood is acted out in space and time. Here two competing discourses meet each other head-on and the impact broader social forces have on the way in which contemporary childhood is configured can be clearly seen. The utilitarian view of childhood, that believes children should be busily occupied in activities that contribute directly to their development and keeps them out of harm's way, works well with current societal demands that parents be gainfully employed. However, an equally strong discourse challenges this view, suggesting that childhood is a time for play and that free, unsupervised play, preferably outdoors, should feature in significant quantities during childhood. There is further uncertainty about the notion of play itself, and here the debate is between a view of play as fun as opposed to play as children's work.

Building on discussions of how children play, is an emerging focus on the way in which children use the outdoors. It has been suggested that their preference for different sorts of outdoor spaces is partly driven by their desire to be able to connect with each other. Being able to play away from the gaze of adults is suggested as another common motivator behind children's use of the outdoors. The increasing encroachment of adult agendas and priorities on children's use of and access to the outdoors is a significant focus of contemporary debates in a diverse range of fields from architecture and urban design, to geography and sociology. It is suggested that children's use of outside space is increasingly constrained and that their rights to freely access the outdoors have been reframed as a threat to adult use. Sometimes children's use of the outdoors is also seen as a threat to their own safety. However, cross-cultural studies reveal that the notion of children's capacity to competently access the outdoors on their own is more a product of the other demands on parental time and attention rather than a fixed point at which they become competent to manage themselves.

The way children use time and space and the structure of institutions developed for their care, protection and education draw attention to the role played by forces outside of childhood itself in the way in which childhood is experienced and structured. In this

connection, the way in which changing workforce participation patterns flow into changes children's use of time and space was discussed. Cross-cultural studies point to the very different ways in which children experience these changes in different places and times. Some writers have further suggested that the separation of familial relationships from child management is giving rise to a new, more egalitarian family form, the symmetrical family. The implications of this, in terms of both parent-child relations and the social construction of childhood, are as yet unclear. Research suggests that children express a level of frustration with the way that work demands intrude into family time, indicating a trade-off between routine opportunities for engagement between parents and children and economic participation.

Technology has also had an impact on the way in which contemporary childhood is experienced in many places. The increased presence of new technologies within households is tied to two significant social trends, increased maternal workforce participation and increasing levels of anxiety about children's safety when away from home. It is also clearly a material resource that has been actively taken up by children for their entertainment. New technology has the potential to recast traditional adult-child relationships by placing children in the position of expert and adults as less knowledgeable. However, children's relationships with new technology are more complicated than this and it appears that its use is also intimately connected to their sense of themselves and their social relationships.

The research, then, suggests there is considerable value in attending to the experience of children. Historically, their location within the family and other key social institutions governed by adults and adult interests, and the developmental view of children as not yet competent, has meant that their interests have been seen as either synonymous with the interests of the adults who are in control or not as significant as adult perspectives. A view of children as projects for adult work, as adults in the making, has further meant that certain sorts of experiences, that would be unacceptable to adults, are deemed appropriate for children. Critiques of these traditional academic perspectives on children came together towards the end of last century to form the new social studies of childhood. This is a broad multi-disciplinary grouping of works that focus upon the social construction of childhood.

These works place children at the centre of the research exercise and thus approach them as experts with valuable information to contribute to our understanding of childhood. Attention now moves to the epistemological and theoretical frameworks for this study.

- Chapter Three -

Epistemology and theory

Introduction

Maynard (1994, p. 10) tells us that:

Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate.

Addressing epistemological matters is therefore a critical part of the process of demonstrating the trustworthiness of research (Harrison, MacGibbon and Morton 2001, p. 324). This chapter develops material presented in the introduction that outlined the factors that led me to this study in both the public sphere and also from my personal and professional life. It attempts to situate these matters in terms of the broader epistemological traditions within which my work is located. In so doing, it locates the assumptions I brought to the research process in their wider academic frameworks, and the new social studies of childhood in terms of the broader intellectual traditions from which this new paradigm has developed. The chapter is divided into four sections:

1. Epistemology: discussion here addresses the origins of social constructionism and the way in which I applied it within this particular project.

2. Ontology and values: consistent with the social constructionist requirement that to establish a warrant²² to speak on behalf of participants, researchers must elaborate their own position in relation to the nature of being and the values that underpin their work. This section deals with these two matters.
3. Theoretical location: the application of an interpretivist stance to this study is outlined in this section and attention is drawn to the key implications of this theoretical positioning for the study.
4. Challenges: in closing, the chapter considers two key challenges that attend upon the positions adopted in the study and outlines the ways in which these have been resolved.

Epistemology

Origins and definition of social constructionism

There is considerable debate about the nature and origins of social constructionism (see, for instance, the following edited texts: Steier 1991; Velody and Williams 1998). However, many agree that Berger and Luckman's (1966) work represents an important landmark in the development of social constructionist thinking. While clear that their work built upon a significant intellectual tradition, particularly from key German thinkers such as Scheler and Mannheim (Berger and Luckman 1966, p. 16 and 20-22), these authors marked a turning point for American sociology, in particular, and sociological thinking more generally. Critical components of the approach they presented were that reality was socially constructed and maintained (Berger and Luckman 1966, p. 15), and that therefore the central sociological task was to specify the social processes that enabled this to occur. Berger and Luckman eschewed any claim to epistemological status for their work through their now iconic statement (Berger and Luckman 1966, p. 25):

To include epistemological questions concerning the validity of sociological knowledge in the sociology of knowledge is somewhat like trying to push a bus in which one is riding.

²² I am using this term in the sense that Alldred (1998, p. 147) applies it to refer to the authority with which statements can be made about research findings.

However, their work has nonetheless become one important cornerstone in contemporary approaches to critical epistemological questions, as well as an important reference point for social constructionist works more generally. Their work has been particularly significant for qualitative research and studies such as that presented here, because they clearly established that the subjective experience of everyday life was a legitimate, indeed critical, focus for analysis, theorising and debate (Berger and Luckman 1966, p. 35). Phenomenological analysis was the strategy they advanced for exploring the way in which the intersubjective commonsense world was constructed (Berger and Luckman 1966, p. 34). This was a descriptive method, empirical but not scientific (Berger and Luckman 1966). Other concepts offered by Berger and Luckman, which have subsequently played important roles in the development of the many fields that have developed within the social constructionist ambit include notions of multiple realities and layers of meaning. The everyday, they suggested, was the reality “par excellence” (Berger and Luckman 1966, p. 35) for study because this was where the tension of consciousness was highest. They further argued that this reality was an internally ordered, sensible and meaningful reality that was, importantly, intersubjective; created and sustained through human interaction.

Berger and Luckman (1966 p. 56-59) suggested three critical processes were involved in the creation and maintenance of knowledge about reality. These were typification, institutionalisation and legitimation. Together these three processes generate experience of social reality as a more or less stable phenomenon; social processes, social reality and knowledge come to seem as if they exist in a concrete form. Berger and Luckman called this reification (1966, p. 58). Necessary if communication is to occur, however, it can also lead to exclusion, the discounting of dissenting views, and consequently to social and personal problems (Freedman and Combs 1996, p. 25). Such processes become important subjects for social research which seeks to untangle the ways in which excluding social practices become embedded in everyday life.

Velody and Williams (1998, p. 2) note the dramatic upsurge in the use of the term social constructionism in recent years, but suggest, despite its apparent popularity, that caution should be exercised when attempting to define it. They speak of considerable diversity in the use of this term and consider that (Velody and Williams 1998, p. 14):

Understood in its own terms, the constructivist movement might best be described as a fragile coalition of marginal, nomadic academic bands. The knowledge produced by these bands is stitched together less by adherence to a body of dogma, technical protocols, master narratives or clear-cut ideologies than by a tolerance of diverse ‘voices’.

Crotty (1998, p. 42), while recognising this diversity and contradiction, nevertheless offers the following definition of constructionism which clearly shares certain critical notions with the position articulated by Berger and Luckman (1966) some 30 years earlier:

It is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.

A social constructionist epistemology thus requires that research explicitly recognise that knowledge, meaning and experience are contextually located and relationally mediated. Knowledge and truth do not exist outside of the processes human beings engage in to create them. As MacGibbon (2003, p. 35) notes:

Theorists agree that it [social constructionism] includes any approach that has at its foundations one or more of the following assumptions: a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge, the impossibility of separating knowledge and social action, historical and cultural specificity and the construction of subjectivities.

Communication and language practices, then, become a critical focus of work located within such frameworks: “Our language tells us how to see the world and what to see in it” (Freedman and Combs 1996, p. 29). The precise role that language is seen to play, however, varies depending upon the particular theoretical tradition used and the focus of the work (Burr 1995, p. 129-130 and 159). Social constructionism brings to the foreground locally constituted meaning, validates the reality of individual experience and highlights the centrality of relationships in social life (see, for example, Mayall 1994a; Punch 2001; Smith, Taylor and Gollop 2000). Its direct engagement with diversity is critical (Burr 1995,

p. 143-147), and through it, not only has research been able to give us a more colourful sense of our social world, but by attending to local meaning and experience, it has contributed to a more representative one as well. In addition to providing new ways of approaching social science and new positions on the nature and status of knowledge, the social constructionist viewpoint has also played an important role in the development of therapeutic endeavour (see, for instance, Freedman and Combs 1996). In fact, there are parallels between social constructionist accounts of therapeutic processes and of research. In particular, the attention to explicating the value base from which one is working and the imperative to attend closely to the account being rendered by the speaker (with as little initial interpretation as possible) are two strategies that these therapies and research activity share (Freedman and Combs 1996).

The social constructionist standpoint has been of considerable significance to the development of the new social studies of childhood because of its emphasis upon the contingency of meaning, the related significance of diverse perspectives and voices, and the everyday life world as an important site for exploring these diverse realities (see, for example, James and Prout 1990a; Mayall 2002). Aries (1960), while not the first to critique the contemporary account of childhood as a universal, objective social fact (Butler 1996, p. 2), and himself subsequently subject to vigorous challenge (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 15), certainly provided considerable impetus for new ways of thinking about the nature of children and childhood and so stimulated the development of social constructionist approaches to the analysis of childhood. In fact his account of the gradual emergence of the notion of childhood between the 15th and 18th centuries in Europe provided weight to the growing anti-realist, anti-objectivist movements during the 1960s that were so important to the crystallisation of the social constructionist standpoint.

As noted in the preceding chapter, a central tenet of the new social studies of childhood is that childhood is not a unitary, universal entity. Rather, there are many childhoods and these are culturally, historically and socially specific. Similarly, social constructionist accounts reject the notion that childhood proceeds in a series of more or less standard, predictable stages and that the significance of childhood lies in its preparation for adulthood. As Gelman (1979, p. 901) suggested, the developmental frame can conceal as much as it reveals, and so a diversity of approaches, as suggested by the constructionist mandate, is important:

There is so much evidence now coming in about the perspective taking abilities of preschoolers ... that I find it hard to understand how I or anyone else ever held the belief that preschoolers are egocentric. [T]hey [also] have considerable cognitive abilities. Why, then, has it take us so long to see them? ... Firstly, we simply did not look. Indeed, we seemed to choose to ignore facts that were staring us in the face. Consider the case of counting proficiency in young children. It is now clear that preschoolers can and do count. ... I don't remember how many times I saw preschoolers counting in my various experiments before I finally recognised that they were indeed able to count, no matter what our theories led us to believe.

The possibilities the social constructionist position on the nature of social reality holds for those interested in understanding childhood is indeed profound, offering as it does a different set of questions through which such studies can be pursued. It provides the opportunity to stand aside from the dominant discourse of childhood as primarily preparation and development, and enables researchers to wonder what it is like to be a particular child at a particular point in time. As Freedman and Combs (1996, p. 21) suggest in their exploration of narrative therapy:

They [postmodernists/social constructionists] differ from modernists in that exceptions interest them more than rules. They choose to look at specific contextualised details more often than grand generalisations, differences rather than similarities.

Lesko (2001, p. 5-10) advances a perspective which blends constructionism with post-structuralism, feminism and post-colonial analysis to consider the systems of reasoning that give rise to different sorts of childhood in different times and places. This blended approach enables questions to be asked about whose interests particular manifestations of childhood serve. In so doing, she opens up possibilities for social constructionist analysis to move between actor centred and discourse centred analyses and thus brings a critical theory dimension into our understanding of childhood. Further, Lesko's (2001) "Cultural Construction of Adolescence", and Zornado's (2000) "Inventing the Child", provide valuable pointers to the way in which broader cultural transformations can be seen to play

themselves out in local experience. This enables the critical interrogation of the impact of powerful discourses on the nature of childhood in the construction of local experience.

Reading Hill and Tisdall's (1997) work first raised the possibility for me that childhood was a socially constructed status and in so doing brought childhood and my developing proposal into the realm of social constructionist thinking. My interactions with and observations of children I met, as I developed the proposal, pointed to the value of an interpretivist stance and the contributions that strategies such as ethnography would make to the generation of data. This was important because it suggested the necessity of re-thinking what a child might be and, importantly, that childhood itself might be a significant experience for children. Rather than being a way-station on the route to adulthood, the way in which childhood manifested itself for individual children might have relevance in its own right. This brought the significance of children's experiences of daily life right into focus. It required that I pay particular attention to the meanings children attached to these experiences (Lancaster 2003) and the ways in which those around them defined the status of childhood. Such a focus also allowed for an explicit consideration of the ways in which children defined themselves and for an analysis of the relationship between these definitions and their various social contexts.

A social constructionist approach enabled close consideration of all these factors because of its emphasis upon meaning, context, relationship and communication. The foregrounding of relationships as critical dimensions of the social construction of childhood was to become a very significant dimension of my work and ultimately provided clear direction when thinking through the most appropriate ontological location for it. Here the works of Brown and Gilligan (1992) and Mauthner and Doucet (1998) in relation to the voice centred relational method were important, because they underlined the importance of relational experiences and communication for children, as a significant matter to be explicitly included in research strategies. Relationships, both in the research enterprise and for children in their daily lives, became a central focus for my work.

The social constructionist mandate that knowledge is socially created and maintained, and not an absolute or unitary entity (Burr 1995), provided me with a way of analysing the diverse relationships the children had with each other and also with the many adults who peopled their lives. My early observations, as I prepared the proposal and refined the

methods, indicated that relationships in general, and with adults in particular, were a critical dimension of childhood experience. The need to develop strategies to effectively explore these matters led me back to Hill and Tisdall (1997) and to their considerable bibliography. Tracking out from their work to other significant publications such as those of Mayall (1994a; 1994b; 1996), Butler and Shaw (1996), James and Prout (1990a; 1990b) and Qvortrup (1990) and Qvortrup et al. (1994) helped orient me to the experiences of the children without being distracted by adult accounts of what was occurring. They each highlighted the importance of grounding the study firmly upon a conceptualisation of children as competent, capable social actors in their own right, and of their stories as valid interpretations of their social worlds. However, Alldred (1998) and Mauthner and Doucet (1998), among others, reminded me that the account would still ultimately be mine. In so doing, these authors drew my attention to the need for caution in claiming that my work ‘represented’ the lives of the children in some pure or absolute sense.

This epistemological tradition provided a framework within which the multiple and contradictory nature of childhood as a fundamental dimension of social differentiation could be explored, without losing an essential grounding in the lives of individual children. It provided conceptual structures for connecting these everyday experiences to broader social, political and economic forces.

Ontological and value positions

This section outlines my value base and ontological position with particular reference to the way in which it has shaped this work. These matters flow from the previous discussion to the extent that certain value positions and understandings about the nature of being tend to be associated with certain epistemologies (Crotty 1998). As noted in the introduction, my initial proposal involved an exploration of the significance or otherwise, of becoming eleven years old. My initial position was therefore positivist, and certainly adult-centric (Mason and Falloon 2001, p. 99) originating as it did in my reflections on what seemed to me to be a significant turning point for children. However, my interest in identifying whether or not it was of significance to children suggests another value position that is close to the more child-centred position that I now occupy.

My early change from a focus on the significance of turning eleven came as a result of close listening to children I encountered in my daily life while I was finalising the research plan and preparing for the fieldwork. During this time numerous children told me that all ages were significant to them, birthday parties were particularly important, and each age held new excitements and challenges, but that there were also many continuities that did not seem much influenced by the passing of another birth-date, or the reaching of another 'stage'. So early in the project I had moved from wanting to come to the research with a set of externally derived specific questions, to approaching it with a very general interest in what it might be like to be particular children. This move is highly significant in terms of the current discussion, signalling as it does important issues around the nature of being in general, what it might mean to be a child in particular, and also about the ways in which knowledge can be generated.

I approach research as essentially and importantly a relational activity. I therefore find Brown and Gilligan's (1992) exposition of a relational ontology particularly attractive. Mauthner and Doucet (1998, p. 25) note that this ontology has been identified and theorised in a number of academic disciplines including political theory, feminist philosophy, feminist legal theory, education and psychology. They explain a relational ontology in this way (Mauthner and Doucet 1998, p. 25):

... the 'relational ontology' posits the notion of 'selves in relation' (Ruddick; 1989, p. 211), or 'relational being' (Jordan; 1993, p. 141), a view of human beings as embedded in a complex web of intimate and larger social relations (Gilligan; 1982), and a 'different understanding of human nature and human interaction so that people are viewed as interdependent rather than independent' (Tronto; 1995, p. 142).

The relational ontology complements a social constructionist epistemology. Both place emphasis upon examining individuals in relation to others and to social context, and upon understanding the duality of social structure and human agency (Giddens 1984). A relational ontology is of particular significance when working with children. For instance, Kovarik (1994) asserts that understanding the way in which relationships unfold and are experienced by children is a critical matter for research to attend to, and this includes both the relationships children have with others in their everyday social worlds and with

researchers. What this requires of researchers is explicit recognition of the fact that, in doing research, no matter how cleverly disguised the method, or socially distant or intensely engaged the researcher, participants will construct what occurs during research encounters in terms of some sort of relationship. This raises particular ethical issues when researching children, and I deal with these later (Chapter Four – ethics). Here, it is important to note that if the data generation phase of the research is relatively short, children will be likely to pick from one of the adult-types of relationships that they have already experienced and use it as a guide for the relationship they expect to occur. Depending on the particular child and the focus of the study, these roles may or may not be particularly helpful for the research. Having a longer period of engagement for data generation allows researchers and children to develop a more tailored sort of relationship. Greater duration provides opportunities for children to come to see adult researchers as different sorts of adults (Corsaro 1985, p. 28), and this increases the likelihood of more meaningful data being generated.

A second critical ontological position to consider relates to the nature of children and adults. This is an area of active debate in the literature and the position one adopts has significant implications for the nature of research questions asked, the way in which data is collected and the way in which it is analysed. Broadly speaking, the various positions can be summarised as those that consider adults and children to be qualitatively different; adults here are considered to be developmentally complete while children are conceptualised as “socially incompetent, intellectually immature, and culturally ignorant” (Mandell 1988, p. 434). Research that arises out of such an ontological position tends to be deterministic and to assume an objective, impersonal stance (Mandell 1988). A second ontological position focuses on the similarities between adults and children with the result that semi-participatory research roles become possible (see, for instance, Fine and Sandstrom 1988). A final position considers adult-child differences to be more theoretical than real and therefore argues for a suspension of the notions of adult and child. Research that develops from such a position adopts an involved-participant observer position, such as the “least adult” role advocated by Mandell (1988, p. 435).

The position I have adopted lies somewhere between these final two points and here critical values I bring to the project can be seen. In terms of my specific understanding of children, I consider them to be competent social beings who are particularly knowledgeable about

what it means to be a child. My positioning in relation to children is that they are experts on their own lives with vital things to say that add substantially to our knowledge about the nature and status of childhood. In relation to the debate about whether and what might be the differences between adults and children, I consider that there are two critical differences, both of which need to be taken account of, particularly when building research relationships. First, I consider the power differential between adults and children requires special attention in research contexts. This matter comes to the fore when attempting to negotiate and maintain access to children as participants because it is most unlikely that researchers will have to negotiate and maintain access only with children. It also has implications for the way in which adult researchers present themselves to children if the objectives of the research require that the children do not relate to them as ‘typical’ adults.

The second critical difference is that adults have a socially defined role of responsibility for children and this responsibility cannot (and I believe, should not) be suspended in the interests of obtaining good research data. These two issues are dealt with more fully in Chapter Four, where I discuss ethical issues. Here it is sufficient to note that in positioning myself in relation to the children I worked to create a role for myself as a different sort of adult (Corsaro 1985, p. 28); as an adult who did not have specific domains of authority over them, who was very interested in what they thought about issues and how they experienced their worlds, but one who none-the-less was still demonstrably an adult.

While this is a different position to that suggested by many who research with children (see, for example, Fine 1995; Mandell 1988), I consider it to be very important. Children occupy a range of positions in the social order and these are dependent upon the ways in which they are defined and the extent to which they accept or reject such definition. Adults most often do this defining. Researchers are not generally children, and should not pretend to be. There are a range of possible roles for researchers (who are adults) to occupy, but, unlike Laerke (1998), I consider that none of these involve them pretending to be children. This is for ethical reasons, and also because children are intelligent beings and are able to spot the difference between an adult and a child, even one who is trying very hard to fit in. Despite Mandell’s (1988) careful articulation of the “least adult” role, and the ethnographic priority on coming to an intricate and detailed understanding of individual’s lives and experiences from their own perspectives (Rice and Ezzy 1999, p. 13-14), the ongoing social reality of adult-child relations means that being an adult researcher means just this;

that is, both a researcher and an adult. This dual status cannot be escaped. However, what can be achieved, and I believe what is achieved in other similar situations where there are social and cultural differences between researcher and participants, is a careful positioning that separates the researcher off from other social manifestations of, in this case, adult roles (James 2001, p. 254).

Viewing children as active, competent subjects has implications for the way in which the research process unfolds. It clearly suggests that listening to children and engaging actively with them is going to be an important part of the overall strategy. However, I consider that it requires more than this. Specifically, it implies that the researcher does not merely uncritically reflect everything that is observed or generated as data. If children can be engaged with as active, participating subjects, then this surely also requires a reflexive process of re-engagement to validate interpretations. Miller and Holstein (1993, p. 12), in this connection, talk of the “new writing” response adopted in social constructionist work to deal with the challenges raised by a relativist stance when presenting research findings. There are a variety of ways in which this can be done. The form it will take will depend on matters such as, the particular nature of the child(ren) participating, the focus of the research and the nature of the relationships that develop between researcher and researched, to name but a few of the factors that will influence precisely how and to what extent researchers can engage and re-engage with participants. At a minimum, what this positioning requires is that children’s own accounts should have a centrality in analysis. It also implies that diverging from their accounts be identified and explained in relation to how it sheds light upon matters such as the ways in which children position themselves differently in particular settings, and the ways in which particular settings constrain or extend what is possible for children to be or achieve.

An interpretivist theoretical stance

Interpretive theories seek to explain the way that local, cultural life is connected to and influences human thought and action. While multi-disciplinary in nature, interpretive studies of children and childhood share a common concern to understand the meanings that children create (Gaskin, Miller and Corsaro 1992, p. 6). Interpretivism challenges traditional empiricist approaches to knowledge generation by drawing attention to the critical role of perspective and position in understanding (Alvesson 2002, p. 3). The

interpretive paradigm fits well with a social constructionist epistemology because it views reality as socially constructed and maintained through complex interactions between individuals, groups and contexts. The interpretive study of phenomena places researchers in a central position alongside research participants; they cannot be seen as separate from the research and having no effect upon its progress nor upon the findings (Banister et al. 1994). Denzin (1994, p. 500) places the interpretive perspective at the centre of social science:

In the social sciences there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself. Confronted with a mountain of impressions, documents and fieldnotes, the qualitative researcher faces the difficult and challenging task of making sense of what has been learned. I call making sense of what has been learned the art of interpretation. This may also be described as moving from the field to the text to the reader.

The sustained and engaged nature of the methods commonly adopted in interpretive research mean that it is possible to document significant phases in children's lives. Gaskin, Miller and Corsaro (1992) note that, in addition to its sustained and engaged nature, interpretive research with children involves intensive observations in natural settings, and can take months, even years to complete. It is through these sustained practices that the ontological matters raised in the preceding section are most usually addressed. My concern to add to our understanding of the experience of being a child by attending to the everyday experiences of individual, situated children, found a comfortable fit with the interpretive tradition.

Describing a new approach to the analysis of family life, Mauthner and Doucet (1998, p. 126) suggest interpretive frameworks fit well with a relational ontology. I would argue that combining a relational ontology with an interpretive frame of reference contributes to the theorising of childhood and children's experiences. These two conceptual pillars enable the explicit incorporation into research of:

1. Children's dependency as children
2. The role of adult power in controlling the ultimate configuration of individual childhoods
3. The contribution of the particular relational tapestries of individual children with peers and adults, and

4. The contextual factors that also influence the ways in which particular childhoods are experienced in specific places and times.

Of course, such conceptualisations also fit well within a social constructionist epistemology.

Gaskin, Miller and Corsaro (1992) suggest that applying an interpretive theoretical perspective to study of children means attending to the ways in which children learn to be cultural beings in the specific local contexts in which they find themselves. In other words, it allows us to understand the ways that children come to invest cultural resources with meaning (Gaskin, Miller and Corsaro 1992, p. 6). These processes are constructive and individual to the extent that children construct personal meaning out of the particular resources to which they are exposed. They are collective in the sense that these resources were created by previous generations and are made available to the child by other people. This is a productive and reproductive process (Giddens 1984, p. 25) that highlights the duality of the social structure, as creator and created.

Gaskin, Miller and Corsaro (1992, p. 9-14) suggest that three components are common to the interpretive study of children regardless of the discipline in which the work is located:

1. Situated meaning and developments

Here the child and context are approached together as a system and constitute the unit of analysis. Interpretive work provides an opportunity to discover the nature and significance of cultural variation and also of socio-cultural change. The notion of situated meaning implies that there are local variations that are largely context dependent, and that particular characteristics of local systems influence precisely how and what children make of the systems to which they are connected.

2. Active, affective processes of meaning creation

Meanings are created through active participation in collective cultural routines/practices. Children take a variety of stances toward cultural resources (Goodnow 1990). Therefore there will be individual variation in the meanings that are created. Interpretive approaches allow us to study individual variation, cultural patterns and to undertake comparisons across cultural groups and settings. Interpretive

approaches focus upon the meanings through which experience of the world is mediated. Children not only seek to understand and adopt, they also actively seek to resist and transform (see, for example, Ganetz 1995).

3. Constitutive power of language

Language and communication practices are the key to understanding meaning. These are the primary tools through which shared meanings and divergent perspectives are negotiated. They are also the vehicles through which children gain entry into the interpretive frameworks of their culture. Ochs (1991, cited in Gaskin, Miller and Corsaro 1992, p. 13) tells us that not only is the symbolic content of language important but the choreography of communication is significant as well. Communication, however, is not only symbolic, it is also pragmatic because it is used to structure everyday functional interactions and activities.

Geertz (1973, p. 5) coined the term “thick description” to refer to the analytical process utilised in work guided by the interpretive perspective. This involves the accumulation of details of everyday life that are generated from interactive involvement with participants and then situating and explaining these in relation to both the individual and the broader context. Careful use of the methodological frameworks that are commonly associated with the interpretive stance, such as ethnography, enable the drawing of culturally valid conclusions from research.

Challenges raised by this approach

While taking seriously Best’s (1993, p. 147) warning that:

Qualitative researchers must balance substance against the demands of theoretical consistency. Analytical purity can come at a terrible cost.

there are two challenges that the approach outlined here raises for this study. These two matters are closely linked, but because they require somewhat different responses they are discussed separately below.

Relativism

The first challenge is to explicitly engage with the issue of relativism in order to be able to tell the diverse stories that comprise childhood (in this case) but at the same time to avoid becoming mired, as Best (1993) cautions us, in its extreme edges. Relativism is very much a double-edged sword. Its promise is the liberation it offers hitherto marginalised and silenced groups to have their reality publicly validated through research, and from there to create change (Burr 1995). However, its curse is that in asserting that all accounts are equally valid, oppressive and powerful positions can be accorded equal status to marginalised or silenced voices (Best 1993, p. 134; Ganetz 1995, p. 78). This has serious implications for research with children. The mandate can potentially serve to justify maltreatment and the silencing of children's voices, just as easily as it can be used to shed light upon the oppressive and damaging consequences of abuses of adult power over children.

This matter was of critical importance to me in this project. Relativism does not always serve children well given the power imbalance between themselves and adults. Many public debates of critical interest to children demonstrate this. For example, despite the liveliness of the debate about the repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act (1964)²³ and the fact that the United Nations has required that the Aotearoa/New Zealand Government explain its position on this matter²⁴ at no point in the past decade has the machinery of government seen fit to canvas children's views on this matter²⁵.

The challenge posed by relativism in children's studies requires explicit attention be given to ensuring that:

1. Children's voices are not drowned out by adult voices, and
2. Data analysis strategies enable researchers to critically consider the implications of different sorts of material and social experience for the nature of particular childhoods.

²³ This is the piece of legislation that allows for the physical punishment of children by their parents (or adults acting in loco parentis).

²⁴ See www.liveupdater.com/labour party/LiveArticle.asp?ArtID=-155978710.

²⁵ As noted earlier, towards the end of 2003, after significant pressure from the United Nations and the murder of another child, the Government has announced that it believes it will repeal Section 59 of the Crimes Act (1964), in about two years time.

These two matters are closely connected and the following paragraphs consider them together.

While I always intended that my focus would be upon the children and their accounts, the potential for the intrusion of other accounts into the data generation was present through the narratives of adults who peopled the children's worlds and also in my own thinking as I worked through the analysis and read and re-read the literature written by adults on and about children. If all perspectives are equally valid, how should I account for fundamental differences between how children and adults might represent an experience? How would I deal with the inevitability of myself, as an adult, being the ultimate interpreter of everything that was said, done and observed? More challenging still, how should I account for those situations where children's perspectives might be thoroughly self-critical, even self-blaming, or mirror those of adults around them, when my view of the situation might be more generous? Clearly, while all accounts have an internal validity and need to be respected as unique perspectives on a particular situation, by definition social constructionism also requires that we consider issues of context. It is here that understanding the role of power and the normative structuring of relationships in both the children's accounts and the situations in which they found themselves can be considered. Further, as Freedman and Combs (1996, p. 35) note, while constructionism actively allows for multiple versions of reality or truth, it equally demands that we consider the effects of different versions on individuals and social groups. While Laird (1989, p. 430) suggests that:

... sociocultural narratives ... construct the contextual realm of possibility from which individuals and families can select the ingredients and forms for their own narratives

she equally brings to the foreground the need to question why some roles or positions are not available to some groups and individuals. The works of Foucault have been critical here, particularly in terms of exploring the relationship between power, knowledge and discourse wherein certain versions of reality are able to exert greater influence than others (for instance, Foucault 1970, cited in Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers 1992, and Foucault 1980, cited in Freedman and Coombs 1996). Analyses such as these are of

considerable importance in the new social studies of childhood, seeking as they do to create spaces where children's own accounts can be heard, and seen as valid representations of our social world that can contribute to the development of policy, practice and everyday social relations.

To address the challenges posed by relativism, I made a number of practical decisions about how I would position myself in the field. I also maintained an iterative strategy during data generation and interpretation. I made the strategic decision that I would limit the extent to which adult accounts would come into my view while I completed the fieldwork. As discussed in Chapter Four, I met with the children's parents once, at the beginning of the research, and I kept my connections with the adults at the school to the minimum required to gain and maintain access. In general terms, the adults around these children accepted my requirement that they sit at the margins of the project and thus, once I had established my credibility and trustworthiness, I was left to proceed with the project.

The observational component of the fieldwork provided me with many opportunities to watch and think about the different ways in which relations between adults and children were configured, to wonder about the reasons why they were configured in these ways and then to consider the ways in which such configurations might contribute to different understandings and experiences of being a child. Emotionally charged interactions between adults and children were one type of situation that I attended to closely because in such cases the use of power by adults over children might feature. I thus collected detailed descriptions of such encounters in order to be able to analyse them later. I also used these descriptions as the basis for subsequent interviews with the children to refresh our memories and to provide opportunities for the children to talk to me about their understandings of these sorts of experiences.

Throughout the fieldwork and the analysis that tracked alongside it, I maintained an intense relationship with the literature. The new social studies of childhood framework provided a set of external analyses for developing my understanding of the experiences and perspectives the children shared with me. These works provided me with ways of looking critically at social contexts while at the same time recognising them as significant and locally valid manifestations of social life. Through this I could bring notions of power and discourse (see, for example, Alldred 1998) to bear on the development of my understanding

of the children's understandings of their social worlds. I could also apply notions of subject and object (Mayall 1994a) to my interpretation of the different ways in which they were able to be in different sorts of social settings. My values and ontological position in relation to children, enabled me to engage with them as reflexive subjects during the interpretation and helped me to meet the challenge of hearing their voices as separate and distinct from adult voices and brought a locally-based critical dimension to my analysis.

It should be noted here that I am not suggesting that my work is discourse analysis as such. I use the word discourse in the way that Burr (1995, p. 184) uses it to refer to “systematic, coherent, set[s] of images, metaphors and so on that construct an object in a particular way”. In particular, my work is concerned with the discourses of childhood and the ways that these work themselves out in the everyday lives of children in a particular location, namely a small Aotearoa/New Zealand town. I used the notion of discourse to critically examine the impact of particular language and social practices on children.

Representation

Establishing the credibility of research findings is a critical task in social research. Taking a social constructionist framework which sees reality as mutable rather than fixed, and meaning as negotiated and created between people through communication practices such as language, has some important implications for the claims that can be made about what research findings represent. In quantitative work, which often operates with a positivist epistemology, these issues are usually dealt with by addressing reliability, validity and the representativeness of samples and measures used. Within the social constructionist epistemology this matter becomes considerably more slippery and there is ongoing debate about the nature of the warrant that can be made by researchers. Sometimes these matters are referred to as representational dilemmas or the making of claims (Alldred 1998, p. 147) and sometimes they are defined as the credibility or trustworthiness of research findings (Harrison, MacGibbon and Morton 2001). However, in all cases, the authority with which statements can be made about the findings, and the extent to which such statements may be said to apply beyond the confines of the specific research project are the focus of discussion.

These issues take on a particular significance in research with children, and other groups that are different in some critical way from the researcher, because any claim to ‘know how

it is' must be viewed with caution. The task for the researcher becomes to specify on what basis and as a result of which processes, claims about findings are made, to specify the nature of the dilemmas faced in constructing accounts and the ways in which they were resolved (Alldred 1998, p. 147). Furthermore, issues similar to those confronted by feminist researchers as they sought to bring matters germane to the private, domestic sphere into public discourse (Mayall 2002, p. 27-29) also confront adults researching childhood because broader (adult-defined) social understandings of what it means to be a child may not fit well with the actuality of daily life for particular children and even for children more generally. As Ribbens and Edwards (1998, p. 2) note:

There is a danger that the voices of particular groups, or particular forms of knowledge, may be drowned out, systematically silenced or misunderstood as research and researchers engage with dominant academic and public concerns and discourses.

There are a number of ways of addressing the need to establish a warrant for research. In qualitative work, recourse to numerical bases of establishing credibility are inherently problematic because of the small numbers of participants, the very local way in which data is collected and the different research objectives that such work usually has²⁶. There is considerable debate about the most effective way of establishing a researcher's warrant to speak in interpretive work. However, what seems clear is that in each project researchers need to be explicit about the nature of the claims they believe they can make and to detail the steps they took in their research to be assured that their findings were more than idiosyncratic reflections on an interesting and engaging process of relationship building between researcher and researched.

Focusing specifically on research with children, Alldred (1998) questions the claim made by traditional empirical research to represent participants because of the emphasis such work places on uncovering universal truths. She further suggests that ethnography's claim to represent children by giving them voice needs to be carefully scrutinised because, she asserts, this claim ultimately requires unquestioning faith in the power of the researcher to

²⁶ For instance, generalisability, which is often an objective of positivist research is not always a goal for work undertaken within a social constructionist epistemology, where the purpose may be to shed light on a particular setting or context in its own right.

step outside of their perspective of 'other' (Lunn 1997). She suggests that by combining ethnography with discourse analysis it is possible to make claims of authentic representation because of the dual focus (in ethnography) on coming to a sensitised understanding of the individual in context, and (in discourse) in unpacking the impact which language has upon understanding. Her focus is particularly upon the challenges to authentic representation that arise once researchers leave the field and begin to work on analysis without the input of participants. The issues she raises are important because, in adopting a social constructionist epistemology, researchers acknowledge that their account is only one of many. This then requires that they be clear about the status of the account they offer (Mauthner and Doucet 1998, p. 121).

I adapted Allred's (1998) suggested strategy to resolve the representational challenges I faced. This involved a two-step approach. The first level of analysis grew out of the two fundamental ontological principles that underpinned my work. Namely, that children are competent and knowledgeable, and that it is through relationships that understanding is generated. Accordingly, I worked with the children as active research participants by checking out my observations and interpretations directly with them. This took place during the fieldwork where I would often return to them with questions in interviews or when I met up with them during observations or group work. It also took place after the fieldwork was completed and I was working more intensely on analysis. I checked my understandings with the children several times and also sought further information or clarification and asked for their reflections on the matters I was working with²⁷.

I recognise that by the time I completed my final re-engagement with the children they were young teenagers and therefore that their experience of the world was in many ways different to how it was when I generated data with them in the field. However, my re-checking with them was focused on talking about whether my analysis was a reasonable interpretation of how things were for them when they were younger and whether they considered it had a resonance with children's experiences more generally. The fact that the children were older when I checked back with them does not, I believe, undermine the usefulness of this approach. My experience with this strategy was that the children were

²⁷ I also used these opportunities to gain specific consent for the use of quotations and other materials.

able to think and talk themselves back into those times when they were younger and to cogently reflect upon the experiences they had during that time in their lives.

The second level of analysis involved aligning my findings with other knowledge and using that other knowledge to interrogate my interpretation. My efforts here involved checking to see if my work made sense in terms of what was already known. This involved either elaborating the manner in which my learning fitted with the literature or exploring how or why it did not fit. This process was similar to the theoretical triangulation discussed by Morse (1994) and took place at the same time as I had discussions with the children about my interpretations. Consistent with the new social studies of childhood framework adopted here, I did not place greater priority on the evidence in the literature than I did upon the children's own input. Rather, I used the literature to create a point of discussion with the children and to seek their views about this alongside my interpretation of the material they had shared with me during the fieldwork.

I thus adopted a process-based approach that involved checking my observations and interpretations with the children from the beginning of the fieldwork through until I had completed my analysis. I also drew out connections between my understandings and those of other researchers in different places and times and engaged with the children over these and my understandings. This process enabled me to generate a set of situated understandings of the children's experiences and then to draw connections between these and other accounts without losing the essential integrity of the original materials. The structure of the thesis reflects this approach by separating out discussions of theory and method, the presentation of data and my interpretation.

Despite the strategies I adopted, I do not consider that there are easy or clear answers to the challenges of creating understandings of the everyday lives of children that are genuine, convincing and also potentially liberating. In the end, I did not find a completely satisfying answer to this fundamental challenge. The literature to some extent supports my underlying disquiet. However, it also offers some comfort. There is an acceptance that careful explication of methods and the use of reflexivity, separation of analysis from description, and the elaboration of the researcher's own value base and ontological positioning provide the best set of strategies currently available for meeting these challenges (see, for example, Burr 1995, p. 183; Holstein and Miller 1993, p. 151-152; Woodhead 1999, p. 16). In this

connection, recent work by Byrne, Canavan and Millar (2003) on the matter of including teenagers as co-researchers highlights the current 'state of the art' on this issue. These authors detail a recent project using the voice centred relational method to engage teenagers as reflexive research partners, and they suggest new ways in which this might be achieved. However, they also note the significant challenges that such research still faces and the distance we have to go to achieve full and equal participation by children and young people in research.

Conclusion

In summary then, this thesis is located within a social constructionist epistemology. It draws heavily upon a relational ontology and adopts an interpretivist theoretical stance. My value position emphasises a clear sense of children as competent and experts in their own lives, but also recognises that adult-child relations are essentially unequal, power relations. These relations have a significant impact on the way in which children come to understand themselves and their social worlds and the possibilities these worlds hold for them. The research relationship therefore needs to be developed carefully, seeking to embody a re-working of the traditional balance of power between adults and children.

Approaching children as experts is a relatively new way of undertaking studies of children and childhood, and the focus of this study on the everyday lives of children about whose wellbeing adults held no particular concern was, similarly, a little-studied area. Working as an adult from a pre-defined agenda was unlikely to provide the best opportunities to learn what it meant to be a child in this particular place and time. The social constructionist framework provided a sound epistemological foundation for my work because it enabled me to focus on the way in which childhood was produced and experienced through social interaction in a particular place and time.

Kovarik (1994) notes that children's worlds are essentially relational and so expressly building this dimension of social life into the foundations of the work was of critical importance. However, it was clear to me that I also needed to be able to directly consider the impact of context and the role of power in relationships and the social constructionist framework enabled this to be achieved also, because of its insistence that a critical stance be adopted in relation to taken for granted knowledge. Discussion now moves to the methodological framework developed for this study.

- Chapter Four -

Methodology and the Research Process

Introduction

This chapter discusses methodological issues. It begins with an overview of the ethnographic approach, which constitutes an overarching framework for the study. Discussion then considers the research process. Here, ethical matters and access and recruitment procedures are outlined and this is followed by a discussion of issues of difference and the approach I took with regard to matters of gender and ethnicity. Attention then moves to the strategies used to generate data with the children. This includes fieldwork matters; both the processes used and the strategies adopted to manage this period of work. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the analytical strategies used in the project. These matters are not often included in discussions of methodology (see, for instance, Mauthner and Doucet 1998). However, I believe that the iterative (Graue and Walsh 1998, p. 158) approach I adopted in this project means that the primary strategies I employed to move from fieldwork to the final written document need to be outlined. This final part of the discussion builds upon the representational challenges outlined in Chapter Three.

Methodology – ethnography

In its most characteristic form it [ethnography] involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, p. 1).

Wiersma (1995, p. 277) suggests that the ethnographic method is particularly useful for research that focuses upon meaning and context. Rice and Ezzy (1999, p. 152-153) consider that ethnography is the methodology of choice for “learning about ‘other’ people's lives”, while Graue and Walsh (1998) devote a whole book to the process of contextually sensitive research with children. Having its origins in cultural anthropology (Rice and Ezzy 1999, p. 155), ethnography has five key characteristics (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994, p. 248):

1. A strong focus on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena
2. A tendency to work primarily with unstructured data
3. The examination of one or a small number of people in detail
4. Data analysis focuses upon the explicit interpretation of the meaning and purpose of human action
5. Research accounts give priority to the description and explanation of events.

Description, then, is a major component of ethnography and such work is commonly inductive in nature. By accumulating the details of everyday life through the use of ethnographic techniques and encouraging research participants to reflect upon these, it is possible to derive culturally valid observations. Descriptions are intended to produce convincing accounts from an emic (insider) perspective (Rice and Ezzy 1999, p. 156). However, thin description is not enough (Geertz 1973). Thick description (Geertz 1973, p. 5) is required to generate understanding. This comes from situating and explaining actions in context. Denzin (1989, p. 83) provides one of the most useful definitions of thick description:

Thick description ... does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals are heard.

Ethnography emphasises the subjective aspects of behaviour and is therefore usually conducted in naturalistic settings; that is, in the situations where the action under investigation occurs. The emergent nature of ethnography is another important feature of this methodology. Hypotheses are not formulated a priori. Rather, theoretical constructions that might specify relationships between events, themes or concepts emerge as the research proceeds (Wiersma 1995, p. 252). Ethnography therefore is theoretically inductive. To some extent the method also emerges as the research progresses (Wiersma 1995) and so ethnography is in this sense methodologically inductive as well. For instance, as Wiersma (1995, p. 213) notes, qualitative research designs usually require flexibility and the recognition that there is likely to be adjustment as data generation proceeds. So the ongoing process of the research will often reveal the next step, methodologically speaking, in much the same way that analytical categories and themes are revealed through the analysis process rather than being generated in an a priori fashion.

The ethnographic method provides solutions to some of the problems confronted by researchers wanting to foreground children and their perspectives and experiences (Hallden 1994; James 2001). Because it is now accepted that children can be studied in their own right and not merely as “adults in the making” (Hallden 1994, p. 63, quoting James and Prout 1990a), ethnographic studies of different dimensions of childhood are particularly important. This relatively recent academic acknowledgement of the subject status of children has enabled inquiry to focus specifically and solely upon children. Building upon analyses

and methodologies developed by feminist writers (see, for instance, Oakely 1994; Thorne 1987) ethnography has provided a viable set of strategies for foregrounding the experiences of “this last of the others” (Brannen and O’Brien 1995, p. 738).

However in order to create new knowledge, will not children first need to be objectified? (Miller and Holstein 1993, p. 12). Further, is it not adults who will do this, thereby simply exercising their power in another guise? Because the central task of ethnography is to identify and understand the perspective, meaning and experience of research participants, it offers solutions to these sorts of problems (Hallden 1994, p. 63-4; James 2001, p. 247). Alldred (1998, p. 150) and James (2001, p. 246-247) note that ethnography has enabled children to play an active role in the production of sociological knowledge and in so doing to contextualise children’s lives. James (2001, p. 246) asserts:

What ethnography permits is a view of children as competent interpreters of the social world. This involves a shift from seeing children as simply the raw and uninitiated recruits of the social world to seeing them as making a contribution to it, a changed perspective which has steered researchers towards doing work ‘with’ rather than ‘on’ children (Alderson 1995).

In doing this, ethnography has been able to trouble the more dominant psychological and developmental accounts of children and childhood. The notion of giving voice, which is central to ethnography, offers a method and perspective through which children can be constructed as active subjects (see, for instance, Lancaster 2003). This involves recognising that they have distinct perspectives on their world and significant contributions to make to our understanding not only of what it means to be a child, but also of the implications this might have for the ways in which adults go about the business of daily life. James (2001, p. 247) asserts that central to ethnography in childhood studies is:

...a commitment to an interpretive approach ... [it] facilitates the desire to engage with children's own views and enables their views to be rendered accessible to adults as well as to other children.

Lincoln (1993, p. 32) argues that when researching silenced groups care must be taken to ensure that research strategies are appropriate, enable the voices and perspectives of participants to be clearly heard, that research texts faithfully represent the standpoint of participants and that researchers actively work to eliminate any potential for harm as a result of the research. These four key research imperatives need to be addressed in studies such as that reported here. Accordingly, the first section of this chapter explores ethical issues and so directly addresses Lincoln's fourth imperative. Additionally, matters associated with elimination of potential harm are addressed in a number of other places in this chapter when processes for data generation and analysis are discussed.

The thesis has been structured to enable the second and third imperatives to be met. Chapters Five through to Eight present the data generated with the children with a minimal narrative from myself as researcher. This means that as much of their own perspectives as possible can be seen. Further, these chapters take as their topics existing academic discourses about children's experience and so, as with the work of Mason and Falloon (2001, p.104), the thesis can be read in relation to these broader sets of knowledge about children. The analytical component of the thesis was developed with input from the children. Although it remains my analysis, the discussion includes their feedback on my interpretation. Finally, the research strategies adopted in this project were designed bearing in mind current best-practice internationally in child-centred research and were adapted in response to feedback from the children. For instance, I had originally anticipated including focus groups, but several children approached me with concerns about participating in group situations. Thus, despite the fact that the literature suggests that group interviews are an effective research strategy (Beresford 1997; I. Katz 1995; Mason and Falloon 2001), I decided not to use this technique because of concerns expressed by the children participating in my study. I modified the plan I had included in the ethics proposal so that the group sessions would feel safe for the children.

Ethnography offers exciting opportunities for creating new roles and relationships between adult researchers and children. Attention to setting and clarifying what is and is not expected in these relationships needs to be a quite specific part of the early days of fieldwork. While it is important to allow for flexibility and also for children to participate as partners in this process, it is equally important that these roles and relationships are understood in terms of what researchers can and cannot offer children relationally. The remainder of this chapter details the processes used to manage the development of research relationships and to generate and analyse the data.

The research process

Ethics

Prior to beginning the fieldwork the Massey University Human Research Ethics Committee approved the proposal for this research project (see Appendix 1). The proposal defined the process for gaining access to the children and the processes that I would adopt to ensure the protection of their interests. It also defined a strategy that would be adopted should I have concerns about their safety or wellbeing.

There are four commonly accepted ethical principles (see table 4.1) that must be considered when developing research plans (Alderson 1995). These principles overlap conceptually and in practice they are often dealt with together. The following discussion briefly sets out these principles and considers the ways in which this study addresses them.

I produced information sheets for the children and their parents that identified the purpose of the research and explained that the children could freely choose to participate and withdraw if they wished. The processes I used to keep the children informed about their rights to participate or withdraw are noted in more detail below (see Access/recruitment). The information sheets and my ongoing interaction with the children also identified that the information they shared with me would be managed in such a way that it protected their identities. I adopted a continuous approach to consent, checking with the children at each

encounter and reminding them that they did not have to participate or answer specific questions. I also approached them several times after completion of the fieldwork to clarify their willingness for various materials and quotations to be presented in my account of the research, and at these times discussed both the specific item and the wider sense that I was trying to make of the research by using their material in these ways (this is discussed more fully in the final section of this chapter).

Table 4.1: The four ethical principles

Rights of participants to:	Duties of researchers to:	Protection from harm	Benefits and reciprocity
Be fully informed.	Protect participants' rights.	Applies to data collection methods and presentation of findings.	Consideration of the outcomes of research for participants.
Be able to choose to fully or partially participate.	Develop sound research projects and complete them to acceptable standards.	Risks from participation as well as risks researchers discover while collecting data.	Attention to the ways in which research will give back to participants.
Have their identity and information protected.		Particularly important when researching children and influence the degree of privacy researchers can offer.	
		Involves duty of care; participants' needs have priority over research.	

The greater vulnerability of children means that issues to do with protection from harm are particularly acute. Strategies for identifying and managing risks need to be spelled out clearly to children and monitored in an active way throughout the research. The way that these strategies may impinge upon other matters such as the right to privacy also need to be made clear. So, for instance, I explained that if I had concerns about their safety I would want to talk with them about who was the best adult to help them make themselves safe. I

also told them that I would not take any actions around their safety without telling them first, but equally, that if it seemed that they were at serious risk I might need to tell another adult even if they did not want me to do this. I also told them that I might need to seek guidance from my supervisors if I was unsure about whether a situation required me to take action of some sort and that this would mean that another adult knew what they had said in a research encounter.

Alderson (1995, p.10) notes that while there may be harm in doing certain types of research with children, there are also potential harms in not doing research. For instance, research can provide a conduit through which children's hitherto silenced voices can be heard. There can be major benefits to children and society in general from the knowledge that child-focused research can generate (see, for instance, Lancaster 2003, on both the value of listening to children, even very young children, and effective strategies for doing this). These benefits may not accrue directly to participants and therefore researchers need to be clear about the likelihood of benefit from participation; it may not balance out the costs. However, it is also clear that participation in itself can be beneficial to both children and adults. Researchers in the qualitative tradition all have experience of participants who have gained value from telling their story uninterrupted, without having to justify or excuse (see, for instance, Williamson 1996, p. 167). 'Telling it' can make a difference, and the fact that telling it to a researcher carries with it no ongoing obligations can be a bonus. For instance, a child noted in one of the diary records completed (see later), that the highlight of the week had been that I had visited to complete the second interview; participating in itself can bring benefits to participants about which we will not always be aware.

Unlike much of the ethnographic research that has taken place with young people in the preadolescent age group (for example, Corsaro 1985; Fine and Sandstrom 1988; Williamson 1997), this study focused upon the everyday experiences of a group of young people about whom there were no significant concerns. The fieldwork did not, therefore, confront the sorts of issues faced by other researchers around the protection from harm principle. However, I did face the challenge of ensuring that the information the children shared with me was not only kept confidential, but also that they knew that this was the case. This was

particularly so because during the fieldwork I lived in the community in which my study was located. It was also important to be vigilant around the children's participation to make certain that their involvement did not come at a cost to them. I regularly talked to the children about being research participants. So rather than simply doing the research work, I also made sure that time in each encounter was spent securing ongoing consent and talking about the impact that participation was having.

It is especially important to take care to check that children freely give consent, because often decisions are made for them, or taken away from them. As a result, they may believe that they must participate, despite (adult) researchers' assurances that they can make their own choices. Accordingly, I made every effort to ensure that they did not feel 'trapped' into participating. I tried to create an environment in the group sessions that enabled them to attend, but not produce any work if they did not wish to and during interviews I reminded them that they did not have to continue to participate or to answer specific questions.

While I was very keen to have them involved, I was also worried about the extent to which they may have felt pressured to join the project and so I paid specific attention to giving them many opportunities for a dignified withdrawal, if that was what they wanted. In one such encounter, a child said in response to my questions "*No, I want to stay in, I really like the attention I am getting*" and in so doing reminded me of the many different ways in which participation can be experienced and also of the particular issues around feeling special and 'being chosen' that can loom large in children's lives.

As I began the fieldwork I realised that my aspired-to reflexive partnership raised ethical challenges around the protection from harm principle and I could not see a way of both achieving my goal and resolving the protection issues it raised. In particular, I was concerned about the potential for my research relationship to achieve a level of significance in the children's daily lives that would make my eventual withdrawal difficult. I enjoyed the company of these children and I worried about the impact both my presence and my later absence might have upon them. I did not want to supplant other relationships, nor to create a space for myself in their lives that would carry with it a sense of ongoing obligations;

obligations which given my wider ethical responsibilities, I could not fulfil. To get close, but not too close then was the challenge. I resolved this, in a conservative way, by making sure that I did not spend too much time with any of the children, so that my presence in their lives was balanced by my absence. I was somewhat unpredictable about when I conducted observations, so that I could not be relied upon to feature in their lives at any given point. I regularly reminded the children about their role as research participants and my role as a researcher.

I adjusted my goals about the nature of the research relationship I expected to be able to have with the children. Their role as ‘partners’ posed risks for them, not only in terms of the relationship issues noted above, but also in terms of the sorts of activities I had planned to engage in with them. For instance, when I first met them we had discussed the things they would like to do in the group sessions. Several became very enthusiastic about the possibility of engaging in a sustained creative writing project and this idea, generated by them, was tremendously attractive to me. As I explored this possibility it became clear that it would involve significant amounts of their school time (their out of school time was already very busy) and would thus need to form part of the formal school curriculum. This meant that their work for the research would have to be read and marked by their class teacher and, in so doing, undermine the identity protection that I needed to offer them. It also meant that once they had made a commitment to participate in the writing group they would not be able to opt out because of the issues it would raise in terms of their non-completion of academic requirements. They could not, therefore, freely participate. For these two important ethical reasons, I reluctantly had to let this exciting idea lapse.

The other area where this research posed protection issues was around privacy, confidentiality and anonymity (see also sections: access, recruitment and consent; managing the process). These issues were hard to manage and I felt constantly challenged to ensure that the children were not exposed as a result of the study. In the end, I do not know how successful my strategies were. Issues around identity protection arose throughout the research and when writing this thesis I again needed to revisit what I had meant by my promise to protect their identities and how I handled the information they had shared with

me. For instance, in Chapter Six I have produced a set of diagrams of the children's friendship networks and I have also made the decision to use pseudonyms in the discussion of results. Because of the particular nature of each child's friendships, it would be quite possible for persons in the particular locality to identify individual children from the network maps and from there to identify them in each situation where I have used material they shared with me. Accordingly, I have taken the decision that while the version of the thesis submitted for examination will include the children's pseudonyms in the friendship network maps, these will be removed in the final version of the thesis that is lodged in the University library and alphanumeric codes will be used instead. I have also made other decisions around presentation of materials, such as not attaching pseudonyms to all quotations where a child was happy for me to include the statement, but where I felt that this material might, none-the-less, lead to their identification.

The concept of reciprocity has been developed to focus researchers' attention upon the contribution that participants make to good research and the things that they might need to do to say 'thank you'. It has also been suggested as a strategy for increasing the quality of research data that is generated (see, for instance, Hall and Callery 2001; Mauthner and Doucet 1998). Morse (1994, p. 232) asserts, "participants' efforts demand some reciprocal gesture from the researcher". She suggests that sharing transcripts and giving research reports back are ways of achieving this. This sort of reciprocity works well in some situations, especially where the interview and subsequent reading of the spoken word has a cathartic impact; one that enables participants to put some experiences in the past and to move on, or that clarifies for them the choices they need to make. However, in other situations, the return of transcripts for checking can constitute a burden for participants or create difficulties for individuals who may struggle with reading. Alternatively, the return of transcripts can place participants at risk because of the nature of the information that they may contain.

Fine and Sandstrom (1988, p. 24) explore the use of rewards and gifts in research with children. They recommend caution and highlight the ethical issues; for example, can a gift be considered an inducement and therefore breach the participant's right to freely choose to

participate? To be seen as part of reciprocity, giving needs to be carefully selected and managed and should not become a routine part of the research relationship. Ideally, it should seem to be a spontaneous way of saying ‘thank you’ that is not discussed with participants in advance.

My fieldwork asked a lot of the children. In general terms, their feedback about their participation was very positive. Indeed, the only exception was one diary record in which a child identified that pressure of other work at school was making it hard to complete the Monday morning diary entry²⁸. I wanted to provide tangible recognition of the contribution that the children made to my thesis and so I built a series of small ‘thank you’ activities into the fieldwork process. When I had completed the first interview and two group sessions, we made popcorn together. In the winter term of 2000 I took the children to watch an All Blacks²⁹ practice session at the Massey University Institute of Rugby and we had a small birthday party for a child whose birthday was coincidentally on the same day (I provided birthday cake and pizzas), and just before Christmas I gave each child a small present (a chocolate bar and a home-made card). After the final group session I read the children a short story. Following the completion of the fieldwork I prepared an individualised diary for each child as a record of their participation.

Access/recruitment and consent

Gaining access to children for research purposes can be a major challenge. Researchers inevitably want to watch and collect information that is usually private and hidden. There are, therefore, many understandable reasons why potential participants would want to refuse to participate. With children, this is even more likely to be the case. An adult who wants to sit and watch children, or who wants to talk to them in private and who apparently has no other reason to be in their lives than to collect information can be thought of as having suspect motives. There will also be many gatekeepers who will stand between researchers and the children they wish to study. Accordingly, it is important to allow sufficient time to

²⁸ I approached this child after receiving this feedback to make sure that the diaries were not impinging on school work, reminded the child concerned that they did not have to complete any of the activities and that it was fine for them to stay in the study, but not to participate in things that caused them stress.

²⁹ The national rugby team.

work with the adults who will be encountered first and then with the children to establish credibility and safety as an adult who can be trusted to be alone with them.

The study was initiated by a phone contact to the Principal of a small-town primary school some seven months prior to commencement of the fieldwork. This was followed up by the research proposal, and a letter requesting access to a group of children who were ten years old. The School's Board of Trustees³⁰ considered the proposal and, after discussion between the Principal and myself, approval was given. Researchers rarely create successful research projects alone; it requires a special person at the research site to facilitate access and assist in the building of relationships, problem solving and day-to-day management of the project. In this case, the Principal played this role and it is a tribute to her that the fieldwork proceeded as smoothly as it did. The fact that the school was a full primary school³¹ meant that I could set up the fieldwork, meet the children's parents and establish relationships with the children and then continue to collect data through years 6 and 7. This approach would not have worked had I chosen a school that catered for children up to year six only because the children would have dispersed to different schools.

The Principal and I worked together to develop the recruitment strategy and to fine-tune the methodology so that it would not disrupt school processes. The Principal composed a letter to go to parents outlining the study. An information sheet for parents, a consent form allowing us to contact their children and a background letter introducing myself as the researcher were included in the parcel sent to the parents of all eligible children in the two classrooms from which children were selected. A stamped addressed envelope was included for return to the school.

³⁰ The governing body of the school.

³¹ A full primary school is one that caters for children from new-entrant level (at about five years of age, or year one) until they move to high school (high school commences at year nine, when the children are about thirteen years of age).

Key factors in the selection process were that:

1. The Principal knew the children and their parents. The Principal (a well known local figure) had taught at the school for six years, and had, in fact, taught many of these children as new entrants. This meant that her endorsement of the research would be clearly meaningful to parents and the children
2. There was prior knowledge of the children's and parent's wider circumstances. It was important that fragile family situations were not exposed to a long term and potentially intrusive³² research project. I had made the decision before beginning this research that I was not going to conduct research with children who were already vulnerable as a result of the actions of adults. I also wanted to foreground children-as-children rather than as victims of adult misbehaviour and abuse
3. As far as possible, selection was concentrated in two classrooms so that children would be able to participate as a group, rather than feeling 'singled out' and to make data generation less disruptive for the school.

Classroom one had a total of fifteen children in the relevant age group. Letters were sent to the parents of eleven of these children and ten returned consent forms. Of the four children who were excluded, three did not meet criterion two. One child was new to the school and thus did not fit criterion one. One set of parents subsequently withdrew their consent prior to fieldwork commencing because they were concerned that participation would distract their child from her studies. The population from classroom one therefore comprised nine children. Classroom two had a total of eleven children in the relevant age group and letters were sent to eight parents, all of whom returned consent forms. Of the three children who were excluded, two did not meet criterion two, and one did not meet criterion one.

At this stage seventeen children had agreed to participate. All of them were Pakeha; ten girls and seven boys. One boy was added from a contiguous classroom in order to achieve a better gender balance in the sample. This child met criteria one and two. In previous years he

³² By "intrusive" I am referring to the fact that this project was going to involve extended contact between myself and the children and that in the process of participating I was going to ask the children to share a lot of their experiences with me.

had been a classmate of many of the children in the sample and it was felt that he would fit comfortably into group exercises and other activities that might take place as the research progressed. The final sample comprised eighteen children. All of them were Pakeha, ten were girls and eight were boys.

Once consents from parents were received, I met again with the Principal to plan the process of gaining consent from the children. I did not want to merely gain 'assent' from the children as often happens in research, and to rely on informed consent coming from parents. If this research was to take place then the children, as the key participants, needed to be actively involved in the research process and to be able to make their own decisions about participation. The Principal and I decided that a group meeting was an important place to begin. This would give children the chance to meet me and to think about the research from within the safety of the group. The Principal provided support and guidance both in planning and managing the setting up of this session.

The Principal attended the first part of the meeting, to introduce me, and then withdrew. I outlined the research and provided opportunities for the children to ask me questions. The first activity was to be an interview. To give them a clearer idea of what this might involve, I prepared a short video of a 'mock' interview that I conducted with my son. He was ten years old at the time (he was not attending this school). He decided that he would play two roles in the interview; the first one of a shy boy who did not quite know what to say, and the second one of a boy who was confident. The children appeared to enjoy watching this and they asked a variety of questions about the research in general and the first interview in particular.

At the end of the briefing session, I gave out consent forms that could be taken away or signed there. The children were really excited about participating and all wanted to sign their forms on the spot. We had many interesting conversations at this point about how to sign your name, how old was I when I first had a signature, and what to do if you did not have a signature yet. I also reiterated that their signing did not commit them to staying in the research; it simply meant that they were willing to come to the first interview and that they could change their minds at any point. From an ethical perspective this enthusiasm to sign

consent forms and to be involved could not be misunderstood as meaning that there was no further need for me to monitor levels of comfort with participation. As noted earlier, I continued to actively monitor their comfort with participation throughout the research.

Issues of difference

A challenge for me, as a researcher, has been to know the extent to which careful matching between research participants and researchers is required. Fine and Sandstrom (1988, p. 54) suggest that unless researchers are interested only in studying public culture or their projects are limited to observation only, they should confine themselves to studying pre-adolescent children of their own gender, because issues of gender identity come to the fore at this stage in children's lives.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand this issue also arises around matching on the grounds of ethnicity (see Walsh-Tapiata 2003) and so when I was planning this research, as a sole researcher (a Pakeha, and a middle aged woman) I needed to make some decisions about the way in which I would deal with issues of gender, ethnicity and age. At the same time as I was working on this study, I was also employed as a family researcher and so I looked to my work-based models and experience for guidance about how I should manage these matters. In one project, our research focused upon young males aged between thirteen and fifteen years. We applied our standard approach that males should undertake these interviews, preferably younger males, and males of the same ethnicity. This worked well, until as happens from time to time, our interviewer was unavailable and despite significant efforts we could not identify a young Maori male replacement. With considerable anxiety we faced the inevitable; we either failed to complete the research or looked more widely. In the process of resolving this challenge we discovered that, contrary to our assumptions, the interviews could be successfully completed by an older, Pakeha, female interviewer. This interviewer, although very different demographically speaking, was a valued and trusted part of the community to which these young males belonged. It seemed that by being embedded in a wider set of relationships she was able to build trusting and open research relationships with participants who were very different to herself.

The ethnic homogeneity of my study population was an issue that caused me concern. The recruitment process was not designed to exclude children on the basis of ethnicity, and I had secured the support of a cultural supervisor to assist me in the analysis of data if Maori children were included. However, equally, I was very aware the inclusion of Maori children would raise some serious issues about my capacity to complete a full analysis of the information these children shared with me, even with cultural supervision. Unlike our female, Pakeha colleague discussed above, I was not embedded in the bicultural community to which they would have belonged. Given that my focus was upon the everyday world of the children, I considered that my capacity to generate data that accurately portrayed daily life for those Maori children who might have participated was limited, particularly because observation was a significant component of this project. While I could secure the support and assistance from a cultural advisor to manage the analysis of the data, I could not secure a peer-researcher to work with me in the field, and it seemed to me that this was precisely what was needed if I was to generate accurate data on the experience of Maori children. On the basis of these considerations I made the decision not to extend the research population to explicitly include Maori children. Consequently, the research documented in this thesis provides an account of the daily life experiences of a group of Pakeha lower-upper middle class children living in a small Aotearoa/New Zealand town at the turn of the century.

The decision to include male children and not to include Maori children may seem contradictory. However, my wider circumstances at the time I was undertaking this research meant that I was familiar with some of the daily experience and perspectives of boys aged between ten and twelve years. My own family and the families of many of my close friends and relatives had young males moving through this age group, and as I undertook the thesis, I quite consciously tuned myself in to the ways my sons and their friends, my nephews, and the sons of my own friends went about their daily lives. In fact, boy-life felt more familiar to me than did girl-life at the beginning of the fieldwork. However, because my daily experience was predominantly Pakeha, I did not feel I could approach Maori children with the same sense of familiarity as I could boys from my own cultural background.

Reflecting on the processes I developed to generate data with the boys provided me with some insights about managing matters of difference in research. For instance, I found it really difficult to connect with a young male in my sample. In fact, he constituted the greatest challenge in my fieldwork, and for a long time I felt that I never really got it right with him. I approached the final interview with this boy with some trepidation, wondering if the issue really was insurmountable because it was connected to the unchangeable facts of our differences as male and female, adult and child. I struggled to think of ways that I could make this interview work. In the end, I opted for the direct approach, deciding that I would use the material from my field observations of him to structure the interview. I also decided that, come what may, I was going to interview this young person on his own territory without interruptions or distractions from others as this had been difficult to achieve up until this point. As it turned out, this was one of the most fascinating interviews I have ever conducted, and this young person talked in a rich and reflective way about the challenges he faced at school and about his other experiences.

What was different? It is hard to know exactly what made the difference, but my view is that by the time we came to the final interview he knew me. We had talked casually in the playground, he had come and sat by me when I was observing in his classroom and asked me questions about what I was doing, which I had answered honestly. He had asked me questions about geography, maths or whatever was the topic for the session I was observing, and I had done my best to answer him. I had also taken him and his mates to watch the All Blacks, which proved to be an exciting event at the time. My questions in the final interview were built around the things we had shared, him as participant, and me as observer. In other words, our relationship was embedded in some common experiences and I had been tested and found to be trustworthy. In essence, through the medium of the fieldwork I had been able to establish some common ground with him, and through this to construct a relationship from within which we could engage in the reflective talking that occurred in this final interview.

Fieldwork – generating primary data

This research programme entailed twelve months of fieldwork with the children. Their participation involved them in three or four semi-structured interviews, three small group creative writing and drawing encounters, ten weeks of diary record keeping, and thirty weeks of observations in their classrooms, the playground and a variety of other public places (such as sports practices, when they were playing at parks, the local pool, or wandering around town). Graue and Walsh (1998) talk of data generation rather than data gathering or data collecting. They do this to make the point that it is an active process; you do not just wander along and pick things up. They talk about “poking and soaking”, and emphasise that we should poke first and soak second (Graue and Walsh 1998, p. 91).

To refer to this process as data generation is to highlight another important characteristic of qualitative research. The creation of data records and their analysis usually proceeds together in a reflexive process. While fieldwork may be completed long before analysis is finalised, analysis needs to begin when raw data is being created. Preliminary categories are usually generated while fieldwork is progressing and they may also be refined while fieldwork is still underway (see, for example, Morse 1994, p. 229; Wiersma 1995, p. 215).

Raw data is generated in many forms and comes from many sources in qualitative research. Field notes generated from observation, transcripts generated from interviews with one or more participants and artefacts are all forms of raw data. Sifting through the detritus left behind after a group interview or sorting through materials left behind after observations in a classroom is also raw data because it can reveal details about the nature of the interaction that has just taken place. Most texts suggest (see, for example, Graue and Walsh 1998; Patton 1990) that researchers should be generous in their generation of raw data. Watching, talking and collecting are the three primary strategies through which raw data is generated. This section is structured around a discussion of the ways in which these three different data generation strategies were used in this research.

(I) SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Interviews are unique speech acts (Mishler 1986). As such they are very different to ordinary conversations. Children may have little experience of this form of interaction and indeed, their usual experiences of adult questions are likely to give them vastly different expectations to those we would like them to have of an interview. For instance, adult questions usually relate to things that they already know the answer to: “What colour is this?”, or to times when they are in trouble: “Why did you do that?” (Graue and Walsh 1998, p. 113). Therefore, the first step when interviewing children is to negotiate the parameters of this interaction to ensure that they both understand the purpose of the conversation and are comfortable with this style of interaction. Formal questioning can be very effective for factual matters and things about which the children are likely to have had direct experience. However, to engage with children in such a way that we can begin to grasp the meaning and their interpretation of experience requires that we approach interviews in more creative and flexible ways.

Baturka and Walsh (1991) found that 20-minute interviews combined with a secret snack were a productive interview strategy. While this appears to have generated the information they were seeking, the notion of giving children food in secret has to be considered carefully for the ethical and health implications it might carry. It is also important to pay attention to timing because children are unlikely to participate meaningfully when they would rather be doing something else. I found, for instance, real enthusiasm for the 11 am slot in my school interviews because that was when maths took place, whereas there was less interest in my carefully planned group session when the children realised that their teacher was reading the next instalment of “Harry Potter”!³³

³³ “Harry Potter” was a series of children’s fantasy stories featuring the adventures of a young boy called Harry Potter who went to wizard school. The school and the adventures were broadly similar to an older genre of children’s stories based on the English public schools. The first book “Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone” was read at the school during the year of my field work and in November 2001 it was released in New Zealand as a feature film.

In this study, I completed three interviews with seventeen of the children, four interviews with one child³⁴, and one interview with the children's parents. The parent interviews took place at the beginning of the research, after the information meeting with the children (see above, Access/recruitment). The purpose of this interview was to provide an opportunity for the parents to meet me, ask questions and to inform me about their child(ren). It was a low-key meeting that also collected information on the family and other individuals who parents considered to be important to the child. From a data perspective, it provided background information on the children, their experiences and families, and is primarily used in Chapter Five.

Interviews with parents were conducted at a place and time of their choosing and they could also choose whether or not both parents (where both were involved in the care of the child) participated. I interviewed four parents (three mothers and one father) at their place of work. In all other cases, I conducted the interviews in the household in which the child resided. In five of these cases I interviewed both parents, in one the father, and for the remaining seven cases I interviewed the mother³⁵. Verbatim transcripts were completed for every parent interview and returned to participants for checking. Any changes were incorporated into the scripts. The focus of this research was upon children's perspectives, and so after the initial meeting and interview with parents, there was no expectation that they would participate further in the research.

Interview formats were structured around a common set of themes, but the wording of questions and the ordering of information varied in each interview. When interviewing the children I used a strategy that combined closed and open-ended questions. My experience indicated that single word answers could easily become a common response. "Yes", "No" and "Dunno", and their variants constitute a comfortable way for children to deal with adult questions that seem intrusive, misdirected or irrelevant. They provide children with a measure of control and a way of creating intellectual and emotional space in encounters like

³⁴ This child moved schools during the first term of 2000, and I completed an additional interview in order to make contact with her, as I would not be seeing her regularly at school when I was undertaking the observations. I also wanted to confirm with her that she was still happy to be involved in the research.

³⁵ It should be noted that two participants were twin sisters. Therefore while eighteen children participated, this included only seventeen households and seventeen sets of parents.

interviews. While I believe that interviewers should not seek to avoid them altogether, an interview that is composed entirely of these sorts of responses is not going to generate the sort of rich data required. Accordingly, I balanced my use of opportunities for single word and elaborative answers. I also talked directly to the children about their single word answers, and asked them to elaborate on what they meant or to give me an example.

Parents and children completed eco-maps (Gilligan 1999; Hartman 1995) in the interviews (see Appendix 2). These diagrams depicted key social relationships and also identified the nature of these. This information provided me with an overview of the household structure and the wider relationships that supported the child or that made life more difficult. The eco-maps identified significant people in their lives and so included teachers (for the children), friends, work mates (for the parents) and other individuals who played either a positive or negative role in their lives.

(II) THE FIRST INTERVIEW WITH THE CHILDREN

I completed all first interviews with the children at school because this was the place where I had first met them. It also was a place that both parents and children knew was monitored by other adults and a setting in which the children were accustomed to having interactions with unfamiliar adults. Later interviews were mostly conducted in the children's homes³⁶.

Many of the first interviews were conducted in the Principal's office. While it was not an ideal location, the school was undergoing a major re-building programme at the time of the research and so quiet and private space was limited. I did not gain the impression that this location had a significant dampening effect upon the children's responses. But as I did not know them and they did not know me, my expectations of what they would say to me and the nature and depth of information I would be able to collect at this time was somewhat limited anyway.

³⁶ On four occasions I completed the second interview with the children after school in a quiet area of the playground or in a private inside area. This was because I had difficulty in finding a time that suited their families for me to interview them at home.

It was school policy that children were not to be interviewed by an adult out of sight of others. This presented a challenge to me. Because of the rebuilding programme I could not have a quiet space that also allowed for observation by others. I therefore used a video camera for the entire length of the first interview. The children and I set the camera up together at the beginning of each interview, and they used the remote control to activate it. I encouraged them to look into the replay screen of the video camera at the beginning of the interview as I sat on 'the chair'. I intended that by doing these things I would demystify the interview and engage them in a shared activity. My impression was that many of the children found it exciting to think that they were being recorded. Once the interview started, the camera, which was quite small and mounted on a tripod, became somewhat of a background factor. As Graue and Walsh (1998) have noted, a camera running by itself can often fade into the background in a way that a camera with an operator cannot.

I also audiotaped all interviews and transcribed them verbatim. I had originally intended that I would return all the transcripts to the children for checking. However many were quite long, up to twenty pages in some cases, and it seemed unreasonable to me to expect that they would read and comment upon such a large volume of material. I asked them for their guidance on this issue and they confirmed that it would be really hard for them to do this. However, I still wanted to give and receive feedback about the content of the interviews. Accordingly, at the end of each interview I prepared an individual summary for each child that captured the details of the information they had shared with me. This included verbatim quotations. I did this in a newsletter format that included pictures. The children commented on this information and returned it to me and I incorporated their feedback into the transcripts.

(III) SUBSEQUENT INTERVIEWS

Between two and three additional interviews were completed with each child. The focus of these interviews was quite broad and covered both personal issues as well as matters I wanted to follow-up from my observations and the material they produced for me in group sessions. There were also a set of specific questions which I asked each child and these focused upon issues and challenges during the year as well as some more general questions relating to their views about families, relationships with friends and adults, and other matters

that they thought were important for children of their age. I also asked them to make three wishes and to tell me about three things that they would and would not change in their lives.

The final interview began with a discussion about the places that the children regularly visited. Using a map and two differently coloured pens, I asked the children to identify the places that they regularly went to and to colour-code the map with those places that “were good” and “not so good” for them. I worked with them to find places and we talked about the things that happened in and around these settings. In addition to collecting information about the territories of the children this gave us a task to do together and our attention could be diverted by trying to find streets and talking about incidental things that we noted as we searched for places. As one boy said, *“McDonalds should really be marked on this map, they have got the pool marked on the map, why isn’t McDonald’s there?”* So we joked about the priorities of people who made maps; the pool versus McDonald’s. Then we talked about what it was about McDonald’s that was so good. *“Isn’t it obvious?”* I was asked. *“Well it might be, but on the other hand...”* We joked a bit more. Several of the children talked about how much they enjoyed these activities; identifying both the places they liked, and the places they didn’t like and the people who were important to them as well as those they were not so keen about. As one child said when looking for places on the map *“Oh I have to find my music teacher’s place, because I really hate going there. Where is that? Oh yeah, there it is. I really hate that place.”* All said with relish and enjoyment at being able to both identify the place and label it as not liked.

I found that in using these mapping activities (the eco-map and the town map) I could incorporate most of the other thematic areas I was interested in. When talking about places, for instance, it was relatively easy to broaden discussion and to begin talking about people and experiences. For example, some of the children were really busy with after school activities not all of which they enjoyed. Rather than having to broach this topic directly, I asked a variety of questions and used prompts to encourage them to talk to me about how they managed to continue to do so many things they did not enjoy and how they managed their busy lives, as they identified the places concerned and coloured them in. I had also wanted to explore notions of belonging in relation to school because a proportion of my

group had parents who either worked at the school, or had other close involvement with it. I wondered whether or not the children experienced school differently depending on whether or not they had parental involvement there. Again, I did not want to broach this subject directly because I did not want them to feel that I might have a sense of what a ‘right’ answer might be. So when the children identified the school as a place they went to regularly, I asked expanding questions around their experience of school and this question of the impact of parental involvement on feelings of belonging slotted quite naturally in there.

In conclusion, the mapping activities achieved three quite distinct things. They provided me with an efficient way of obtaining a large amount of information about the places the children went to regularly, the meanings that these places held for them and the different roles people played in their emotional worlds and the experiences they had. They provided an effective way of ‘breaking the ice’ in the interviews, by providing a diverting activity that we could both engage in. The children could lead these activities and this allowed them to control the pace, the content, and the direction of a large part of the interview. Finally, working on the relational and physical maps enabled me to include almost all of the other questions I had planned to ask the children. The focus on people and place was easy to extend to an exploration of experience and meaning. Again, the children could control the extent to which they elaborated on any of these issues; when they wanted to stop talking about something, instead of sitting there in silence waiting for the next question they could simply move on and identify another place on the map or draw another person.

(IV) OBSERVATIONS

The literature identifies a number of different ways of undertaking field observations in research with children. Corsaro (1985) developed a “reactive strategy” that involved waiting for children to approach him instead of addressing them directly himself. In this way, the participants drew him into their worlds. He also situated himself close to settings that adults did not usually frequent. His strategy recognised that children would always see him as an adult, but they could see him as a “different type of adult” (Corsaro 1985, p. 28). This strategy was not so much centred on behaving like a child as it was on not behaving like a type of adult with whom they were familiar. Similarly, Mandel (1988) chose what she termed “the least adult role” in her work with young primary school children and through

this also became a participant of a different type with them in their activities. Laerke (1998), on the other hand, developed a full-participant strategy and emulated the behaviours of the children in her work to such an extent that, despite her size, she reported that teachers treated her as if she was a child, and the children incorporated her in their play and interaction as a full-child member.

Observations were a significant part of this study and being clear about the role I was to adopt was important. I wanted to build active, engaged relationships with the children where they could influence the way the research developed, and it was therefore important to reduce to the greatest possible degree the extent to which they would see me as someone with authority over them. I watched and with two exceptions during the school observations, did not participate³⁷. I made the decision to observe and not participate quite deliberately because I considered that in participation the only viable role I would be able to play would be as an adult like a teacher, and I wanted to clearly establish myself as a different sort of adult (Corsaro 1985, p. 28).

There were two separate components to the observations; formal observations undertaken at school and informal observations undertaken in public spaces that children frequented. Formal observations involved the children who were participating in this study and I completed 30 such sessions in classrooms of between one and two hours, and 30 one-hour observations in the playground. I completed five additional one-hour sessions observing practices for the Major Production³⁸. I also observed the children at the visit to the Institute

³⁷ These two situations were as follows:

1. I “came out of role” and tried to assist a child with some of the maths lesson. He had been sitting in front of me, obviously struggling and quite distressed. The teacher had spent some time explaining the exercise to him and needed to go and work with other children. He was clearly still struggling to get to grips with the structure of a stem and leaf graph. I asked him if he wanted some more help and checked with the teacher that it was alright for me to try to assist.
2. While observing from the back of the classroom, I noted that a boy (who was not a participant in my research) had hidden a pair of scissors in his desk and when the teacher’s back was turned was brandishing them at the child in front of him, the scissors were open, sharp and very close to this child’s head. I was quite concerned about the potential for this to result in a significant injury to the child in front of him. I passed a note to the teacher indicating the presence of the scissors, and she removed them from the child.

³⁸ The major production was the school’s biennial play that involved the children in the Intermediate syndicate. In 2000, it was called “Malice in Wonderland” and was a play written by one of the teachers.

of Rugby to watch the All Blacks at practice. For all of these observations I completed field notes that formed part of the primary data set.

The informal observations involved paying close attention to children as I went about my normal activities. Accordingly, I watched children who happened to be at swimming lessons at the same time that I was at the pool with my own children and I also watched the BMX³⁹ track and associated park and river, which were attractions for many of the children. During school holidays, I drove and walked the district, watching public spaces to see where the children were and what they were doing. I spent time watching around The Bowl, The Warehouse⁴⁰, at the movies and the supermarket. I also spent time sitting in classrooms in different schools after I had completed the fieldwork as I embarked upon the analysis (see Analysis). For these observations I made less extensive field notes, and I used this information as background material and also to keep a sense of vibrancy to the data once I had completed the formal fieldwork.

(v) ARTEFACT GATHERING

The value of using a range of strategies to generate data with children has been identified elsewhere (see, for example, Davis 1998; Hill, Laybourn and Borland 1996; James 1993; 2001; Lancaster 2003; Morrow and Richards 1996). In addition to the interviews and observations already discussed, the children and I completed six group activities over three group sessions. As noted above, I modified the format of these groups so that the children did not have to speak up in front of each other. These activities provided opportunities for the children to be individually creative and they involved writing and drawing about a range of topics and issues that the children had raised with me in the interviews, or that I had noted when observing. A teacher at the school helped me to design the activities and also provided me with guidance and support about how to present the materials and manage the sessions. The activities offered the children opportunities to draw pictures, complete book or movie

³⁹ BMX stands for British Moto Cross and is here used to describe a type of bicycle that the children used to ride in off-road situations. The children also used the BMX bikes for town riding and for riding on tracks and at the beach. These bikes have low gearing and wide tyres that facilitate off-road riding. Both BMX tracks and other facilities were attractions constructed by local authorities. For example, while I was conducting the field work *The Bowl* was popular with local children. This was a concrete bowl where they could do stunts with their bikes, skate boards and roller blades).

⁴⁰ A cut-price retail outlet that was popular among the children.

outlines, write lyrics or raps, I also used the sentence completion strategy (Hill, Laybourn and Borland 1996, p. 140). The children completed Monday and Friday diaries during the first term of 2000 so that I could track significant events and activities during this time. These works gave me glimpses of their lives away from school (see Appendix 2).

When conducting the group sessions, I approached the children in their classrooms (after clearing this with the teacher) and invited them to each session, reminding them that they did not have to join in if they did not wish to. On two occasions a child declined to participate. In the first instance a girl was feeling unwell, and in the second a boy had had a really bad morning in class and had, as a result, received several detentions that needed to be worked off in coming days. He was obviously upset and angry, and while I gave him the opportunity to come and join in, he elected to stay with his class.

A more common situation I encountered was the desire to attend with the group, but to adopt a lower level of participation. There were many possible reasons for this reaction; perhaps the activities were just plain boring, maybe as a boy suggested once, *“I just feel all out of stories today”*. It is also likely that some did not enjoy working with pen/pencil and paper. Others may have felt that a particular activity was too intrusive and they did not want to share that particular information. While it was perfectly acceptable for the children to join the session but not produce any material, the result was that some of them did not create many pieces of paperwork. As the fieldwork drew to a close, I found that I could simply talk with them about the topics included in the group sessions and they would answer my questions with the most disarming honesty and self-reflection.

The methodological learning for me here was that there was more than one way to generate the data, and the same strategies would not always generate comparable information from each participant. It also reinforced the value of taking a long-term approach to data generation rather than expecting that I could collect everything I needed in a single interview or session. Here the work of Williamson (1997) was helpful as a guide for me, because it showed me that a neat, discrete data collection plan was unlikely to succeed. So in working with the children, my objective became to provide multiple opportunities for them to share

their perspectives with me and also for them to re-direct me away from things that were not so relevant, rather than expecting them to complete every task.

(VI) MANAGING THE PROCESS

Researchers need to create conditions that enable participants to have confidence in both the person and the process, so that they know that their information will be treated with respect and kept safe. This is doubly important in research with children because they are more vulnerable than adults simply by virtue of the fact that they are children. Accordingly, I placed a priority on keeping the children, their parents and the school informed about what I was doing. Alongside my data gathering plan, I ran an informational strategy that was intended to keep the various stakeholders up to date about what I was doing, without constituting an interference in their daily lives. The night before the first meeting with the children I called all their parents so that they knew what I was doing. I outlined the format for the meeting and reiterated that at the end of it the children would get the opportunity to sign the consent forms. If they signed then I would contact the parent again to arrange an interview with them prior to any contact with their children individually. I emphasised to parents the importance of ensuring that no child should participate if they felt uncertain and I talked with them about the sorts of strategies they could use to ensure that their children felt able to opt in and out of the research.

Before undertaking any observations or interviews at the school I called in at the office to let them know that I was on site. After the completion of each piece of work I returned to the office to let them know that I was leaving. In this way staff could easily note my movements and I was never in the position of doing research without the knowledge of the school. I was aware of the potential for people to feel uncomfortable about my role. Making sure that people knew why I was there and what I was doing was therefore important.

Each time I interviewed a child at school I quietly entered the classroom and waited until the teacher acknowledged my presence. I did not engage with any children until I had this recognition. I felt a bit like a dental nurse! Often other children would ask what I was doing. My response was to simply say I had come to get so-and-so. I realised early on that it was not possible to promise anonymity to the children. Almost from the beginning the group

became known as ‘Jackie’s kids’ and the children themselves would approach me in the playground and ask when I was going to interview them, what was happening next and so on. In fact, the children did not want to be anonymous, they were proud of their membership in this small group and even wanted their names to be listed in my thesis. This presented some significant challenges to me as a researcher, and some decisions I made, such as allocating the children pseudonyms, rather than letting them choose these themselves, and removing the pseudonyms from the friendship network maps in the final version of the thesis, occurred as a result of this.

I could not guarantee the children anonymity because of the fact that I completed the first interview with them at the school and because they themselves drew attention to the fact that they were participating. However, I could guarantee them confidentiality in terms of the information they provided to me. Throughout the fieldwork I talked with them about the strategies I used to protect their information. I also wanted to demystify the research process as much as possible and so I took materials that had been entered into QSR Nvivo (the computer package I used to manage the data) to group sessions to share with them individually⁴¹.

I also needed to exercise care about my interactions with adults at the school. Sometimes teachers would come up to me to talk, or to invite me to the staff room for a cup of tea and to socialise with the other adults at the school. The focus of my research meant that I was interested in children’s perspectives and to gather this sort of information I needed the children to have confidence in me. It was important, therefore, that I did not socialise or spend unnecessary time with the adults there, or with the children’s parents and other adults in their lives. It would have been relatively easy for the children to interpret this sort of contact as me ‘talking about them’ to the adult and thus my status as someone they could have confidence in would have been compromised. I found situations where adults approached me while doing the fieldwork quite hard to manage. Good research is partly dependent upon the quality of the relationships we can make and sustain with all

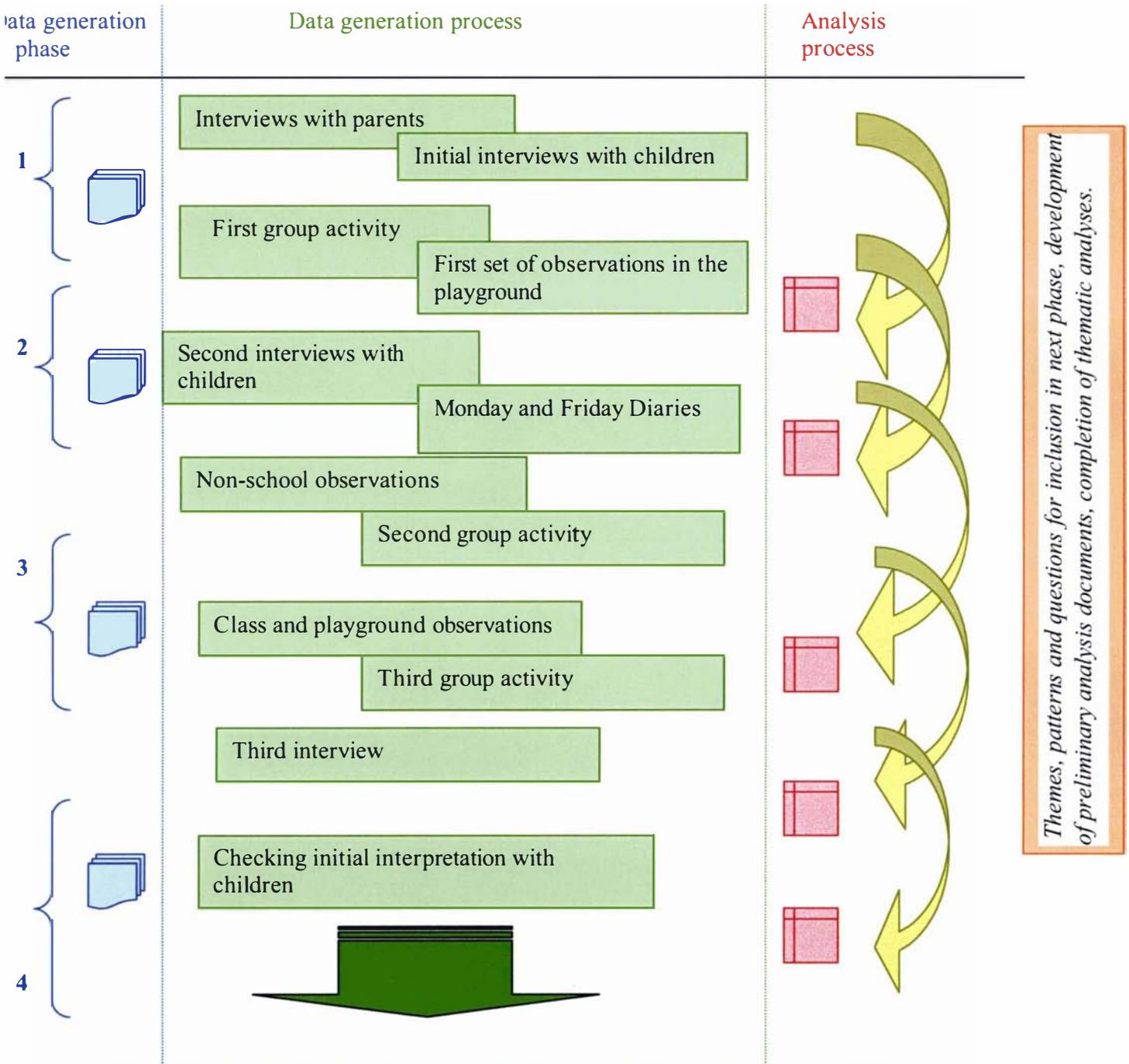
⁴¹ What I mean here, is that I marked out specific parts of interviews, my field notes or the group work relating to each child and sat with them individually to show them how I was using their material.

stakeholders. Therefore it was important not to be seen as rude or non-communicative. In these unsolicited encounters, I adopted the strategy of explaining that I was there to watch the children and so it was important that I did that and did not get sidetracked into other conversations or encounters. Usually this worked well and I was left to get on with my tasks. When it did not work, I opted for manufacturing a distraction. For instance, focusing down on my notes and then up on the children around me, and back down onto my notes, saying something like, “*Just a minute I need to note that down*”. This served the purpose of distancing me from the adult involved without causing offence, and of indicating to the adult concerned that I was involved in my task of observing and not really available for conversation.

Analysis

Van Manen (1990) asserts that qualitative research is fundamentally a writing activity. Accordingly, the processes that have been developed to facilitate the production of rich and conceptually dense material involve working and reworking the written word whether it is field notes, transcriptions of the spoken voice, excerpts from the literature or analytical, theoretical or methodological memos created as part of the research process. I began interpretive activity when I began the fieldwork and continued on with this for three years after I left the field at the end of 2000. Data generation and interpretation formed an iterative process (see Diagram 4.1). During the fieldwork the emphasis was upon data generation but it also included early processing and analysis of information. This early processing fed back into the fieldwork by generating new questions and facilitating the revision of strategies. It also contributed to the ongoing development of the picture I was building of the life experiences of the children. After completion of the fieldwork, attention moved to refining and developing ideas generated during that earlier phase and the development of new concepts. I also periodically re-engaged with the children during this stage to clarify my developing understanding, to check out my interpretations and to gain their permission to use specific pieces of material in the writing of this thesis.

Diagram 4.1: Data Generation and Analysis Process



Themes, patterns and questions for inclusion in next phase, development of preliminary analysis documents, completion of thematic analyses.

Continued analysis and return to field situations (both participants and other intermediate schools). Analytical and conceptual material developed. Return to children for discussion and feedback on findings and consent to use quotations. Continued re-analysis and re-writing and rechecking with children to progressively make more analytical sense of the material.

Other researchers have found that returning materials to children sometime after completion of data generation can be met with resistance, indifference or embarrassment (see, for example, Mason and Falloon 2001, p. 104; Mayall 2001a, p. 8). However my experience was more productive than this. This may have been because I had worked with the children as a researcher for quite a considerable length of time and so, in some senses, we had a relationship that afterwards felt quite personal. I also think that the fact that I continued to see the children and their families from time to time, through chance encounters after I had completed the fieldwork, meant that the research remained current to them. On the other hand, I may have just been very persuasive and they very generous. It is a real tribute to these young people that they allowed me to do this through the second and third years of the project. Sometimes these encounters were very brief and at other times they may have involved a conversation of up to half an hour in length. Typically, however, 15-20 minutes was involved in these later re-engagements.

I used QSR Nvivo to manage the data set. Nvivo's node facility makes linking material in diverse files a comparatively easy exercise and through this I could keep raw data separate from my reflections and interpretations of it, and also from the material I collected when I re-engaged with the children (Graue and Walsh 1998, p. 129; Patton 1990, p. 239-242). As noted above, I adopted a two-stage analysis process that involved each piece of data (for example, a transcript of an interview or a field note) being processed and analysed in a preliminary fashion as the data generation took place. This meant that interviews were transcribed and preliminary analysis completed as the interviews were conducted. Similarly, field notes were translated from notebook to computer and searched for themes and patterns throughout the fieldwork. The analysis and write up of group work materials and the field notes, taken during and immediately after these sessions, were transferred to the computer and preliminary thematic analysis was completed immediately after the group work was undertaken.

The focus of these *in-situ* pieces of analysis was primarily upon the identification of themes and further questions to be used in the next phase of data generation and only secondarily upon the identification of any explanatory or theoretical types of concept (the level three

type of analysis discussed by Graue and Walsh 1998, p. 94-5). Each phase of data collection was kept separate and distinct in order to achieve good triangulation (Morse 1994). However, they also needed to be integrated into a snowballing whole, so that ultimately the overall analysis was able to ‘hang together’ as a single piece. The computing capacity offered by QSR Nvivo was crucial here because it allowed for storage of separately identified “sets” of data that could still be brought together at a later stage through “node”, “attribute” and “document” structures. It was particularly important that I could identify patterns common across the different phases of data generation and then re-sort and analyse them as discrete units, while still retaining their links back to their original places.

As I moved away from the fieldwork I experienced a sense of fieldwork data ‘fading’. Being able to periodically re-engage with the children became very important for me in terms of keeping the material vibrant. I also developed linkages with a number of other schools in the district and was able to spend varying amounts of time sitting in classrooms, and talking informally to children. While these activities did not contribute data to my work they did enable me to refresh my sense of being with children. My goal here was to keep on seeing and feeling the lives of children, rather than to ‘test’ out specific issues or to re-observe themes or patterns. I also continued to visit the haunts in the district that I knew the children regularly visited. So the informal observations noted earlier (see Observations) continued to be part of my regular movements throughout this second stage of analysis.

Checking and reworking analysis while still undertaking fieldwork and also going back to participants after the fieldwork had ended, were critical in this project. This approach reduced the risks that my understanding or interpretation would over-take the children’s own interpretations of their experiences. For example, sitting quietly in a classroom, one can draw certain inferences about the nature and meaning of the patterns of a specific teacher-pupil interaction. The degree to which these inferences accurately reflect the experience and meaning that participants attach to this encounter need to be carefully checked out through other data collection methods. Interviews with individual participants, for example, provide one effective way of verifying conclusions drawn about observations of body language, words, tone and emotional content. The incident observed may carry no significance beyond

the immediate encounter for those involved because of the way it is embedded in a wider relational context. Alternatively, it may be that it was a defining moment in the relationship and something around which all future interactions were structured and past interactions re-interpreted. Being there and seeing it, without any reference to this wider context, does not necessarily provide sufficient information to be sure that what is observed by a researcher represents what the participants experienced.

An excerpt from a field note and an interview conducted with a child involved in one such encounter will help to elaborate upon this point:

Field note

9.42am noise is up and teacher is out again. She is not happy, this is disrupting her work on the running records. She says "Can someone tell me what it is you need to talk about? This table (motions to David's table) has a lot to talk about. Can you tell me, David, what it is that is so important that you have to talk about it now instead of doing your work?" David looks down with a really ashamed expression on his face. He is blushing and looks like he might cry. He answers the teacher in a quiet voice: "What time is it in Australia now?" "Ok", says teacher in a loud and very determined voice, "I will give you a chance to do this on your own. If you can't complete it now then you will have to do it at morning teatime. Time is precious. If you don't believe that it will be done at interval if you don't get it done now, then just try me".

Excerpt from interview

Jackie : OK is there anybody at school who is really important to you.

David: *I wouldn't be able to go to school if it wasn't for [name of teacher]. She makes it so I can bear it. She makes it fair for everyone.*

Watching quietly in the classroom I had formed the distinct impression that there was significant tension in the class and that being singled out in this way would have been

acutely embarrassing for David, and further, that this might well colour his daily experience of the classroom. However, when I checked this interpretation out with him, other experiences and the wider relationship he had with this teacher, meant that this encounter was not significant. My interpretation gave it a prominence that it did not have for David. While events such as this did not seem to colour David's experience of his classroom, they did have a major impact upon the way in which others experienced it. For instance, as can be seen below, Lizzie, who was in the same class and had recognised that she did not usually "get into trouble", found that the level of tension and teacher anger undermined her enjoyment of school:

Excerpt from interview

Well I wish the teacher wouldn't yell and scream so much. I don't really get into trouble, so it doesn't happen to me. But it is not very nice having to sit there and listen while someone else gets shouted at. I hate it. I am quite good at schoolwork, but I really hate being there when it is like that, and it is like that quite a lot.

Managing differing interpretations of encounters is a key task for research. By triangulating my field notes with interviews, I was able to ensure that I gained an understanding of the different ways that children experienced encounters such as these. My strategy was to piece together what I thought of as a reasonable interpretation of what I saw and then to return to the children individually and engage with them in a discussion of the situation or experience and to try to understand their responses to my attempts at explanation. The re-engagement with the children, after the fieldwork had been completed and they had left this part of their lives behind, was another strategy I adopted to check out my interpretations. While the interpretations remain mine and the account produced in this thesis is thus produced by an adult some time after the field material was generated, the re-engagement was a strategy that contributed to the sense that what I had done with the material was, broadly speaking, believable to those people who had been there with me at the time.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework adopted in this thesis. Building on material outlined in the previous chapter about the epistemological and theoretical orientation of the study, it highlights the significance of ethnography as the methodology that was most likely to enable me to achieve my research objectives. My goal was to develop a research process that provided opportunities for children to actively participate. I was also keenly aware that there was relatively little information about the everyday lives of untroubled children, particularly in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context⁴². I very much wished to create a process that would enable me to listen to children and to learn from them the things that were most relevant and important. The chapter has also discussed access and recruitment processes, ethical issues and the approach to managing issues of difference. The data generation processes have been outlined as have the strategies adopted to manage the fieldwork process. Finally, the approach taken to analysis has been discussed, and in so doing, the contribution these techniques make to resolving the representational challenges identified in Chapter Three have been elaborated upon. The following four chapters present material generated from the fieldwork.

⁴² As I was developing my project in a small Aotearoa/New Zealand town a number of other researchers were working collaboratively in a range of different cultural and national contexts to develop new understandings of children's everyday childhoods (see Alanen and Mayall, 2001). These materials became available at the end of 2001 and had a significant impact upon the way I completed this study.

- Chapter Five -

The children and their contexts

Introduction

This chapter provides contextual material about the children who participated in the study. It begins with a brief overview of the community in which the children lived and then considers their family and school contexts. Attention is then given to their interests and activities. Two final sections consider narrative material from the children relating to self and feelings, and to future and wider issues. These sections move from the children's perceptions and experiences of their inner worlds to the outer worlds in which they are embedded.

The community

Eighteen children and their contexts formed the core of this project. They lived in a small, provincial town with a population of about 15,000. 2001 census figures show that median incomes in the district were similar to the national average (\$18,700 cf \$18,500 nationally). However, as is common for small towns, the proportion of the population earning over \$50,000 per annum was notably lower in the district than was the case for the national population (9.1 percent compared to 11.5 percent nationally). The area had a lower proportion of Maori residents (12 percent compared to 20 percent nationally) but a higher

percentage of Maori children under fifteen years of age (41 percent compared to 37 percent nationally). Other ethnic groups were under-represented in this district (Pacific peoples 1.4 percent compared to 7.7 percent nationally, and Asian, the other numerically significant ethnic group 1 percent compared to 5.8 percent nationally).

Two Maori tribal groups originally settled the area and both of these maintained a continuing presence. European settlement commenced in 1874 in the form of British migrants from Manchester and Liverpool. Located in the middle of a fertile river terrace, historically sheep and beef farming were significant economic activities in the area. Dairy farming and cropping are now more significant agricultural activities.

The township, in which most of the children lived, was predominantly a rural service town. However, its proximity to a modest-sized provincial centre (population 75,000) meant that it also functioned as a dormitory suburb. The town, lying on a large river plateau, was surrounded by open farmland and dissected by two large river systems. It was predominantly flat, although its outer boundary to the northwest included areas of housing located on an escarpment that provided dramatic views to the east over the town and surrounding rural land. Residential areas were characterised by wide, tree-lined streets and included two large parks and a number of smaller formal playing areas. There were four primary schools (two full primary schools catering for children to year eight, and two catering for children to year six⁴³) one intermediate and one high school.

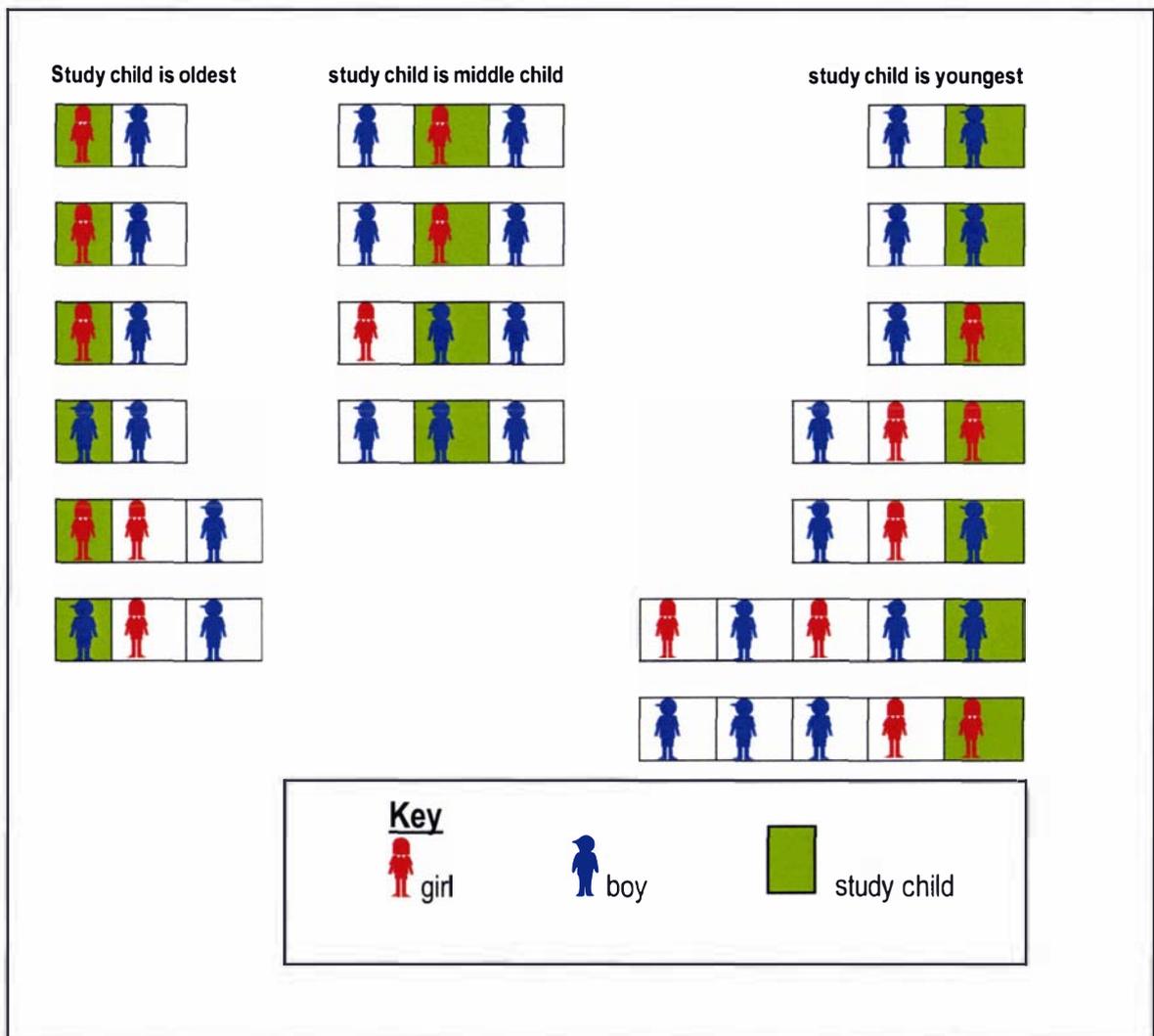
The children and their families

The study population comprised ten female and eight male children. Diagram 5.1 summarises the numbers of children in each household. The children came from a diverse range of families, although the average number of children at 2.6 per household was slightly higher than the national average (2.3 in the 2001 census). Numbers of children ranged from

⁴³ A full primary school is one that caters for children from new-entrant level (at about five years of age, or year one) until they move to high school (high school commences at year nine, when the children are about thirteen years of age).

five to two per household. Three of the girls were twins, two were twin sisters and one twin from another pair was included in this study. All of the girls in the study came from mixed gender families while four of the boys came from boy-only families. The study children were reasonably evenly spread in terms of birth order.

Diagram 5.1: The children and their siblings



Eleven of the seventeen households had two parents resident, and both of the adults were the natural parents of all the children residing in the household. Six of the households included

either blended families or one parent and children. In all the sole parent households, the mother had day-to-day custody of the child who was participating in this study.

In sixteen of the households one or both parents were in paid employment. In six cases one partner worked part-time and the other full-time. This did not always mean that the families were wealthy. In many cases total household incomes were modest, and parents were working hard to provide for their children. In five of these sixteen households one or both parents were employed in either primary or tertiary educational settings. In two households one parent was gaining further education. One of these households had two parents resident and the other parent was engaged in full-time work. The other household had one parent and that parent was engaged in full-time study. The children came from middle class homes. At the lower end were children whose family incomes were low, but their circumstances were not impoverished (that is, they did not lack material and emotional resources that would render them more vulnerable than their peers). The upper end included children who had two parents resident, both of whom were working in professional occupations.

Geographical origins

Two of the children had moved from the northern hemisphere when younger and four had moved from other places in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The remaining twelve children had lived in the locality all their lives, some of these children were second or third generation residents of the district. This latter group received significant support from their wider kin group.

Extended family and social networks of the families

A number of the families were tightly connected to their extended kin networks. Grandparents played a particularly significant role in these connections for twelve of the families in this study. In several of these cases grandparents lived out of town, but the families had made conscious efforts to maintain these extended links. Grandparents who lived locally played a particularly important role in terms of caring for the children, and provided release from the constant juggling that the other families experienced around balancing work and family responsibilities. The children talked of the special relationship that they had with their grandparents. Because they lived in a small town, the children were

often able to get themselves to their grandparents' houses. Visiting on a regular basis formed a common non-home destination for these children after school. Those grandparents who were involved in the children's lives, but who lived at a distance, provided holiday care and often this support made it possible for the children to have holidays. Many of the families had small social networks whether they were constructed from family, friends or a combination of these. The immediate source of support was mostly the family unit that resided in the household.

The school

The full primary school from which the children were recruited was large and had a roll of 525 pupils during the year I undertook fieldwork. It was a Decile 5⁴⁴ school. It had 27 classrooms divided into four semi-circles. These semi-circles were organised into syndicates; junior (years one and two) middle years (three and four), senior (years five and six) and intermediate (years seven and eight). There were seven junior classes with a total of 106 children. Five middle syndicate classes had a total of 134 children. The five senior syndicate classes had a total of 154 children. The intermediate syndicate was composed of four classes with a total of 131 children. Covered access-ways and paths connected classrooms to each other, and the newer classrooms had wide covered verandas and separate toilets and cloak bays. The older classrooms shared cloak bay/toilet areas, in which bags containing lunches were stored.

Outside each of these areas, was a play area with play equipment appropriate to the age of the children who used the adjacent classrooms. There were rules about outside play to ensure that older children did not impinge on the space of younger children. The physical separation of the school into age-related areas was reflected in social practices within the school such as separate assemblies for each of the syndicates.

⁴⁴ Decile ratings rank schools relative to each other on a scale of 1 to 10. They are used to calculate the state funding for each school. The lower the ranking the more funding a school will receive. Deciles are calculated from a combination of household socio-economic data derived from the census and each school's ethnicity profile: "Decile 1 schools are the 10 percent of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10 percent of schools with the lowest proportion of these students" (Ministry of Education 2002, p. 1), (see <http://www.minedu.govt.nz>).

The school showed evidence of considerable growth over the past 10 years and had limited outside space that reflected the pressure of a growing role. It also housed a language therapy unit, a special needs unit and a bilingual class⁴⁵. Facilities for wood, metal, fabric and food technology were not available at the school and the children attended the local intermediate school once a week for these aspects of the curriculum.

Goal-directed learning, a feature of the education system during this study, was used extensively throughout the school. Children established weekly and termly goals of what they hoped to achieve in their lives (at school and out of school) and they were involved in self, peer, teacher and parent assessment of these at regular intervals. Sometimes the children were able to define their own goals, sometimes the class as a whole was given a goal for the week, which all children needed to copy into their Learning Logs, and to make a focus of their work for the week.

Self and feelings

I asked the children to tell me the things that they would and would not change and to make three wishes. This section considers those responses that touched upon their sense of self. They made concrete and abstract wishes, wishing for things such as a sibling to be well and also to be able to fly, for world peace and to have as many toys as a best friend. Four girls and two boys included animals in their wishes and changes. Almost all of the children included a wish for material things like money, a bigger house or more toys. Their material wishes often included material resources for their parents, underscoring the significance of parents in their lives:

Get a great retirement house for Mum and Dad. [Joshua]

For Mum and Dad to be rich so that they could travel overseas. [Isaac]

⁴⁵ This is a class that provides tuition in both Maori and English for students.

To have money so that mum doesn't have to buy second best all the time.
[Hannah]

Their wishes and changes also included global issues such as the elimination of poverty and pollution, and end to war; they were concerned about the survival of the planet and the world, as they knew it. Eight of the children expressly and spontaneously stated that they would not change themselves:

I definitely wouldn't change anything of me, and if I do seem to change in the slightest way, it would be because of me growing up and maybe being around different people. [Ellen]

I wouldn't change the way I act now, my tone of voice, my personality and my hobbies. I will keep them for the rest of my life. [Luke]

Five wanted to develop or change an aspect of themselves or to develop a new skill. For instance, Lizzie declared that she "*would like to make [herself] better at sport*", a wish she qualified by adding:

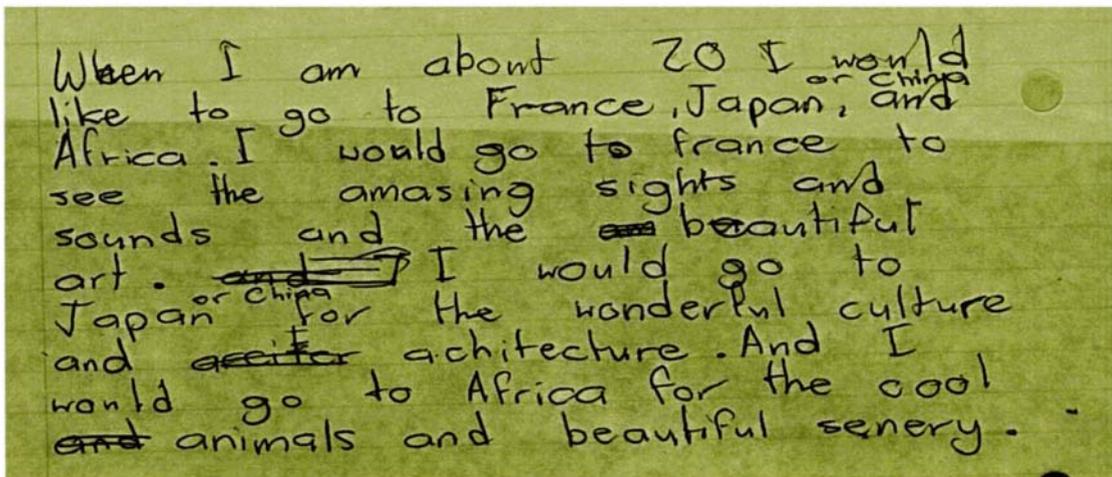
But I would still like to be the same kind of person, because I think I am really good at appreciating other people's feelings.

Several wished to be famous. This was connected to activities they currently excelled at or enjoyed such as sport, music or drama. For instance, Tim, a keen sportsman, said that he wanted "*To become a star at sport*" while Ellie wished "*To be a musician... and I want to do stuff like that on television*". David wanted to be a movie star, and had developed a plan. This involved the progressive development of his skills and confidence at performing, beginning with participation in the school's biennial play (the Major Production⁴⁶), moving to involvement in the local Amateur Dramatic Society production, then performing at the theatre in a nearby provincial city, and on from there.

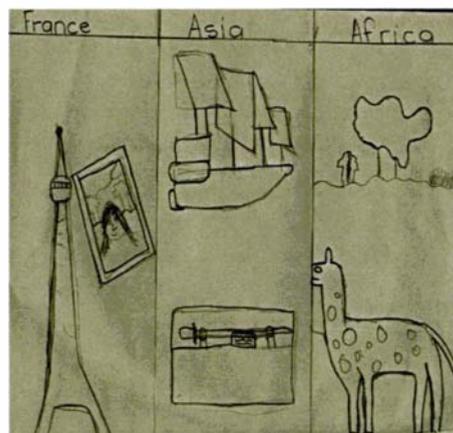
⁴⁶ See note 11, Chapter Four.

The most common issue the children talked of wanting to change involved travel. Twelve had lived their lives in this small community and all of those who had not travelled wished to do so:

Diagram 5.2 Isaac's future thoughts



When I am about 20 I would like to go to France, Japan, ^{or China} and Africa. I would go to France to see the amazing sights and sounds and the beautiful art. ~~and~~ I would go to Japan ^{or China} for the wonderful culture and ~~architecture~~ architecture. And I would go to Africa for the cool ~~and~~ animals and beautiful scenery.



Well I would like to go overseas for a while I think [when I have left home] because I just like interesting things. [Isaac]

I would like to go to Australia. I haven't even been out of the North Island. [Steven]

One of the group activities “Me and My Feelings” (Appendix 2) asked the children to complete a pamphlet about the emotional meanings they attached to different parts of their everyday lives and to exceptional events.

Happiness

The girls connected relational dimensions of family and friendship to their happiest times. Boys also spoke of relationships as resulting in happiness but they did this less frequently and their focus was exclusively upon family relationships. In fact, throughout the exercise, no boys identified a feeling state as being associated with their friends (two identified experiences which were associated with peer group activity such as: *being left out of sport* =sad, and *being told on* = angry). The boys also identified that material resources, activities and games made them happy. For the boys, identification of happy states associated with relationships focused on either specific and named individuals (*I go fishing with Grandad, we spend time together*) or people in the most general sense (*I help someone do something. It feels good*). The girls’ identification of relationships that created happy feelings were located between these two types of situations, they identified being with family in general, or their friends in general as creating a sense of happiness.

Sadness

Sadness was associated with a diverse range of situations. Relationships appeared in both the boys’ and the girls’ responses. This included things such as being left out of activities or excluded by friends, being told off by parents and being let down by others. One boy indicated that he did not get sad and another revealed that thinking about dying made him sad. During the course of the fieldwork, his grandfather was diagnosed with terminal cancer and so the reality of this really important person dying was an issue with which he had grappled. It is interesting that he identified his own death and not his grandfather’s, as creating sad feelings. The death of his grandfather was associated with feelings of disappointment. Being bored at school created sad feelings among the boys and one boy said that letting himself down as a result of his own actions had made him sad.

Worries

Eleven of the children suggested that relationship matters caused them to worry. Seven of the eleven children who answered this question worried about people close to them dying or being ill, while others worried about what other people thought of them and about people talking about them behind their backs. They also wrote of worries about personal performance and failing to meet their own expectations and being “*shamed out*” as a result.

Anger

Anger was connected to relationship matters for all of the children. In particular they highlighted circumstances where other children undermined them. Their examples included situations where others:

- cheated or took more than their fair share
- got them into trouble with adults
- teased them or were mean
- made personal insults or showed off
- did not listen to them
- took or broke things that belonged to them, and
- when siblings intruded into their space.

What was interesting about these situations was the absence of adults as a direct cause of anger. Their examples were confined to the impact that unfair, manipulative or provocative actions by other children had upon them. While some of their examples did imply adult involvement, the focus of their anger was upon the actions of other children. At other times during the fieldwork the children talked of specific situations in which they had felt angry at an adult, yet when I asked them to give me examples of situations that made them angry, none chose a situation that directly involved an adult.

Future and global issues

For nine children, wishes and changes included futuristic and global themes (Diagram 5.3). They wondered about the impact of technology particularly in terms of new modes of transport such as flying saucers and spaceships that might replace cars and the development of domestic robots (to make beds and do dishes, in particular). Others hoped for space travel and contact with aliens or beings from outer space. Their imaginative thinking about more magical or fanciful futures was tempered by their awareness that the degradation of the planet might snatch away the possibility of these wonderful futures. In this connection, the children also talked of hoping for cures for disease and the elimination of crime and pollution. Four wished for a cleaner environment, a safer world and enough food for everybody:

I like watching the news, and I don't like all this stuff, like wars and that.
If I could have a wish I would stop that. [David]

I am reading "The Diary of Anne Frank" at the moment, and all the stuff about wartime makes me really sad. I am pleased that where I live those sorts of things don't happen. If I could change one thing I would change what war does to people. It is scary sometimes knowing about these things. [Ellie]

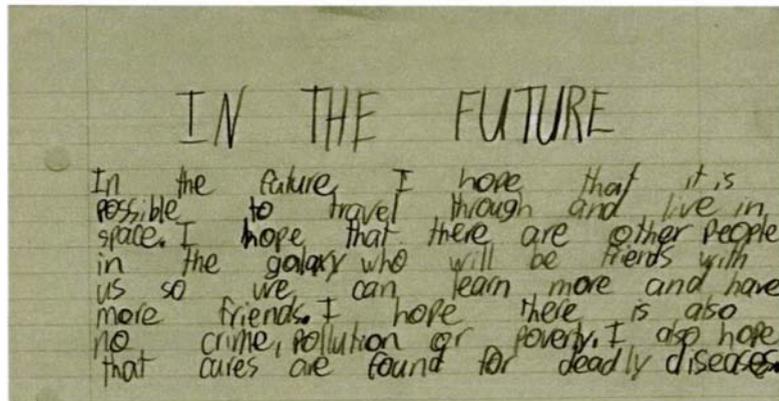
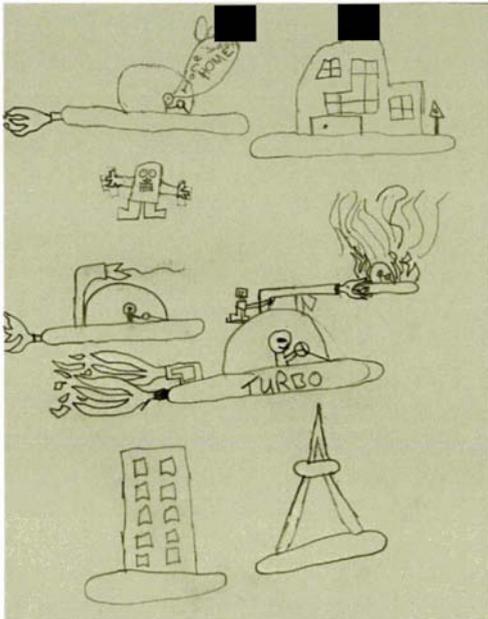
Some contextualised these global issues in terms of their own family values and, in so doing, demonstrated an acute awareness of the way that local matters connect to global issues:

Less pollution ... because we could use cars less and I don't like the waste and everything, I like clean places ...and for us not to have laws because we can trust people to actually obey and do good. [Toby]

We explored their thoughts about the future and any plans or goals they had. In talking about strategies for the future, most expressed a preference to 'wait and see'. I was interested in this way of looking to the future because while they clearly thought about many things in

depth, their responses suggested that they preferred to leave the future to sort itself out. For instance, although Gemma worried about passing tests at school she prefaced these concerns with a statement that she did not think much about the future, preferring to take each day as it came to her.

Diagram 5.3 Futuristic themes from the children's group sessions



There was a marked difference between the girls' and boys' narratives in relation to their own futures. The girls' responses were dominated by ideas related to occupations they might have, while the boys' narratives also featured the possibility of girlfriends, wives, sports, hobbies and other activities as well as the possibility of having children of their own. Isaac's thoughts were typical of many of the boys:

I think I might come back to New Zealand and get a job in a zoo. I will probably have a wife by then and I will probably be playing [favourite sport].

This can be contrasted with the following quotations reflecting the general pattern of response from the girls:

Jackie: *What do you think you will be doing in 10 years time?*

Ellen: I want to be a teacher.

Jackie: *Do you have any goals for your future?*

Sophie: I want to be a zookeeper.

Jackie: *What do you think you will be doing in 10 years time?*

Lucy: I want to be either a vet or a beautician.

With two exceptions, the girls did not mention boyfriends, marriage (or other sorts of stable relationships) or having children of their own. The two exceptions were Emily, who wished to have a family of her own and Sophie, who said that she and her friends talked about boys at the back of the playing field at lunch times.

Six of the children (four girls and two boys) did not have a clear idea about what they might do when they left school. Of these, the girls (but not the boys) worried about this, they expected that by now they should know what they wanted to do with their lives:

No, that is what I am worried about. I don't have any idea of what I am going to do. Everyone is like 'I am going to be a vet, I am going to be a scientist'. And I don't know, I don't have a clue. I suppose I have got a lot of time, but I worry about it. All my friends have already made up their minds, but I don't know. [Lizzie]

I really don't know what I want to do with my life. I don't know what I want my job to be... it does bother me because everyone seems to know exactly what they want to do.... My uncle, he is always saying that he

doesn't know what to do, and I think 'I don't want to be like that'. I want to know exactly what I want to do. [Gemma]

It was notable that some of the academically dedicated and diligent girls did not have a clear sense of future direction. Rather than being directed at achieving a future goal, their commitment to schoolwork was focused around a general sense of education as something that they should do well at. It sprang from a desire to please their teachers and parents and was located in the present.

The children who did have clear career aspirations chose occupations that came from their own daily experience of the world. In particular, occupations that were reflected in their favourite television programmes appealed to them, and some also wanted to be actors because of their experience of television and the movies.

Karen: I want to be a policeman.

Jackie: *Why is that?*

Karen: Because I reckon it is fun. I like watching it on TV.

One of the boys wanted to follow the example of his father, and had spent time finding out the steps he needed to take to get there.

I want to be an engineer like my dad. Then I will be able to earn enough money to be a proper motocross racer...my maths skills need to improve and my language skills. Partly I want to improve them so that I can be an engineer. Partly I just want to improve so that I can be better at them...I have got better at them this year... when I am old enough, Dad will get me a part-time job at his work so I can learn more about being an engineer.

Another was very interested in science and technology, and over the three interviews his views of what he wanted to do career-wise developed:

Interview #1:

I want to be a scientist and do something really useful... yep I read up on it, anything I can.

Interview #2

I am thinking that if I keep my interest in science, I will have to have a look and see if [polytech or university] has better science stuff on whichever science I want to go into.I want to become a scientist and do something really useful.

Interview #3

I still want to be a scientist, but I think I have finally decided what sort I want to be. I want to work on spacecraft engines and spacecraft designs.

While not having a clear occupational focus, Ellie, like several other children, held the view that she needed to have a good education because of the options this would give her later in life:

Jackie: *If you had three wishes what would they be?*

Ellie: Get a good education.

Jackie: *So why would you choose an education, why is that important?*

Ellie: Because, so you can get good jobs and stuff.

Jackie: *Is that really important?*

Ellie: Yeah.

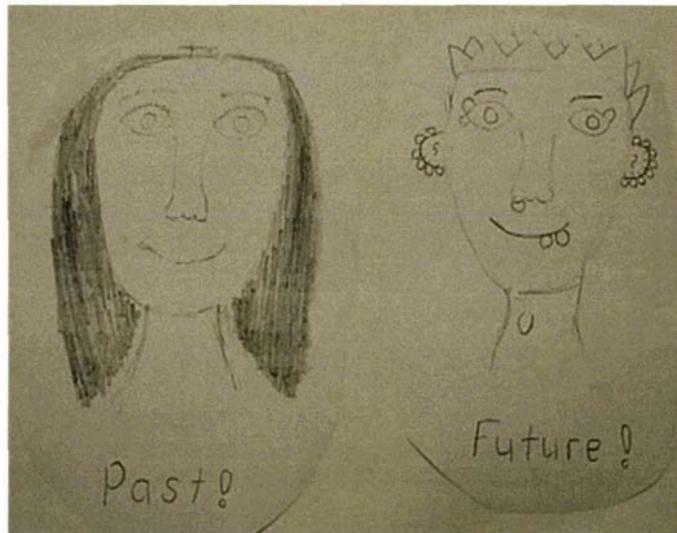
Jackie: *Why is that?*

Ellie: Because otherwise you wont have any money or a house or anything.

Ellie also produced two self-portraits in a group session (Diagram 5.4). These pictures illustrated her as relatively demure in the present and as a very racey, body-pierced young

person in the future. Ellie, a very busy child, appeared very much as her present-time self-portrait. She was exceptionally well-behaved at school and very obedient at home. Her artwork suggests a future filled with very different possibilities than those in her present. It points to a view of the middle-distance when she would be a teenager, a future point not present in many of the other children's work. Her work suggested an internal world that was markedly different to the way she represented herself in the present and, like several of the other girls, suggested that despite the carefully crafted image of compliance she presented to others, this was also an image that she resisted.

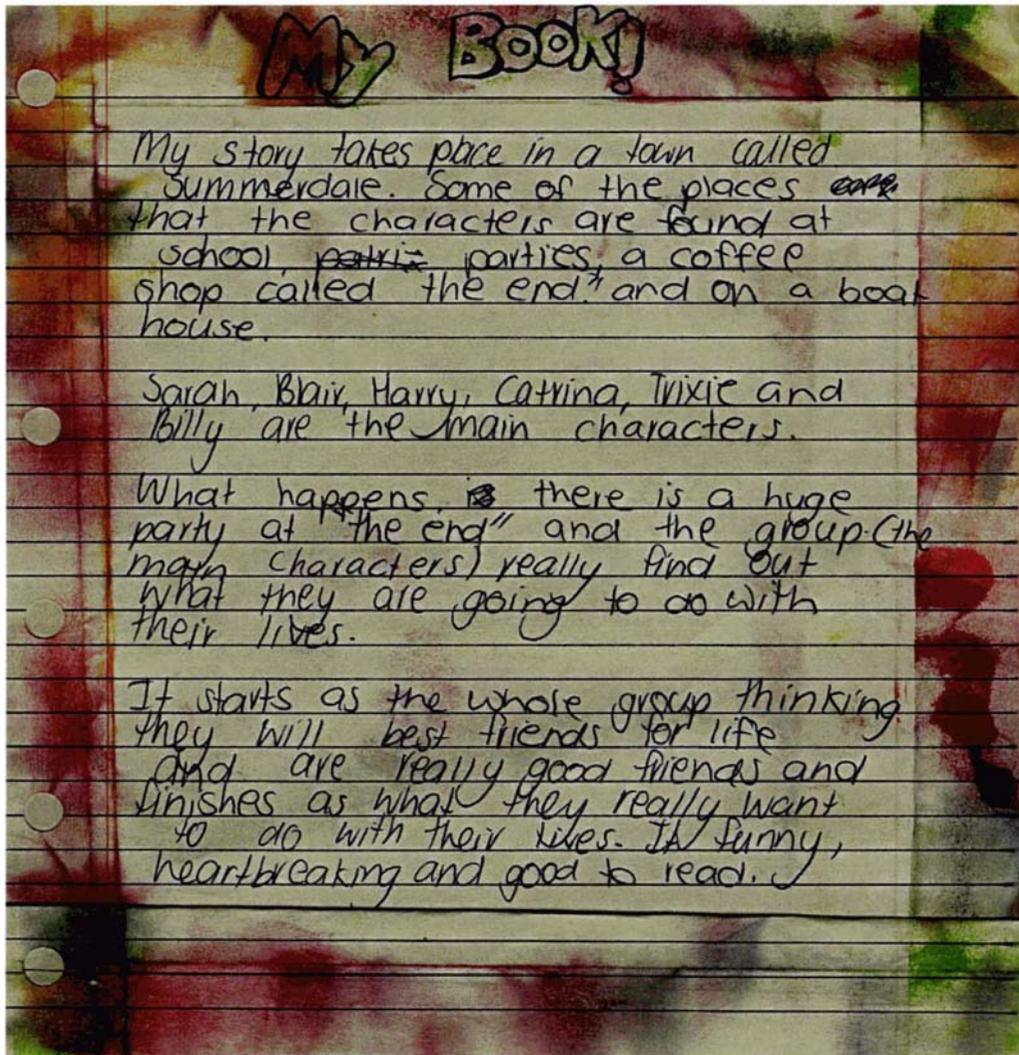
Diagram 5.4 Ellie's Self Portraits – me in the past and me in the future



Sophie produced a plan for a book (Diagram 5.5) that also had a medium-term future focus. Her story involved a group of friends engaged in a process of discovery about what they would do with their lives. A secondary theme centred around the development of the relationship between the friends. While resolving their uncertainty about the future, the ending of the story calls into question the survival of their friendships. An interesting additional time-related theme in this story is the naming of the coffee shop at which parts of the story are located; it is called “The End”. Whether Sophie saw the use of this name as a clever linguistic device that could be used to end her story, or whether she intended to use it

in a more prophetic way, to signal the end of the friendships at the point at which the question about the future was answered, is left hanging in her story plan.

Diagram 5.5 Sophie's book plan



Observations of the preparations for the Major Production provided a final source of information on the ways in which the children thought and acted in relation to the future. These preparations consumed a lot of their time and involved much waiting for their 'turn' to rehearse their lines. The children managed these preparations in a variety of ways, some

became distracted, others played games together around the margins of the hall, some did homework and some got into trouble for causing distractions.

When required to participate, many did their parts as quickly and as well as they could in the moment. The coaches adopted two strategies to try to encourage the children to develop the quality of their individual performances:

1. Exhortations to think about what ‘it would be like on the night’ and to consider the performance from the audience’s point of view, and
2. Encouragement to get fully into role during practice and become the part they were playing.

The first strategy attempted to motivate the children by focussing their thoughts into the future and it also required that they be able to anticipate how they and their audience would feel. This strategy did not often achieve the desired improvement and usually raised the tension and anxiety levels in both the coaches and the children. The second strategy encouraged the children to perform their parts in the present, and this seemed to make a difference for the children. Although it was used less often, its immediacy appeared to create the conditions under which the children could achieve the required performance levels.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a context for the children, highlighting the nature of the community in which they lived and the families to which they belonged. The children had a strong sense of themselves as good people and a number wished to become famous by excelling at one of their personal interests. The powerful role of relationships in their emotional lives was apparent. The children placed a high value on stability, particularly with respect to key relationships in their lives. The significance of parents and the value of their homes were notable. Girls attached a broad range of relationship experiences to different emotional states while boys concentrated more specifically upon familial relationships. Both boys and girls identified relationships as a common source of happiness. Negative emotions

were associated with situations where the children had little control over the course of events or where they failed to meet their own expectations of their performance.

The children freely mixed personal and global, abstract and concrete ideas when thinking about the future and they demonstrated a vibrant awareness of their wider world. The boys had more diverse thoughts about their futures than the girls, who were quite focused on occupation. When they did not have a preferred job in mind, the girls worried about this. In contrast, the boys talked of a wide range of things they might do in their futures. Lack of a clear occupational focus did not appear to bother the boys. The next chapter will explore the children's experiences of space and time.

- Chapter Six -

The children's use of space and time

Introduction

The ways in which children occupy themselves, the places they go and the people with whom they share their time are all topics of intense public and academic interest. In an era when pressures of time seem particularly acute, the ways in which children use their time and the impact which time pressures have upon the nature of the childhoods they are able to experience, are important questions that capture the public imagination (Gibbs 2001). Is the time of children well spent? Are they safe when out of adult sight? Are they happy at school? Should they be busily occupied after school or should they have lots of free time to themselves? (see, for example, Kim and Cole 2001). Questions such as these occupy the minds of parents, teachers and researchers, and often form the focus for public debate about children (Kluger and Park 2001). The narratives of children, however, only rarely provide information that feeds into these debates. This chapter presents material from the children about their space and time agendas.

The chapter is divided into five sections. It begins with a consideration of the ways children used time that they were able to control themselves. To some extent their free time⁴⁷ use was divided along gendered lines, and this reflected both the differing interests of boys and girls and also differences in parental attitudes. Attention next moves to school; the place where children spent much of their time. In this discussion the two contrasting ways in which the children experienced school can be seen. The children's experience of home is the focus for the next part of the discussion. While home narratives were very positive, the way in which home became contested space when parents were away is also noted. Finally consideration is given to their experiences of out of school care and supervision. The chapter concludes with a discussion of organised activities.

Free time

Outdoor places

Eight children (four boys, four girls) had physically active lives and spent a lot of time shooting hoops, playing sport, cycling or skate-boarding at the track with family or friends. The local municipal pool was also used by many of the children (both boys and girls), but not all of them saw it as a place they liked to go to. For those who did enjoy it, it provided an important space where they were allowed to play without direct oversight of their parents. Of course the space was still managed by adults (lifeguards). The boys who did not enjoy going to the public pool pointed to the way that the safety rules got in the way of their fun (see Joshua's comments below).

⁴⁷ This term is seen as problematic in the literature because of the way in which children's non-school time can be absorbed by adult demands – after school activities, jobs, homework and so forth, and also because of the impact of broader structural matters upon the ways in which children are able to use public spaces, in particular, in their own ways. I use this term here to refer to the times the children had available to do as they wished, while recognising that this was often only a very small part of the available non-school time and also recognising the way in which the children's capacity to freely use time and space was conditioned by wider agendas and demands. For instance, the ways in which girls' use of public space was restricted as a result of safety concerns meant that their capacity to 'freely' use open spaces would be questioned. The issue of 'free time' is explored in more detail in Chapter Ten.

The children who used parks talked of them as very positive places to be. With the exception of the pool, the other public spaces (parks and tracks) were used to a much greater extent by boys than the girls. Parents of daughters and daughters themselves were more likely to define these public, unsupervised play spaces as a risk, and the girls' use of them was more limited as a consequence. However some of the girls did talk of play in public parks, while acknowledging the rules that applied around their use. For example:

Jackie: *What is your favourite place there [at the park]?*

Karen: We like building dams at the stream.

Jackie: *Do you go up the stream a bit to do that?*

Karen: No we have to stay in the bit that goes through the park.

One of the girls sometimes rode around the township or went for runs by herself and in this she was different to the other girls:

Well sometimes I go for a run with Dad, sometimes I also go for a run by myself, but that is not as often. I go around these streets here [draws them on the map] sometimes I might bike over there and back [draws area on map] but not very often.

The local river was popular with several of the boys. It flowed through a large park and a track for off-road motorbikes had been created underneath the bridge that spanned it. Several playing fields, a park, the local BMX cycle track and 'The Bowl' ran along its edge. It was a vast resource. Parents identified it as a risky place and had defined conditions around its use by their children. Joshua compared the pool and the river:

Joshua: There is [sic] no rules at the river. I go there with [older sibling] and Robert and we can do what we want. We stay for ages, it is so cool. I don't like the pools. The inside one smells [of chlorine] and I get cold quick in the outside one. You can't do this and you can't do that, and the

lifeguards are always telling you to stop doing things that are fun and don't hurt anyone. At the river we just do what we want.

Jackie: *Do you get to go there just with your friend or ...?*

Joshua: No, I have to have [older sibling] there or we are not allowed in the river.

The boys utilised a wide range of local public spaces for play. However, their attempts to use local resources for recreation were not always successful. Luke explained to me how he and his friends had been skating at the local intermediate school during the holidays, but had been chased away by an angry caretaker who saw their presence as a threat:

Luke: The Intermediate ... is blue [blue referring to places that were not 'good' for Luke].

Jackie: *Why is that?*

Luke: We got kicked out of there for skateboarding. There is no signs or anything around there saying that you can't. We were just skating around and this dude came and chased us out.

Jackie: *Oh no. That was after school was it?*

Luke: In the holidays.

Jackie: *Oh no.*

Luke: And he shouldn't be able to kick us out because it is in the holidays and we weren't doing anything wrong.

During the fieldwork some of the boys reached an age at which they were allowed to travel to friends' places by themselves. Luke picked up on the ways in which they were able to move about on their own and the negotiations that had taken place around this:

Luke: I go to William's house. He lives just outside town, over the bridge.

Jackie: *That is quite a way away from here, how do you get there?*

Luke: I go there sometimes on my bike. I have just been allowed to start doing that. I have to ride on the footpath because the road is busy, but it is all left turns. Then coming home, I have to wait for my mum to pick me up because it is all right turns and I have to cross busy roads. We have fun out on his farm, playing on the bikes sometimes.

Outdoor recreation with their dads was something the boys particularly enjoyed. Two talked about restoring a motorbike with their fathers and then taking it to the beach to ride. Camping was also mentioned by some of the boys. Three of the children talked of regular family water skiing trips.

Friends' places

The girls more frequently talked of playing in and around their own or their friends' houses, and all but two talked of commonly being picked up and dropped off by parents.

Ellen: My best friend is Kelly, I like her place to play at.

Jackie: *What do you do there?*

Ellen: We sit in her room talking and listening to music and we play with each other's hair, doing up hair styles and stuff.

Jackie: *Do you go to other places when you play with her?*

Ellen: We mostly stay at her place, or we might come back here, sometimes we might be allowed to walk down town to The Warehouse.

Jackie: *How do you get to Kelly's, do you walk or bike there?*

Ellen: Mum and Dad don't like me walking, so mostly they will take me.

Sophie: I play with Shona, I really like playing with her when I have time after school and at weekends. We don't play that much at school together, she has other friends there...

Jackie: *Do you go to other places with her when you are playing, or do you mostly play at each other's houses?*

Sophie: We play at each other's houses.

Jackie: *Do you go to parks or anything like that to play sometimes?*

Sophie: No I don't go to parks really.

Jackie: *How do you get to Shona's?*

Sophie: Mum takes me there and then her dad brings me back when he gets home from work if it is after school.

Several of the girls in this research belonged to large complex friendship networks (see Chapter Seven). Managing this number of friends meant that a lot of time was spent playing with each other. As noted below, Karen had nine other girls that she counted as good friends, and she played with them in a large group at school. Sometimes, as noted below, all of these girls would play together out of school, but more often their after school play was in groups of two and three. Joshua, on the other hand, had two close friends, and he played with one of these at school and home:

Amy is just real fun. Her father is really, really nice. Yesterday we went to her house for a barbeque after school. And all our friends went there. There was [nine other girls] there, and then they all came around here for a swim. [Karen]

That is Robert's house. I stayed the night there last night. I go there every morning because we bike to school together. And I go there just about every weekend. We play basketball most of the time, sometimes we play 'stay home- go home' in the dark. [Joshua]

However, friend's places were not always viable places to spend time. Parents expressed views about the company their children kept and monitored where they went. For instance, restrictions were placed around particular friend's houses because of concerns about health, safety and wellbeing issues, and Hannah spoke of a situation like this:

Hannah: No I don't go to [friend's] place anymore.

Jackie: *Is that the place you are not allowed to go to?*

Hannah: Yes.

Jackie: *Is that because of the kids smoking, is that what you said?*

Hannah: Yeah. And [friend] goes out partying with her sister. And she comes back a bit drunk ... So Dad heard her saying that she was drunk. And I already knew about that. So I am not allowed to go anymore.

Reading

Reading was a popular pursuit for fourteen of the children. All of the girls and half of the boys identified it as an activity they chose to do for pleasure. The children who chose reading as a favourite activity were attracted to the fantasy, exploratory and imaginative potential of reading and several also enjoyed reading for knowledge. They derived considerable pleasure from this activity. The girls, who made time in most days to read, generally chose to read fiction stories that had a real world focus and some of them also enjoyed biographies. On the other hand, the boys chose fantasy and science fiction and some also enjoyed science fact books. Sophie and Brendan describe their favourite sorts of books:

I have got lots of favourite authors. Sometimes my friends and I we read the same sorts of books. Well I like reading Jacqueline Wilson at the moment. [Sophie]

I like the science fiction books and the science fact books, I also like things like "Goosebumps" and "Choose Your Own Adventure" things. I find those really interesting. I like reading through them and since they don't have any pictures I just have to think about it myself. So I like having to use my imagination for the books as well. [Brendan]

Lizzie explained how her reading was linked in with the pleasure she gained from having her own bedroom and being able to have time on her own:

And I like sometimes I like being with my family but sometimes I just like reading in my room. It is really important to me to have my own room because I like, you know, to be there and to read and stuff like that.

The boys were more diverse in terms of their involvement in reading. They were equally divided between those who identified it as a favoured activity and those who disliked it. Those who expressed a dislike of reading had struggled to maintain their chronological age in reading at school and talked about having had additional assistance with reading.

Animals

Animals featured prominently in many of the children's accounts about how they spent free time. Several (boys and girls) enjoyed horse riding and Luke explained his horse-related activities in this way:

Like we wash them and put their stuff on them and stuff... Like the saddle and the covers and we wash their tails and we lead them around.

Playing with dogs, cats and rabbits were also mentioned by the children when talking about their favourite pastimes. The differences between the children's narratives about these house-based pets and the horses being that domestic pets were available on demand, whereas contact with the horses had to be arranged, planned for and required adult co-operation to take place. So, while the horses were intensely enjoyed by the children, the opportunity to be with these animals was limited.

Companionship was an important dimension of the contact with animals. The children talked of caring for their pets and they played with their pets in the sense of playing 'fetch' with dogs. They also constructed fantasy games in which their pets were actors alongside themselves.

Creative activities

Ten children talked about creative activities as one of their favourite pastimes. Fantasy story or poetry writing was popular with two of the boys and eight of the girls:

Karen: I write at home and at school. Sometimes I just, you know, sit down and write stories.

Jackie: *Oh ok, so you particularly like writing stories?*

Karen: Yeah.

Jackie: *Yeah, anything else that you like writing?*

Karen: I really like writing made up stuff.

Jackie: *So you like writing made up stuff, ok?*

Karen: Yeah, I am not very good at doing reports.

Jackie: *Why is that?*

Karen: Well, I suppose I am, but I prefer to write about make believe because then I can make everything as I think it should be.

Equal numbers of the boys and girls favoured drawing. Ellen enjoyed making models and used her pocket money to purchase kits and other materials:

Like I have got heaps and heaps of kits, I like to paint and one day I made this thing that you make with cardboard and one day I make up little credit cards and a little shop. And it was like cash machines. I had that from when I was really young and I have got this plaster stuff and I make plaster things. You get these little containers and you put the plaster in that and you wait over night and take them out and then you can paint them and put them on your dresser.

Cooking

Four of the children (two boys and two girls) talked of cooking as a favourite activity. David shared cooking with his grandmother who provided care after school and during holidays while his parents worked. He clearly had a very special relationship with both grandparents.

Cooking with Grandma was something we discussed at length during the first interview. David talked confidently of the things he could cook and shared jokes with me about some of his cooking disasters:

David: It is cool, and sometimes, I like Jo Seager's cooking⁴⁸.

Jackie: *Oh that is interesting, do you like cooking?*

David: Yes. Sometimes I cook biscuits. But the last ones that I made I forgot to put in the eggs and they turned out a bit disastrous. And I like to cook, there is this cake that Grandma's friend gave us, and we just call it (name's) chocolate cake. And we usually make that for birthdays.

Jackie: *And you help with that?*

David: I make it all by myself.

Tim enjoyed cooking with his mother. They did this together to connect up again after school:

Yeah I cook quite a bit sometimes, cook with Mum in the kitchen after school. A lot of the time I burn them, I cook the eggs and Mum cooks it with me. I like cooking after school with Mum and stuff.

The girls who cooked did so as part of their desire to do things for other people. They talked of cooking and baking to mark out special occasions, as Lizzie noted:

I like cooking for other people. I like baking cakes and stuff because I like to hear people say, 'Oh, that is very nice'.

Town

The local town centre also featured as a public place the children accessed in their free time. It was located between one and two kilometres from their homes for all but one child who lived on a farm some distance away. Many were able to use this space relatively freely,

⁴⁸ Jo Seager fronted a cooking programme on local television and also had produced many cooking books.

walking or cycling to and from town with their friends. Pet shops, bookshops and The Warehouse featured prominently, as did the local video rental shop which provided both videos and console⁴⁹ games (such as Playstation and Nintendo) for hire.

Hannah identified two streets in the township that had really 'bad'⁵⁰ connotations for her because she had witnessed several frightening fights between members of her family.

Hannah: Well, there is some bad things about [adult relative's] house.

Where is it?

Jackie: *What are the bad things, can you tell me that?*

Hannah: I will tell you in a minute when I find it. Where is [street]?

There it is. That is all bad.

Jackie: *Why is that?*

Hannah: Well [adult relative] is a bad drinker and has a lot of fights with [other family members], ... That is the house where they had a huge fight and got really bad and really drunk, and [adult relative] is an angry drinker. And we had to go all the way up to Hamilton to my Auntie's house because it was getting too dangerous. And so I don't like that street.

The provincial city, some 15 minutes away by car, was also popular. Many highlighted its shopping mall and fortnightly trips with parents were common experiences for about half of the children. Most, but not all of them, enjoyed these trips and many had favourite shops that

⁴⁹ These games are described in this thesis as console games because they are game machines that are played via the television. Nintendo, Playstation, Sega were all common console games during the time I worked with the children.

⁵⁰ The term 'bad' was the children's own term. They used it to label the places that were not so good for them, or places they did not enjoy going to – which was the question I had asked. I did not want to select the more pejorative term 'bad', but was happy for them to ascribe this label to the places they identified. In reality, the terms 'good' and 'bad' were used regularly by the children to describe their experiences, their feelings, observations of the world around them and also to describe themselves. For instance, a boy indicated in his diary entry that it would be a 'good' week at school for him if "*I didn't be bad*". The issue of how children come to see themselves as 'bad' is very significant. This process of collapsing behaviour and identity – "*I am bad*" versus "*I did something bad, wrong or inappropriate*" – I think reflects the way in which children are objectified by adults in general and by the education system in particular. However, consideration of this matter in detail is beyond the scope of this thesis. I used the term 'bad' advisedly recognising that it was an understood part of children's lexicons.

repeatedly drew them back. However, some found shopping really boring. The city also hosted some of the major sports events and so its sports stadium was a very important place for the children who played sport. One of the boys described the stadium like this:

I love playing basketball. I just love basketball. That is the most fun game. We play in this huge stadium and it is just so huge, it's massive as. I just love that place.

Electronic media

(I) TELEVISION

Most of the children were no longer regularly watching the specific children's programmes. For many, watching after school television was limited by the fact that they were busy with activities, or their parents' work commitments meant that they had to attend formal after school care. However, six (three girls, three boys) preferred some of the children's television programmes. For the other children, their viewing interest had moved to the early and middle evening time slots (up to 9pm) and for one or two it included programmes that finished around 9.30pm during the week. Most children had fairly relaxed viewing restrictions over the weekends, and could stay up and watch programmes that finished as late as 10.30pm. In general terms, parents still monitored the programmes their children watched. However, the fact that many regularly watched up to 9pm during the week indicated that their attitudes to suitable programmes were more relaxed than that of the New Zealand Broadcasting Authority which deemed family viewing to end at 8pm. Preferred evening programmes divided roughly, though not completely, along gendered lines.

Many of the boys watched the sit-coms and "The Simpsons" was a particular favourite. The attraction of these programmes lay in the pleasure gained from identifying with the comic or ironic dimension of the programmes. In general, the children talked of enjoying watching comical situations where people (mostly adults) did foolish things. Luke explained it this way:

I like it [The Simpsons] because it is funny and Homer is a dodo. He does really dumb things. He is more like a kid than an adult.

Brendan expressed a clear preference for British comedies in his viewing, and Monty Python was particularly enjoyed:

Yeah I like the British comedies. I find them really funny. I like Monty Python. ... I think I like the British comedies better [than American ones] because there is a lot more of them as well. They have funny jokes.

Girls, on the other hand, tended (though not exclusively) to watch the serialised programmes such as “Shortland Street”⁵¹, “Dawson’s Creek” and “Home and Away”. “Shortland Street” was a particular favourite because of the local content. They enjoyed hearing New Zealand voices, related to elements of local culture, news and events, and enjoyed seeing local landmarks. They also enjoyed the fact that the show was directly accessible to them and they could easily obtain its memorabilia:

Sophie: Shortland Street. I love that one, I have watched it ever since it came on. I have got all their t-shirts, and stuff like that. I have written to them and they have written back to me and I have got postcards and stuff.

Jackie: *Oh wonderful, what do you like about it?*

Sophie: It is in Auckland. It’s got all the Auckland streets and stuff and it is just more real you know, we went to Auckland once and you could see all the places there. Now they have put the Skytower up, like in the mornings, it will come back on and you will see the Skytower.

(II) NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Sixteen children (eight boys, eight girls) had access to and talked about at least one type of electronic game. Nine listed electronic games as being a favourite activity, three ranked

⁵¹ A locally-made serialised soap opera based in Auckland.

electronic games as being their second, third or fourth most favoured choice of recreational activity.

The boys talked about playing console games more frequently than the girls and they preferred war simulation and racing games while the girls enjoyed “Spice World” and “Heroes Mile of Magic” (a strategy game). Parental monitoring of the use of the games varied. Two children had unrestricted access but the others, like Luke, were only able to play with them at weekends and sometimes after school:

Luke: We are only allowed to play it from Friday to Sunday.

Jackie: *So you have got rules around video games?*

Luke: Yeah.

Jackie: *Why is that?*

Luke: Else we stay up too late on the week nights, playing them, and we don’t go to sleep and Mum says we go mental if we play at night.

The children used technology in varying ways and to varying degrees. One boy, who was an enthusiast, played Playstation and Gameboy⁵² with his father in the evenings and at weekends. This was unusual in this group of children who otherwise played electronic games by themselves or with their peers. Steven often played Playstation games, the console for which was located in his older brother’s bedroom. Access to the machine required negotiations with this brother as well as with his parents. Tim had to limit his game playing to times when his parents did not want to watch television because they only had one television set.

Brendan’s technology-centred interests extended beyond electronic game-playing and could also be seen in his extensive collection of Star Trek resources. He explained the things that drew him to this material:

Brendan: Yep I have a Star Trek fact file at my home. I have [laughs], I

⁵² Nintendo Gameboy is a hand-held portable electronic game machine.

must have like four or five big folders, [they] must be that thick with all the stuff in it.

Jackie: *Oh cool. So what do you like about the sci. fi. stuff?*

Brendan: Oh, I just like all of this advanced technology, and I like watching the lasers or whatever they are shooting hits the shield, the glow it makes and all that. And I like, 'Oh we'll have to do this to the force field' and da da da da [mimics the talk on the shows].

Brendan also took some of his materials to school to share with his friends. I observed him talking about new cheat codes to access different levels of games that he and his father had found on the Internet and also showing his extensive collection of Pokemon⁵³ cards. Both his understanding of the games and his ownership of specific raw materials formed an important part of his interactions with his friends and other children at school.

The children's discussions about the electronic games they liked playing and the ways that they played, mirrored their talk about the imaginary games that some of them also played. Even for those children who played less intensely than Brendan, the permeable barrier between the externally constructed games and programmes and their own private or shared imaginative worlds, could be seen. For instance, several of the girls enjoyed playing a computer game called Heroes Mile of Magic, a game which in itself was based on old fantasy stories. The themes and characters from these games recurred in their creative story writing, with their own individual modifications. Lydia tells us about this game:

There is this game called Heroes Mile of Magic. You have got this horse and you have to get all this treasure and stuff and you have to beat like dragons and stuff and there is like about four other people and they attack castles and stuff and so you have to buy goblins and stuff. I made a story

⁵³ Pokemon originally came into the children's lives as a television programme that was developed in Japan. The name stands for pocket monsters. The programme was about the adventures of a young boy called "Ash Ketchum". His adventures involved him catching the pokemon (pocket monsters) totalling 150 in all. Over time the story developed and more pokemon were added. The merchandising of this story was particularly successful. It developed into a trading card game (which the children played at school, until it was banned) several Gameboy games, story and colouring-in books.

up at school about it; we were doing the millennium project and I made a future story with some of the characters. Sometimes we make up our own game of it together after school, we pretend we are different characters and my friend Jessie sometimes makes up her own new characters too.

Electronic game playing was primarily confined to consoles and computer games; direct playing through the Internet and chat rooms did not feature in the children’s time use. They did, however, use the Internet to facilitate their game playing (for instance to search for cheat codes), to assist with schoolwork and to find information relating to hobbies and interests. Several also used the Internet with enthusiasm to pursue their own interests. For instance several followed the emergence of the Harry Potter⁵⁴ phenomenon. Harry Potter came to them in story form, in electronic games, through the Internet and it also provided them with raw material from which they developed their own fantasy stories. Isaac and Brendan told me about the different uses they made of electronic media:

Jackie: *Ok, so you do use the Internet on your computer?*

Isaac: Yeah. Um I usually look at storm chasers.

Jackie: *Oh how did you find that?*

Isaac: You just look up um, tornado, twisters or whatever. Um, I usually find clubs or I email a chaser.

Jackie: *Really?*

Isaac: Yeah, and he gives me information.

Jackie: *Oh really, that is awesome isn’t it?*

Isaac: Yeah.

Jackie: *And did you find that out all by yourself?*

Isaac: Yeah, mostly.

Jackie: *You must be pretty good at the computer.*

Isaac: No, I just watch my dad.

⁵⁴ Harry Potter was a series of children’s fantasy stories featuring the adventures of a young boy called Harry Potter who went to wizard school. The school and the adventures were broadly similar to an older genre of children’s stories based on the English public schools. The first book “Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone” was read at the school during the year of my fieldwork and in November 2001 it was released in Aotearoa/New Zealand as a feature film.

Jackie: *Awesome, how long have you been interested in twisters for?*

Isaac: I kind of just started about three weeks ago and um, I was really interested in it about four months ago. And I started kind of looking.

Brendan: Well every now and then I will go on Dad's computer on the Internet, because my computer doesn't have that unfortunately⁵⁵. But yeah, I will go on there every now and then if I need, like if I want to look up something on games. We have a few Encartas⁵⁶, in case I need any information for my homework.

Jackie: *Mhmm, so you use them for information too?*

Brendan: Yep.

Jackie: *Most of the stuff you do on The Net is games related or do you look for subjects as well?*

Brendan: Um, every now and then I will look for subjects, but I don't do that too much unless I need it for homework or something and I can't find it on Encarta.

Four boys and nine girls had access to home computers. In addition to using them for games, the predominant use among this group of children, they were also used to find information for schoolwork or for other recreational purposes. Here, they used the technology in much the same way as they might have used books and magazines in an earlier era. Some of the children also used the home computer to write their own stories and part of the attraction of story writing in this way was the enjoyment of being able to use the technology.

School

The children's narratives about school time emphasised the times they spent with their friends at interval and lunch time, and gave less prominence to the times they spent in class.

⁵⁵ At another point, Brendan explained that his family had installed the internet connection on his dad's computer partly in order to have some control over the costs associated with internet use in terms of telephone charges.

⁵⁶ Encarta is a computer based encyclopaedia.

Both boys and girls were likely to identify that a good week day would be when they did not have to go to school at all, and the best thing they liked about school was either going home or playing with friends. They had little to say about time spent in class. Indeed, as Sophie and Luke suggest below, the primary purpose of school was to meet up with friends:

School is the only place you go where you can see all of your friends at the same time. [Sophie]

[School is a good place for me] because that is where I meet my friends. And if I didn’t go to school I would probably hardly ever meet any of them. [Luke]

During lunch times, half of the girls joined with other friends to play at the basketball hoops, along with three of the boys, who joined with a number of other boys to play a game that combined elements of basketball and rugby. The boys and girls played separate games, but shared the same space while doing this. These children, who could number over 30 in total, competed with each other for court space, particularly during winter. Two boys joined with other friends to play chasing, ‘army-man’ games and ‘pens’⁵⁷ and were highly mobile. The remaining girls played elastics⁵⁸, walked around together talking or sat and talked together in the outfield (during summer) or on the benches around the classrooms (during winter). The remaining boys also walked around talking, sat and read, or played Pokemon⁵⁹ games. When the school banned this game they played marbles, which became a popular replacement. Few girls played Pokemon but when this was banned, more played marbles.

⁵⁷ Army-man games are games that involve the children pretending to hunt and shoot each other down. It is a fast moving, highly mobile game that is based around hide-and-peek, but which has a very overt component of pretending to use machine guns, bombs, hand grenades and other military paraphernalia. Pens is a game where pens are thrown towards a wall and the person who gets closest to the wall wins all the pens.

⁵⁸ Elastics is a game that involves three or more players. Two stand with legs apart and a long piece of elastic is stretched between them, while other players jump in and out of the elastic performing different sorts of jumping manoeuvres. The degree of difficulty of the jumps is increased by raising the level of the elastics up the legs of the two players who are standing still. A player’s turn is over when they trip or fail to execute their manoeuvres correctly.

⁵⁹ The Pokemon game here involved children throwing their cards (usually those that were of lower value) up in the air for others to scramble after. One of the asphalt courts was used for this purpose, and up to 30 children would dash all over the court area chasing Pokemon cards.

One child spoke of school as a wholly positive place, she stated emphatically "*I just love school*". Twelve of the children identified school as both a 'good' and 'bad' place to be. For these children the 'bad' dimensions of school were connected to the nature of interactions with adults. Sport and games were positive dimensions of school for some, but not all the children. As Lizzie noted:

I don't hate these streets as such, but I really hate running around them for cross country training, but I am going to colour them black because when I go past them they remind me of those horrible runs we have to do at school.

Toby (below) drew attention not only to the impact of the 'grouchy' teacher on the way things were in his class, but also to the limited options he had to deal with this difficult situation:

... Well I don't really like the teacher. She is kind of grouchy They [pupils] get really tired of the teacher pushing them around and they hit back. As you have probably seen, some of our class get sick and tired of the teacher, and then it all bursts out ... Well I would like to be in a different classroom but there is nothing I can do about that. So I have just got to work with it.

Later in the interview, in fact, he reflected on what would happen if children were allowed to choose teachers and worried about how this teacher would feel because none of the children would want to be in her class.

Harassment by other children made school a difficult place for some of the children. Several talked of the impact on them of being teased by others or feeling excluded:

... what I don’t like about school is some of the kids are mean to me. Yeah well that has changed from last year for a start. I don’t play with [Nathan] anymore. He is a big fat pooh. He is a show off. He goes around thinking he is ‘the man’, he has got all the friends in the world. I just don’t like him. He is a pig.

They also talked of how these situations were often minimised by adults when they sought help, noting that adults would often tell them to “*stop telling tales*” or to “*toughen up a bit*” and, in so doing, effectively leaving the children to sort out these matters on their own.

Home

All of the children stated that they loved their homes. These places mirrored their emotional and relational worlds, which were nurturing and safe. It was clear that they identified very closely with home and this produced a sense of stability and security. Gemma expressed her thoughts about home in this way:

I wouldn’t change where I live because I really like it here. I have got this massive backyard to go and hide myself in when I am feeling grumpy. When I am grumpy I like being able to go right down to the big tree at the bottom of the garden and sit in the tree and just relax for a while.

For Isaac, home was just the best place to be; *Yeah home is blue, it is totally blue* (blue being the colour he chose to represent ‘good’ places on his map). When I probed for reasons why home was a good place to be, the children’s responses were typically brief, as the following quotations illustrate; “*Home is home*”; “*It is where I live*”; and obvious; “*My family live there*”.

Homes were even more special when they held a particular association or a special memory. For instance, David told me about the upstairs part of his house:

David: I really like this house. Partly because my granddad built it.

Jackie: *OK, he built the whole thing?*

David: No, he just built the upstairs bit. I like coming up to this room and sitting in here by myself.

The positive nature of home was seen as self-evident. In this sense it seemed to be a background issue for the children. Home was just there, it was the base from which they were able to do other things. Home provided their sense of place and belonging and while clearly tremendously important, it was in the background because it was unproblematic for them. Half of the children described a good day at home as being a day that they did not have to do anything and where they could just “*blob out totally*”.

Self-supervision

Home was also the most common place where the children spent unsupervised time. Not all of the children who had working or studying parents, had formal arrangements that covered the time between the end of school and their parents’ return home. In a number of cases, providing continuous care and supervision of children during school holidays was particularly challenging because of the cost of care or its unavailability. This meant that they needed to self-supervise to cover these times, and in such cases parents had negotiated fairly tight rules around the use of this space and time with their children.

Supervision was achieved by remote control via regular phone calls during these times. Parents often rushed home at morning, afternoon tea and lunchtimes to check that their children were safe, a care strategy that was possible in this small town because of short distances and travel times. Electronic entertainment featured prominently during those times when work took parents away, the attractiveness of the medium meaning that they were unlikely to leave the house or engage in other possibly unsafe activities. At such times, friends were not usually allowed and the children were required to stay at home, except for the trip to the video store to get supplies.

Sibling issues came to the fore for several of the children during these self-supervising times. They talked about how difficult it was with older siblings 'bossing' them around and the challenges posed when conflict got out of hand. Times of being confined to home, waiting for a parent to return, could be stressful. To illustrate the problem of being 'bossed' by a sibling, consider Karen's story:

Karen: Yeah they are always picking on me, always.

Jackie: *It must be quite hard for you being here without your mum?*

Karen: Yep.

Jackie: *Does it happen often?*

Karen: Yep and they [siblings] always tell me what to do. Oh it is not really [sister], [sister] is just annoying, but [brother] tells me what to do. He said, 'After Jackie has gone, you can go down and get the videos'. And he tells me what to do. If I don't say yes, he will say, 'I will tell Mum all the things that you don't do'. So I have to do it anyway.

However, this did not detract from the significance of home as a good place even when interviews were conducted during the times that the children were self-supervising. Not all of the children who spent time at home alone reported these sorts of experiences. Sophie, for instance, suggested that she enjoyed time at home on her own, and home was the best place to be when her parents were unavailable and she did not have friends to play with:

Sophie: Ah, I just like being at home.

Jackie: *Yeah.*

Sophie: You can be by yourself.

Jackie: *Mhmm is that a new thing for you?*

Sophie: Yeah, I can be by myself. I can be alone by myself at home. Because it is kind of hard being alone by yourself somewhere else, like the park, or in town or whatever. So those times when Mum and Dad are working and I am not at school, it is easier for me to be here by myself. I can do the things I want to then.

Two different experiences of being a self-supervising child were evident in the children’s narratives. For instance, Tim talks below about it being a “*bit scary*” when he was at home alone, because the door had to be left open, while Sophie (above) enjoyed being at home, particularly when she had no other people to be with.

Jackie: *OK now in your sheet that you gave me, you talked about part of the weekend being cool because you got to stay here while your parents went to town.*

Tim: Yeah, because Dad painted the door and they went to town and I stayed here. They were looking at new kitchens, so it wasn’t too bad. And it was a really wet day and I just wanted to shut the door. So it was cool in a way because I didn’t have to go and look at different kitchen places. But then it was a bit scary because I had to have the door open and it was cold and all that.

Ellen’s mum had just returned to the workforce to help make ends meet, and she talked about how they had worked out a strategy for her to be safely at home on those occasions when her mum was late:

We talked about it and worked out that I lock the door when I get home, and I make muffins so me and Mum can have afternoon tea. I don’t open the door for anyone, because no-one can see me from the kitchen windows, we checked that out. So as long as I am in the kitchen, making muffins I will be OK ‘til Mum gets home.

The delicate balances that needed to be achieved between independence, family circumstances and children’s own uncertainties about managing themselves away from adult oversight can be seen when Tim’s statement above about being at home alone are contrasted with his desires expressed below for greater freedom:

Jackie: *You want to do some stuff [after school]?*

Tim: Yeah I mean, other people in the school, even younger ages than me, they get to go out on the town, buying, things like that. They just get to walk around. I have to come straight home. And it is like I haven't got a life at all.

Jackie: *You are ready to have one are you?*

Tim: Yeah.

Jackie: *Mum and Dad not ready to give it to you yet?*

Tim: No, and they say that I have to come home, because they can't be around to take me places because of work. So I have to come home and that is that.

Jobs and pocket money

The children took on a range of jobs and responsibilities at home. In general, all of the children were responsible for making their beds and tidying their bedrooms. Other jobs were allocated over and above these. Some families allocated specific sets of jobs to each child, others rotated jobs between the children, and in other situations the jobs were divided up weekly by negotiation and according to what needed to be done. The allocation of jobs was done primarily as a training strategy so the children would learn to contribute to the household.

The children talked with me about pocket money and the things that they were able to purchase with their own resources. Each family adopted its own approach to providing financial resources to the children. In some cases pocket money was given to train the children in managing money, while in others its purpose was to give the children a sense of independence. In other situations, children said that family resources were limited and did not allow for pocket money:

We used to [get pocket money] but we don't anymore because Mum said we can have pocket money or go on holiday at the end of the year. We

wanted to go on holiday at the end of the year so we don't get pocket money.

The children made different use of their money. Some spent everything they got each week and in these cases the purchase was usually sweets. Others split their money between immediate gratification and saving for bigger purchases of toys, collector items or for entertainment, such as going to the movies. One or two saved with no particular purpose in mind:

Lucy: I save it and sometimes I buy things like hairclips or something. If I like them I get those.

Joshua: I sometimes get three or four dollars just to save up and go to the movies from Mum and Dad

Steven: Lollies, but now I am going to start saving up and buy some more playstation games.

Lydia: I try to save it.

Jackie: *What are you saving up for?*

Lydia: Don't know.

Three of the children had after school jobs. In two cases this involved assisting the school to set up for Housie on Thursday nights. This activity provided a small amount of money and also some assistance for parents with after school supervision. One of the other children helped his older sibling with her paper round. One further child did not have an after school job at the point of the interview but noted that when he turned thirteen there would be no more pocket money and so he would need to get an after school job to generate money.

Out of school care and supervision

Non-family care

Some of the children went to organised after school programmes or to the homes of private providers to cover times when their parents could not be home. There were relatively few of these children in this research, and their after school week-days were structured according to the programmes available locally. Their levels of enjoyment and participation were largely contingent upon the ways in which the caregiving adults provided care.

Two of the children, Luke and Hannah, talked about these sorts of experiences:

Hannah: I have a caregiver. ... It is good and bad.

Jackie: *Right, you told me earlier in the year that something you didn't like was it was boring there.*

Hannah: It is. And [caregiver] swears a lot, and she gets really angry when [another young child going to the same place for after school care] pees on the toilet seat.

Luke: The red [=good] is we get to play around, and the blue [= bad] is that sometimes they get grumpy. The adults.

Jackie: *OK and what happens then?*

Luke: Oh, when they are not grumpy we are allowed to run around having water fights and cool stuff like that, but when they are grumpy they tell us off a lot.

Jackie: *And what is that like for you?*

Luke: It just makes you get bored and feel bad.

Jackie: *Right.*

Luke: Yeah. It is really stink. And you just sit there watching the little kiddies' programmes on TV.

Relative care

Other children went to their grandparents’ homes for care after school. These arrangements were long standing and, embedded as they were in ongoing, very positive relationships, provided enjoyable ways of spending after school time. The children enjoyed being with these grandparents and this appeared to be due to the quality of the interaction and the time that their grandparents made available to them.

Jackie: *OK, you come up here don’t you?*

Isaac: Yes, it is a good place.

Jackie: *What is good about it?*

Isaac: I get to ride the four-wheeler.

Jackie: *Cool, those pots are neat aren’t they?*

Isaac: My grandfather makes them; he is going to show me how to make them later. I really love coming up here to be with Granddad.

Lucy: Grandma picks me up after school. Sometimes we walk to her place; sometimes we go in her car.

Jackie: *What is it like at Grandma’s?*

Lucy: It is really cool, I like being there, we get to play heaps outside and I help her with the garden. Sometimes we do jobs together. She helps me with my homework and says that it is heaps harder than when she was a girl. She says I am really clever.

Organised activities

All of the children participated from time to time in extracurricular activities that were formal and organised. For some, this amounted to a favourite sport when it was in season, music and drama classes or a fitness/gym session from time to time. For others, however, the level of extracurricular activity was significant and constituted a major part of their non-school time. This latter group of children participated in activities for up to four after school sessions a week and also often competed in sports on Friday evenings, Saturday and

sometimes on Sunday. They were very busy children. During the year of the fieldwork these children also participated in the Major Production⁶⁰, and this absorbed many lunch times and after school hours. These busy children did not actively define their participation level, it was chosen for them by their parents. It seemed that parents had very clear views about what they believed to be a 'balanced' after school life. Knowing their children were busy was important, as was ensuring that they participated in a range of activities. Thus, sport, cultural and social activity all formed part of the mix, while in addition to this, some children helped out in their parents' businesses after school and during the holidays. Children whose parents left them to select the areas in which they became involved generally chose fewer after school activities.

Sport was a popular organised activity for eleven of the children. The children who were interested in sport were attracted to it for a number of reasons. This included the pleasure of playing, the opportunity to run around as well the competitive dimension in terms of their own performance and in terms of winning games. Many of the children were accomplished sports people in their own right by the time of my study. Several had been playing club sports since before they started school. Other children had recently become interested in participating in organised sport at weekends. Lucy, for instance, explained her recent interest in netball:

I like to play netball. I have just started this year anyway. I wanted to give it a try because I saw people playing it on TV. I thought like, 'Oh I might try that. That looks really cool to play'.

The children indicated that from time to time there was conflict and disagreement between themselves and their parents about what and how much activity there would be, but this did not usually result in a reduction in their levels of activity. Nine of the eighteen children had

⁶⁰ The Major Production was the biennial school play which involved the intermediate children at the school – years seven and eight. It was a significant piece of work for these children and this year the play was *Malice in Wonderland*, a play written by a teacher as a story and adapted by her for the Production. Major Productions are a common feature of intermediate school activity calendars across Aotearoa/New Zealand.

lives that were busy and organised in these ways. One of the busy girls, described her activities in this way:

Well I don’t really like speech and drama, but Mum says that it will be good for me, especially when I get to high school. I don’t really like the instructor; she is a bit weird I think. Then on Wednesday I go to ballet, I didn’t want to go anymore, but Mum says I am doing really well at it, and it would be a shame if I gave up now after so long. She says I will thank her later on for pushing me now. Then we go to first aid; that is really boring. But Mum says that I might be able to help someone in an accident someday and then I will be really pleased that I stuck with it.

Those who did not have such organised lives sometimes commented on their busy peers, drawing attention to their preference for lower levels of involvement and more time at home:

Well how shall I tell it? Emily, she has all these things she does after school and at the weekends, she is really, really busy to the max. Sometimes she says she can hardly get her homework done on time. I don’t do much really, I just play netball. That is my best thing and I really like playing with my dog. We jump on the trampoline together. I like looking at my fish, and reading my books lying on my bed.

Overall, the girls were busier with organised extracurricular activities than were the boys. For the most part, the boys were able to choose and enjoyed their levels of participation. Only one of the boys in the study was required by his parents to participate in a specific number of extracurricular activities, and this was only on isolated occasions.

Two factors influenced whether or not the children enjoyed participating in extra activities, the behaviour of the supervising adults and whether or not they were able to choose for themselves to participate. Karen, Gemma and Luke explained it in these ways:

Jackie: *You didn't put that on here [on the map], is it so black that you couldn't bear to put it on?*

Karen: Yeah, she [music teacher] is down about here.

Jackie: *OK, and you don't like going to the music lessons?*

Karen: I don't like the teacher and I do not like being made to go.

Jackie: *Do you go to gymnastics there?*

Gemma: Yep and I don't like it.

Jackie: *What don't you like about it?*

Gemma: I don't really like the coaches there and I just really hate it. I hate everything about it. My coach, I really hate her she is really horrible to us I don't know why she even does it, she nuts off so much. She just goes psycho all the time.... Mum wanted me to go to art lessons and stuff like that. I don't really enjoy doing it, but you have to do it. When I first went I really hated it, like for the first five lessons. That was because we didn't really get a choice in what we do. And I hate that. I want to be able to decide what I want to do. And then we got to like paint and use these pastelly chalks to draw pictures and I really enjoyed doing that. I would like to think it showed in my work because the first five lessons my work was really crappy and then there is this really nice work at the end.

Luke: Ah, when I was at swimming once I was doing so good, and like I thought I was doing really, really good. All the kids, they didn't really like me that much, they were really - trust me - they were really weird, and they thought that I was going good for once and the coach said 'Oh well you have got to improve lots and lots. A lot more', and they all thought it was stink and that I was doing really good.

Jackie: *So what effect did that have on you?*

Luke: Ah, that's why I don't do it anymore.

Jackie: *Oh OK, so it had a big effect didn't it?*

Luke: Very big.

Jackie: *So would you like to do swimming again?*

Luke: Yep. Yeah I really like swimming. I have always wanted to do it.

These expressions can be contrasted with that made below by Lizzie who chose music and Isaac who chose soccer as their after school activities. Both children drew attention to the importance of relationships in their enjoyment of activities:

Lizzie: I am going to put the place I go to for [music] on there [on the map], because my music teacher is just so cool.

Jackie: *What is cool about your music teacher?*

Lizzie: She is nice. She doesn't yell.

Jackie: *What sorts of things does she say and do that means that she is nice?*

Lizzie: She doesn't never ever yell. She never ever got cross at anyone. Like if you say, something like 'Oh can I use this finger?', she never ever goes, 'No you can't'. She just says 'That won't work very well'. She explains why you are not supposed to do things.

My best thing is soccer. I really love that game. My granddad and my dad play it and so does my older brother. I really like moving between people with the ball, that is just the best thing, and I really like scoring goals too.

The girls developed strategies to manage their high levels of participation in activities they did not enjoy, and to cope with the impact of unresponsive or angry adults upon them. Lydia illustrates the sorts of strategies the girls used to manage such participation:

Lydia: Only for gymnastics there was this person and she is really like mean to me, but I just didn't care. Yeah.

Jackie: *So you feel good about yourself anyway?*

Lydia: Mmm. I just thought of really mean things about her in my head. I thought, you have a really big nose, and you are getting a spot on your chin.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the ways in which the children talked of their use of time and space. The children had very busy lives and sport, reading, television and electronic games featured prominently as recreational activities they enjoyed. Many had favourite pets and enjoyed a range of creative activities including model-making, creative writing and cooking.

Free time activities most clearly distinguished the boys from the girls because of the greater frequency with which the boys used public spaces, and their higher rates of engagement with all forms of electronic entertainment. Rather than constituting a separate domain of activity, the children's engagement with technology appeared to be integrated into their broader social lives. Themes from their games recurred in their creative writing and also provided raw material for imaginary games they played with friends. Game playing also featured in conversations with friends and in so doing constituted currency in social exchanges. Freedom of movement around the township was more limited for the girls; this was partly as a result of safety concerns, partly because of the higher levels of engagement by the girls in formal extra-curricula activity, and partly because the girls elected to play with their friends in home environments.

The high level of participation in organised activity was notable in this group of children, many of whom had little real free time. Children who were able to choose their level of activity often expressed greater satisfaction with it, partly because they could select activities that held genuine interest for them, and partly because they could remove themselves from activities that involved grumpy or unresponsive adults.

Home was a very important place. It manifested itself as an intensely emotional, relational space as well as a physical place. Home meant family to the children, and so the physical

location was very closely connected to the relationships that were experienced there, particularly those they had with their parents and grandparents. For the children who needed to self-supervise while parents worked, home provided opportunities for the children to begin to experience independence and to develop their capacities to care for themselves.

School was identified as 'good' and 'bad' by many of the children. The 'bad' dimensions of school were most often characterised by unhelpful interactions and relationships between the children and teachers, while positive dimensions of school were usually linked in with the social relationships the children had with their peers. Taken together, the home and school narratives of the children suggest a powerful role played by adults, and the centrality of these relationships in the experiences children have. This feature of childhood experience was also seen when the children's narratives about out of school care were considered. Here, the children talked about the way that adult attitudes and responses coloured their experiences. These issues are explored in more detail in Chapters Nine and Ten where the way in which adult agendas and priorities shape children's worlds is considered. The next chapter explores the ways in which the children experienced their relationships with each other.

- Chapter Seven -

The children's relationships with each other

Introduction

Children's interactions with each other are a topic of intense interest for many parents who worry about 'the company they keep'⁶¹ and by researchers and policy makers who have sought to understand how children form relationships with each other, the functions these relationships have and the ways in which patterns of friendship may be linked to different outcomes in adolescence and adulthood. I was particularly interested in hearing children's own accounts of their relationships with each other and their understandings of the meanings that these relationships held for them. I was also interested in their observations of children's peer relations generally and so some of my questions asked them to reflect more widely upon the nature of friendship and other types of child-child relationships. By focusing intensely on a small group of children, I wanted to be able to attend to the subtleties and differences between the children as well as to the commonalities or patterns that they may have shared (Mayall, 2001a, p. 9).

⁶¹ The significance of this phrase in adult approaches to children's friendships can be seen also, for example, in Hartup's (1996) work.

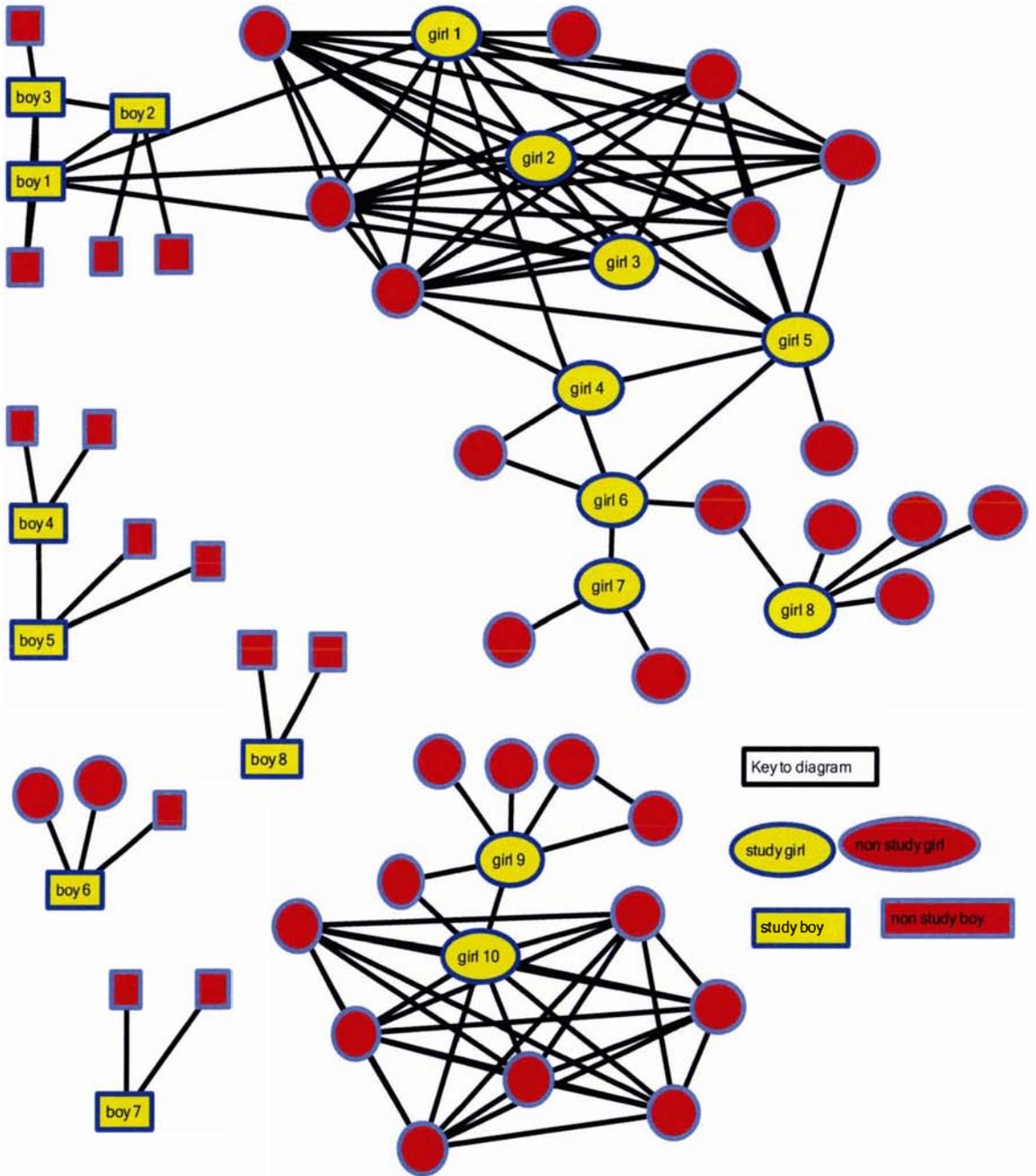
This chapter considers the ways in which the children understood and experienced their relationships with each other. It begins with a description of their friendship networks and considers the characteristics of their relationships. Here, the contribution friendship make to their emotional wellbeing is considered. This is followed by a discussion of issues of intensity, context and transferability. Attention then moves to the experience of making and losing friends. The fifth part is structured around a discussion of peer relations more generally; particular attention is paid to issues of popularity and likeability and the connection of these to friendship relationships. Finally, the children's views about the differences and similarities between boys' and girls' friendships are considered.

The children's friendship networks

Diagram 7.1 pictorially represents the children's friendship networks. This diagram is indicative only; it gives a sense of the nature of each child's friendship network, rather than a literal representation of all their friendships. Relationships are dynamic and subject to change, fixing them in diagrammatic form is therefore a somewhat artificial exercise. In integrating the eco-maps (see Chapter Four – Semi-structured interviews) with other information given by the children, I have attempted to generate a pictorial image that achieved a 'best fit' with the nature of the friendship relations of the children during the time that I knew them.

What is immediately apparent from Diagram 7.1 is the large complex set of relationships for several of the girls. The girls talked of large friendship circles commonly involving between five and twelve girls, and had between one and five best friends. One of the large girls' networks included both a number of the girls in the study and some who were not participants. There were also some girls at the periphery of this large friendship group (Diagram 7.2), who sometimes played with girls in the network and sometimes played with other girls who did not link in any way to this group. The other large network included a girl from the research and six others. There were also other smaller sets of girl relationships that linked into these big networks on a more ad hoc basis.

Diagram 7.1: The children’s friendship networks



Because of the particularity of the children’s friendship patterns, names have been removed and codes used instead throughout this chapter.

In contrast to the girls, the boys seemed to have friendships that were more focused, and which were certainly smaller in number. While they may well have played with larger numbers of other boys during school time, these relationships were not important relationships and their out of school play only routinely featured their close friends. Generally speaking, both the boys and the girls in this study played together in groups of two or three when not at school. Primarily, the children’s friendships flowed into and out of their school lives. In a minority of cases, however, children noted that either:

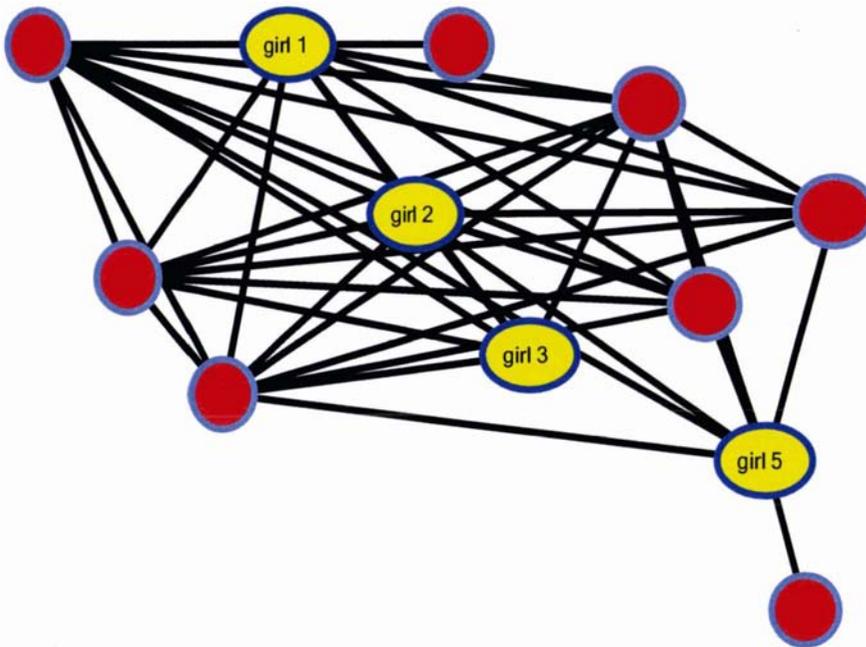
1. they had friends they played with at school, who were usually children in the same class, and friends they played with at home who were children of parents’ friends, children from their classes in previous years or children they knew from other activities and interests such as church or clubs, or
2. they played with friends at school, but preferred their own company at home and thus did not often play with friends out of school time.

Four of the girls (Diagram 7.2) belonged to a large friendship network, parts of which had been in existence since their pre-school days. This network could draw in between six and twelve non-study girls. Within it were several smaller networks of best friends and close friends. Play at school and out of school time included varying combinations of these girls. When the netball/basketball courts were available during school time, the group could number between ten and twelve girls in total. During these times, their pattern of association mirrored those of a large group of boys who also competed for space in the playing court area. When not playing on the courts, these girls spent almost equal amounts of time sitting or walking around talking together.

While some of the friendships were longstanding, significant friendships were also formed by some of the central girls in this group with new girls who came to the school. Girl 1, a member of the large friendship network (Diagram 7.2) elaborates upon the way in which she developed an important friendship with Jayne:

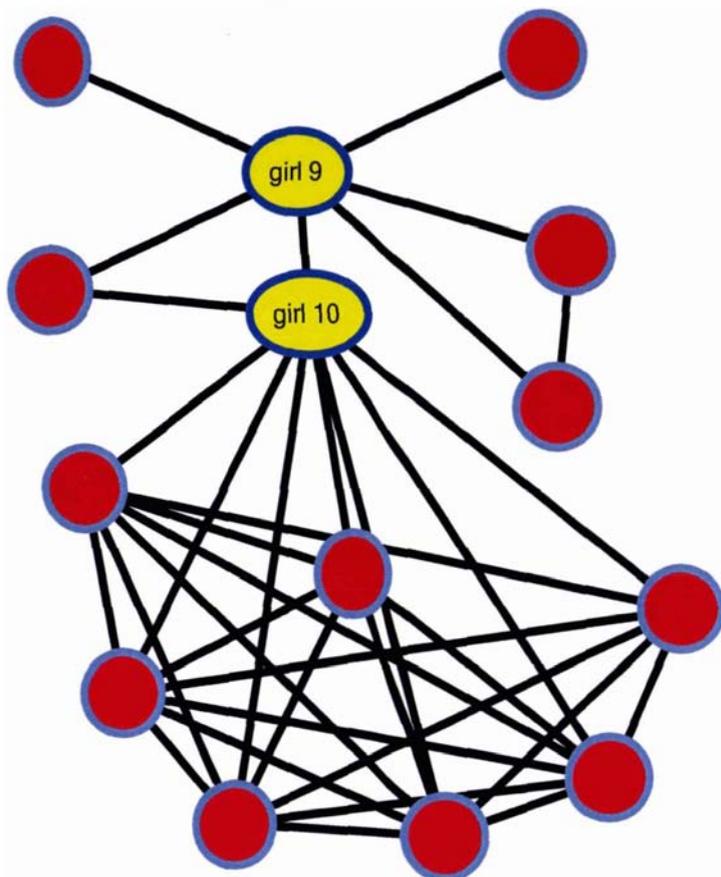
Well Jayne just came to our school last year. And I really like Jayne, she comes to my place a lot. But she is moving schools next year, and so we wont see each other that much. I will miss her heaps.

Diagram 7.2: the networks of girls 1,2, 3 and 5.



Six girls did not often feature in the big network (Diagram 7.2). Two (Diagram 7.3) played together and joined with another non-study girl often walking to the far side of the sports-field to engage in intense conversations. These conversations sometimes spilled over into interaction with the boys who played on the field during summer. One of these girls, Girl 10, also had her own extensive network that involved children who did not attend this school. This network resembled the other large network of girls in that it involved intense reciprocal relationships between all of the participating girls. The other girl, Girl 9, had five additional friends. She played with two of these individually, sometimes at school and but more often at home, and she also participated in a smaller three-way network of girl friends mostly at school.

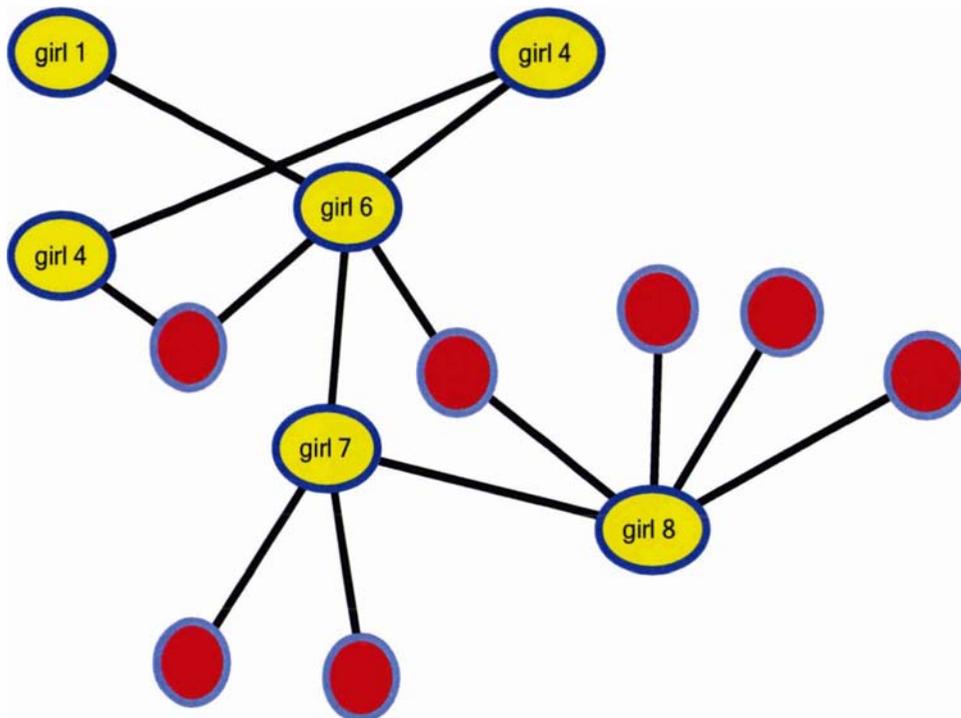
Diagram 7.3: The networks of girls 9 and 10.



Girl 7 (Diagram 7.4) played in a three-way network at school that usually condensed down into two, two-way friendships away from school. She also had individual school-based friendships with two of the other study girls (Girl 6 and Girl 8) during the research period. Girl 8 had individual friendships (Diagram 7.4) with four non-study girls and with Girl 7. These were all primarily based at school. Girl 6 (Diagram 7.4) played with a non-study girl at the beginning of the research and connected up with three other girls (Girl 5, Girl 7 and Girl 1) when they were placed in the same class. These three friendships were based at school. Girl 4 had two close friends. She mostly played with Girl 5 at school and she had a

longer-standing friendship with another, non-study girl, who she usually played with at home.

Diagram 7.4: The networks of girls 4, 6, 7 and 8.

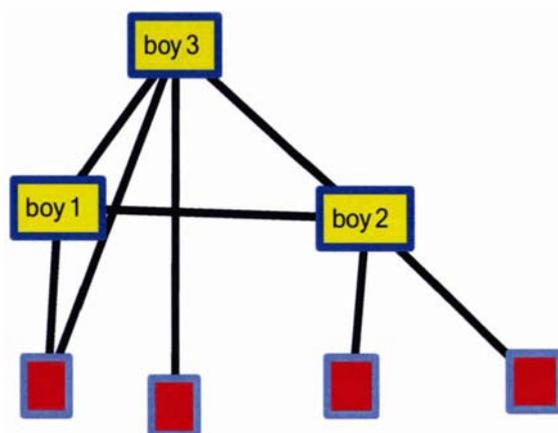


The boys had smaller friendship groups, most of which extended beyond the children participating in the study. One group of three boys (Diagram 7.5) had a very intense friendship at the beginning of the research but by the end, this threesome had shrunk back to the paired friendship from which it had grown. One of these boys also had longstanding friendships with three girls. At the time of the study these friendships with the girls did not involve joint play at either school or home. During the research these three boys spent virtually all their school playtimes together playing ball. In winter they often connected up with other groups of boys to play games around the congested basketball/netball hoops. They stuck closely together, waiting outside each other's classrooms, walking to and from classes together and in any joint syndicate⁶² activities they would sit together if at all

⁶² The syndicate involves large group activities with all the children from a two-year grouping and so allows opportunities for friends who have been separated for most class activities to sit together during these sessions.

possible. They also had play and sport relationships outside of school time. When they were separated at school they related to other children, but when there were two or more of them in a setting they gravitated together.

Diagram 7.5: The networks of boys 1, 2 and 3.



Five of the other boys (Diagrams 7.6-7.9) had less intensive friendships with other children at the school. On several occasions Boy 6 (Diagram 7.6), played with two girls from his class. This school-based play involved relatively unstructured 'hanging out' sort of behaviour. He was also the boy in the study who would most often come and talk to me while I was observing in the playground, and he spoke of not enjoying lunch and interval times because they were too long and there was nothing to do. Boy 8, Boy 5 and Boy 4 had a loose collection of associates with whom they played a range of 'army man' type games involving lots of chasing around the school, hiding from each other, the teachers and so forth. This group was hard to follow because of their high levels of mobility and so my observations were mostly limited to the beginning and end of free playtimes when I would be able to catch them leaving and returning to class. These boys also participated in Pokemon and marble games from time to time. Boy 4 indicated that his important friendships were sourced from outside of the school. Boy 5 talked of two close friends with whom he played while at school, but said that he preferred his own company after school and at the weekends.

Boy 7 played ball games most lunch times with children younger than himself. This featured in his interviews and also in the creative materials he completed (Diagram 7.10). He expressed concern that the younger children spent too much time playing Pokemon and marbles and he believed that they needed to burn up energy at breaks so they could concentrate during class time. As a consequence he engaged them in ball games. He did not count these relationships as significant friendships in his eco-map and identified two other boys from his class as his friends.

Diagrams 7.6- 7.9: The networks of boys 4,5, 6, 7 and 8.

Diagram 7.6 The networks of boy 6

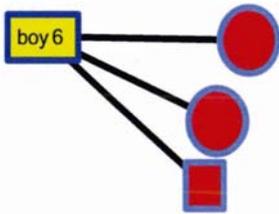


Diagram 7.7 The networks of boy 8

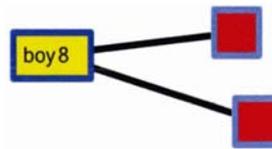


Diagram 7.8 The networks of boys 4 and 5

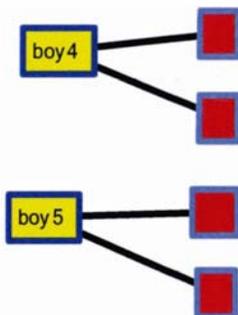


Diagram 7.9 The network of boy 7

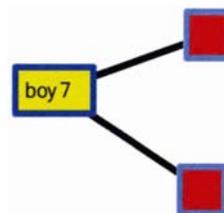


Diagram 7.10: Boy 7's strategy for managing play at school

What do I enjoy? •



What, you ask? Well ~~to~~ let me tell you in a ^{story} ~~page~~
This is me, the big one playing with a smaller junior
because I really like playing with younger kids than I am
and getting games under way. I also like b/ball so I included
that in my pic. I am I the b b/ball team so I play a lot. And
I look after little kids at my brother's birthdays and at school in my
spare time. I do both of these with out a parents permission
but all I need for b/ball is admission!!

These then were the children's relational patterns. They reflect both the individual characteristics of the children and the opportunities they had for finding other children who struck a chord with them. Friends and friendship were mentioned in the children's interviews more than any other single relationship, issue or experience and formed part of their sense of themselves. Despite the small size and relative homogeneity of the study group there was considerable diversity in the way they talked of their friendships, the types of friendship they had, the ways they made friends, the functions friendship performed in their lives and even the prominence friends had for them. Their relationships with each other provided an important set of school experiences that ran alongside the formal educational programme and the relationships they needed to develop with the adults employed there.

Characteristics of the children's friendships

Friendship contributed to the children's sense of belonging and as a result it played an important part in their sense of identity. They talked of their friendships as having differing intensities, functions and meanings. Friendships were made in a range of places but were most commonly formed at school. Building and maintaining friendships was a key activity and many of the children invested significant emotional resources in this task. For most, friends were a very important part of their emotional lives, in addition to the significance of their families.

The contribution of friendship to children's emotional wellbeing

Friends performed important emotional functions for the children. They talked of the support they gained from their friends and that they both sought and gave advice and assistance to each other. The companionship provided by friends was critical. It was very important that their friends liked them for who they were and this acceptance and communion was very important. The quotations below highlight these different ways in which the children described the importance of their friends:

You can relate to them maybe. And maybe say to them 'Can you help me with this?' if you need to do something or anything.

They are nice. They are friendly. They stick up for you.

They are caring. They have to be kind. They have to like you for who you are.

They are always there. If you have got a problem, you can tell them, and yeah, it is just neat to have them around.

When the children had strong friendships, these relations in some ways seemed to define them. Several talked of belonging to a friendship unit, and their membership in that group was a very important part of their identity. As Boy 1 noted:

I [know that we] will be remembered as Boy 1 and Boy 3, like we are.
Everyone knows that we are best friends. It is always Boy 1 and Boy 3.

Shared interests were an important feature of friendship for many of the children. For some, the intensity of common interests defined and also limited the number of close friends they had and provided a focus for a lot of their time and activity. Girl 5 expressed these different facets of friendship in the following way:

Fun. Oh it is fun having someone to do stuff with on weekends and play at lunch times and to talk to on the phone, to organise things with, thinking about the things we have done. To invite each other around and practice games that we can have at school, so we can be on each other's teams.

In other situations, the children talked of maintaining friendships with others who had passionate interests that differed markedly from their own. In these situations it appeared that the desire for the particular friendship was more important than commonality of interest:

When I go to Hayley’s place we play on the Internet and stuff like that. Hayley likes very different things, she is more into Pokemon and all that. I don’t really like that, but I like playing with Hayley and so I do that too when I am there.

In addition to the emotional sustenance provided by friends, the children also drew my attention to a wider sort of communion that they gained from being children alongside other children. While particular children may not have described themselves as friends, they did note that others in their class were important to them. For instance, Girl 5, talked of a boy who she sat next to in class and whose company made boring class times more enjoyable. As she expressed the way in which this happened, she also draws our attention to the careful, covert way in which she was able to challenge the strict behaviour code established by her class teacher:

Girl 5: Cody, he is just a boy in my class who made me talk all of the time.

Jackie: *Made you talk all the time?*

Girl 5: Yeah, he talks a lot.

Jackie: *Right, and so do you get into trouble for that?*

Girl 5: I don’t really get into trouble, but I just couldn’t stop talking. And it was fun to talk to him, especially when it was really boring during school. I talked to him and watched the teacher out of the corner of my eye and when she turned around I stopped quick and sit up straight.

Observations in class time highlighted the ways in which children would work together as a group to provide support and assistance, even when this meant exposing themselves to the risk of being punished. The following field note, recording an emotionally charged class situation, identifies the way in which Boy 1 (who was in the same class as Girl 5 and Cody) deflected the teacher’s attention from Damien and onto himself, taking a considerable risk in the process:

Field note

[watching in class #3, Tuesday morning]

10.10-10.15 Damien is staring out the window, flicking pen up and down in hand in an absentminded way. Hasn't heard teacher ask class to put pen down and to think about question. [Putting pens down in this class is a huge issue when the teacher asks the class for attention.] Teacher has noticed Damien, wonder what she is going to do.

Teacher screams at Damien "PUT YOUR PEN DOWN NOW". Damien comes round and realises what has happened, looks scared.

Teacher asks Damien for an answer to question. Head is down, face is flushed, and is now staring intently at desk. Teacher demands Damien to look at her when she is talking to him and again asks for answer to question. Class is quiet, some eyes on Damien some on the floor. Boy 1 from other side of the room calls out answer to question.

Teacher turns to Boy 1. [I wonder fleetingly how she will respond to him, she has very strict rules about interruptions, putting hands up and waiting to be chosen to answer.] Teacher accepts answer to question, reminds Boy 1 about rules for contributing in class and moves on.

Subsequent playground observations and later interviews did not reveal a relationship between these boys of any significance, and certainly there was nothing recorded between them before or after this incident that suggested a strong friendship. Neither was the interruption by Boy 1 likely to be an act of attention-seeking, because in this class interrupting the teacher was a high-risk activity and one that would be unlikely to be received well. Further, Boy 1's demeanour when making this interjection was characterised by anxiety and uncertainty. It did not have any of the features of an attention-seeking action.

Intensity

The children spoke of friendships as having two different levels of intensity: best friends, and friends. They also talked about a third type of relationship, that of enemy; some of the

children talked of themselves and their friends as belonging to a group that was partly defined by its relationship to who was not a member, their enemies:

Boy 2: No he is at intermediate. He thinks he is 'the man'. He always tries to beat people up. He is big and he is really strong. He steals things and he tried to beat up Cody's dog. He was coming around to their house pulling the dog out and we tried to stick up for him. And he has one of his huge friends with him, and he is pretty big and he is like trying to beat up the dog and the dog is really small. And the dog jumped out of Cody's arms and bit him. Then we sprinted off to get away from them. We went, 'Quick, go!'.

Jackie: *So how do you know him?*

Boy 2: He is at intermediate, he stole our bikes once. They were riding around and we saw them. Oliver [another friend] was with him. He is a friend of ours and he is also friends with [the boy who stole the bikes], so we sort of asked Oliver to get them back. So when Oliver is around it is sort of sweet, he can protect us because he is friends with us and him [the boy who stole the bike].

Not all of the children had a best friend and not all of them wanted to have friendships of this intensity, as indicated by Boy 5:

I don't really visit any of my friends outside of school hours very often, because I don't mind being around them at school but I just like to have time by myself when I get home.

However, many of the children did talk of their friendships as being organised in a hierarchical type of way. This meant that there were a few friends who were very important around which was a larger group of friends who were played with less frequently or less intensely:

Girl 1: It is not us. Me and Girl 3 and Natalie [Girl 1’s two best friends] never ever fight. It is just the others.

Jackie: *So is it like the three of you are a strong group and then there are other friends all around you?*

Girl 1: Yep. Like tomorrow, Girl 3 and Natalie and I are going to see “Charlie’s Angels”⁶³. But we haven’t told the others. Because they would be like ‘Why aren’t we going too?’ and stuff and we just want to go ourselves.

For some of the children, best friends endured for many years, while for others, best friend status was something that changed from time to time. In addition to best friends, there was another group of more casual friends who were known from school or from other networks and who would mitigate against loneliness and feeling isolated if best friends were not available. In some situations, proximity influenced both best friends and who would be included in this wider group. In these cases, the class at school constituted the pool from which these individuals would most probably be selected. Once the year was over, the friendship would tend to lose intensity, unless the children were placed in the same class in the following year:

Girl 10: Girl 5, I kind of stopped being her friend because she went to a different class and I think she found people in her class that were good for her.

Jackie: *Did you miss her as a result of that, or was it OK for you?*

Girl 10: Oh it was OK for me because I had other friends that I was hanging around with. But she was still hanging around with me. So, yeah, we went our different ways.

Jackie: *So does that happen quite a bit from year to year?*

Girl 10: Mmm, it does really. But sometimes it depends, like some kids they have best friends that they have forever and it doesn’t matter if they are in different classes. Like Jordan and Harley they haven’t been in the

⁶³ “Charlie’s Angels” was a movie that screened during the summer school holidays at the end of 2000.

same class for years, but they are still best friends. I think they get put in different classes from each other because they are disruptive when they are together. They keep getting off task.

As Girl 10 suggested, in some cases, friendships endured repeated classroom separations and the children knew that while their best friends were tremendously important to them, they were unlikely ever to be in the same class again. The following quotation illustrates this sort of situation:

Boy 6: No. I haven't been in Shane's class since like four years ago because we were so naughty. I really wanted to be in Shane's class next year but I am not.

Context

Friends could also be defined in terms of where and how they were made. In some cases children's friendships grew up around their parents' friendships. Girl 2 and Girl 1 explain this source of friendship:

Oh like I have known Danielle since I was about two. And I have known Danielle's mother for ages too since I was born because my mum and Danielle's mum were friends.

Yeah, they are Mum and Dad's friends, but yeah they have got kids and they are really good friends of mine, we go on holidays with them.

In other cases, friends were made from the neighbourhood, as Girl 10 elaborates:

I hear about intermediate, like they have manual [technology classes] and stuff. I have got friends who live over the back from me, and that's how we met, and they bring all this stuff home that they have done at school....It sounds quite cool there.

Mostly, however, friends were made at school, and school formed a major part of the peer-milieu for the children. Being able to make friends at school and being able to play with them at school was tremendously important. Being separated from their friends, either through class placement or when friends moved away, was devastating for some children and made school a very hard place to be, as illustrated below:

Jackie: *What is that like for you in class?*

Girl 3: Just a hollow feeling really, I just don't know anyone. Like there are all these new kids who haven't been here before and I don't know who they are, and there isn't anyone I know in my class from last year or before.

For those children who were busy outside of school, time with friends was quite limited. For these children, school play times provided an important opportunity to spend time with their friends. However, the children whose time was not taken up so much with organised activities did not necessarily fill their time up with friend play as indicated earlier by Boy 5 who talked about having friends at school but preferring his own company at home.

In fact the children with lower involvement in extracurricular activities had fewer close friends than did those children who had higher participation rates. Despite this, extracurricular activities were not a source of friendships for the children and so their levels of involvement did not generate their friendships. The length of time residing in the borough was more often linked to the size of the network and, in particular, those children who had spent all their schooling at the same school had the largest friendship networks.

Sometimes children lost friends because of the impact of bullying behaviours in the playground that were not resolved. Girl 1 had an experience like this:

Girl 1: She [Girl 1's friend, Larissa] is going to go to [another school] for a year and then she is going to go to another high school. It is not fair, I am going to really miss her heaps and heaps.

Jackie: *Why is she leaving?*

Girl 1: I think it is just because of the kids at our school. You know Charles. He is just really mean to Larissa.

Jackie: *Is he?*

Girl 1: Yeah, he is really mean to Larissa.

Jackie: *So she has got fed up with it?*

Girl 1: Yeah, and so has her mum.

Jackie: *That is sad isn't it? Has anyone tried to do anything to solve that?*

Girl 1: Not really, because she doesn't want to tell the teacher about it.

Transferability

The final way in which friendship could be characterised involved the degree to which it was transferable. Some of the children had friends in specific contexts, and they did not associate with those friends in any other places. So, for instance, in the first quotation below Girl 6 identifies that Alison was a home friend and Joanne was a school friend. All three of these girls knew each other, and from time to time were in the same classes, but the business of friendship was carried out in different places. In other cases, such as Girl 1 in the second quotation, friends were transferable. The transferability of friendship did not seem to have a direct impact on its quality or intensity:

She [Joanne] is my best friend in my class. Alison is like my best friend at the weekend, we always play together at the weekend. We go to each other's houses, sleep over, like every week.

Natalie is my best friend we do practically everything together. We even sometimes go on holidays with each other's families. It has been like that for ages.

Making and losing friends

Making and keeping friends through shared activity consumed a large part of the children's own time. Children who had moved schools or who found themselves separated from their close friends from year to year were faced with the need to develop effective friend-making skills. The difficulty that this posed for them was not always recognised by the adults around them and they did not always receive the support they needed to work through the impact of these experiences. Some children developed their own style for linking up with other children so that their play time at school and their free time at home was not too lonely. Others managed these times alone with a greater or lesser degree of comfort. Those who were on the margins or who were new at school sometimes talked of hating lunch times and interval, the breaks were too long and they were lonely and felt excluded despite the busyness created by over 500 other children.

Boy 7 saw the need to make friends in new schools as a challenge that he had mastered. He watched other children carefully and chose potential friends judiciously. He had also developed the strategy of occupying himself by organising games for younger children while he identified potential friends in his own classes (Diagram 7.10):

Jackie: *Does it get hard doing that [moving and making new friends]?*

Boy 7: Well, yeah I don't find it really hard because we have done it so much. I am pretty good at it now. If somebody likes basketball, I might go out and play that with them or something ... I pick my friends wisely. Very wisely. I just control myself.

Jackie: *So how do you pick your friends, what are the things that are in your mind when you are looking for a friend?*

Boy 7: Well, I think about how they work in class and stuff and if I am gonna choose someone to do a project with I am going to choose someone that will do their fair share of the work.

Others had found the process of breaking into the social milieu of a new school a considerable challenge as indicated in Diagram 7.11. One girl talked of initially making

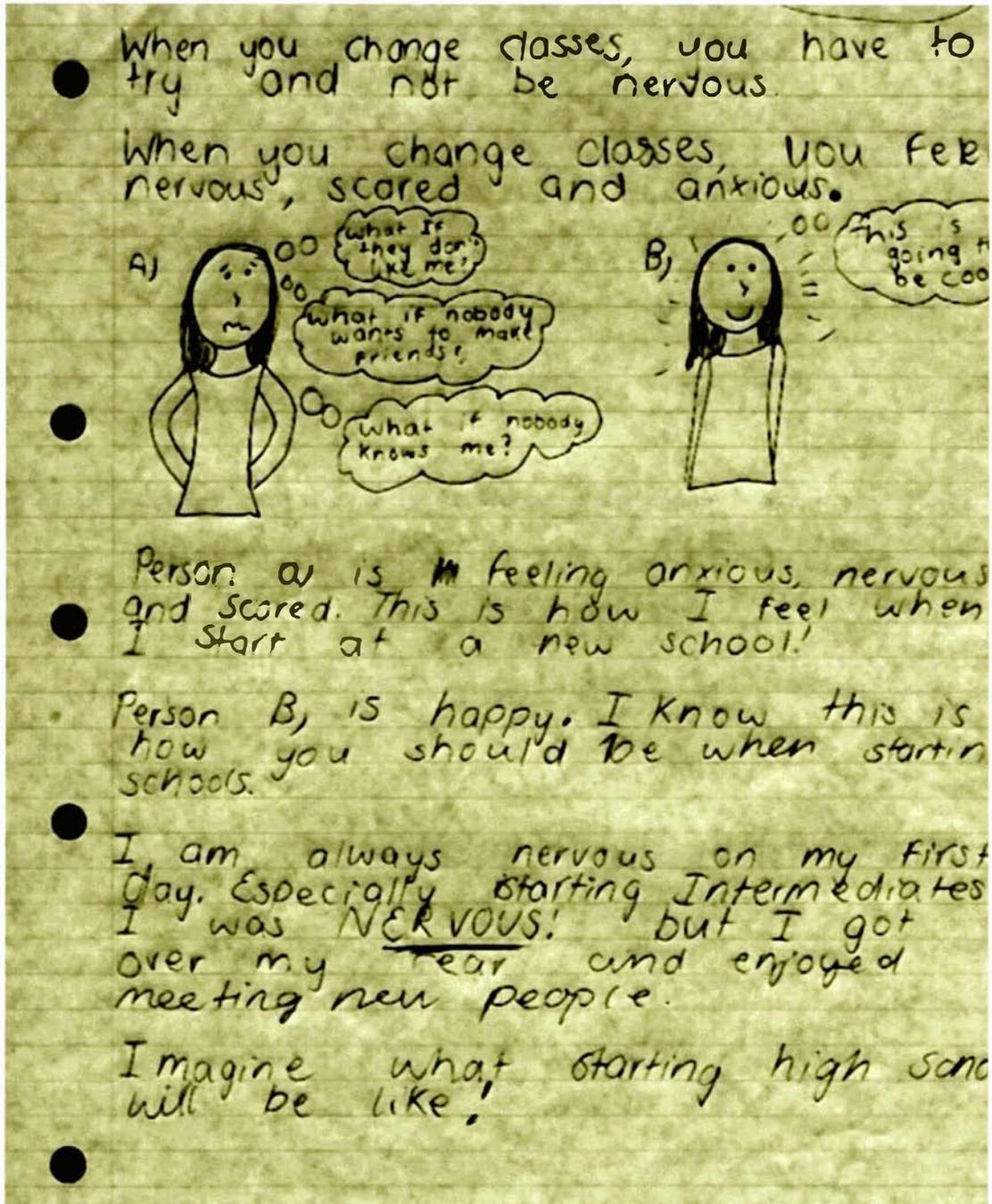
friends with children who were social outcasts in the school because these children were accessible; they did not already have best friends. However, the stigma associated with these sorts of friendships could also be a disadvantage:

Like trying to make friends is really hard. When I first got here it wasn't that great. The first real good friend I had was Jasmine. But Jasmine wasn't very popular. In fact she was really unpopular, and everyone teased her a lot and I was her friend. People still tease me for being her friend. And then I was Carla's friend for like three or four years. For ages, and she is still a really good friend. Last year I had a couple of friends. But I think I have slowly fitted in quite good. It is good now people have kind of accepted me now.

Children who were competent and confident sports-people found that games could facilitate friend-making. The time spent playing alongside others provided opportunities to get to know a number of children without having to push into established groups. Given that a lot of the play required ball and other sports-related skills, the fact that these children could play well also meant that they tended to be invited to play games with others more often than those who were not so competent at sports. In the following quotation, Girl 9, who did not feel confident playing sport, talks about the way that this influenced her profile and social relations at school:

Some people don't even know who I am really because I am not very good at sport. People who are good at sports tend to get a lot of, oh not really attention, but they get to stand up in assembly and that and because I don't, I don't get seen that much and so I am not that popular.

Diagram 7.11: Girl 6 and Girl 7's joint creative writing about changing classes



The creative writing example below also illustrates the way in which confidence at sport and newness combined to make it hard to make friends in a new school:

Diagram 7.12: Girl 6's ideas about being new at school

Writing For Tv and books.

- I am writing a book For my favourite author.
My story is about a kid who is having a hard time at school. ~~the~~
It takes place at school, her house, and the garden.
- It starts with her being new and has no friends. Then she gets bullied because she is smart.
- It ends with her winning a maths prize for the school and it is new sports stuff. Then people like her.
- She knows who her real friends are because they don't just like her because she won stuff.



The illustration shows a girl with a sad face at the bottom. A thought bubble above her depicts another girl pointing to a sign that reads "Don't be my friend". To the right, another thought bubble contains the text "why don't they like me?".

As already noted, sometimes friendships changed at the beginning of the new school year when children were placed in different classes. This could be the time when quite significant conflicts erupted and the children talked about no longer wanting to be friends with particular people, or being excluded from previous friendship groups. The beginning of the 2000 school year saw disruptions for a number of the children. Separation from close friends had thrown up the need to begin again. Girl 5, who had been part of a large, longstanding friendship group, said that her two best friends had left the school and there were no other friends in her class this year. Despite the fact that, to an external observer, this should not have presented her with problems because she had been at the school for 7 years, she nonetheless recognised with sadness the challenge she faced to make new friends:

Jackie: *OK. Right. So that is pretty hard. You had to make friends again?*

Girl 5: Yes.

Jackie: *Was that tricky?*

Girl 5: It was hard.

Jackie: *Do kids tend to make friends with the kids who are in their class?*

Girl 5: Um, yes.

Jackie: *Makes it bearable?*

Girl 5: Yes and it is better when they are in your year⁶⁴. Because then you don't lose them if they move into another syndicate next year.

Jackie: *That can be hard can't it, in these combined classes?*

Girl 5: Yes.

Jackie: *Has that happened to you?*

Girl 5: Yes.

Jackie: *What is that like?*

Girl 5: Then you have got to make new friends again. It gets pretty hard really. And I didn't have any really good friends at the start of this year.

⁶⁴Girl 5 is referring to the fact that classes at her school involved mixed-year groupings. Her discussion here identifies the difficulty that this can create in relationships when friends are made in class with a child who is a year behind or a year ahead of them, because this will inevitably mean that the children are placed in different classes in the following year.

Like my other two best friends left and so I didn’t have any best friends at school anymore.

Jackie: *So after all those years at school, all of a sudden it was like being new was it?*

Girl 5: For me it was like starting all over again.

Some were philosophical about being separated from their friends during class time. Others, however, worried that a special friend made last year was now going to be lost because they were no longer in the same class. That friendships could be so fragile was highlighted by the narratives of other children who talked of how they used changes in class placement to end friendships from the previous year that they no longer wished to continue.

Separation from close friends in class time not only had the potential to make school time lonely; it could also make class activities, such as group work, intimidating and academic performance difficult. Children who did not have close relationships spoke of feeling exposed and anxious when they did not get chosen by other children to be part of groups. For their part, teachers often expressed exasperation and offered little sympathy for the plight of children caught in these ways. On a number of occasions I observed teachers saying with frustration words to the effect that: “By now you should know that everyone in the class is your friend, and so it shouldn’t matter who you team up with for activities”.

Both boys and girls talked of the significance of placement in a class away from a special friend. Some saw it as a challenge to make new friends; others felt miserable and exposed, particularly when the new teacher was perceived as being unresponsive to their emotional needs or as being “*mean*”. In these cases it seemed that the absence of the emotional support that would be provided by friends left the children feeling vulnerable particularly when it was perceived that the teacher would be unresponsive to them on a personal level. Teachers that were accessible and responsive provided a safe relational focus for the children, while they worked through or learned the networks within the class and created a space for themselves in relation to the other children.

Friendships, of course, are complex and losing as well as gaining friends was part of all of the children's experiences. It seemed that the children could not simply stop being friends. Not wanting to be friends with someone anymore required an exit strategy and some of the children talked about the processes they used to extricate themselves from friendships. Boy 1 and Boy 4 explained it this way:

Boy 1: And then there is Carl. And I already told you why I didn't like Carl anymore.

Jackie: *Yeah. Did something specific happen to change that?*

Boy 1: Um, yeah, Carl told a secret.

Jackie: *Oh, OK.*

Boy 1: That (Boy 1's other friend) had this problem and Carl told people about it. So that ended it. Because we were sort of looking for a reason to stop being friend's with Carl anyway. And Carl always cries too, Carl cries a lot.

Interviewer: *Oh OK right. So the secret really did it for you?*

Participant: Oh yeah. We sort of wanted to stop being friends anyway and we needed an excuse, and so that was it.

Boy 4: I tried being friends with James but that didn't work.

Jackie: *Is that right because you used to play with James, didn't you?*

Boy 4: Yeah.

Jackie: *What has changed there?*

Boy 4: James has started being too cocky. Me and Alex used to teach James heaps about soccer. Me and Alex taught James the game and stuff. Alex taught me, and now me and Alex are exactly the same at it. And so we taught James a lot and James started getting so cocky. And we said 'James, don't forget who taught you'.

Likeability and Popularity

There were differences between popularity, likeability and having enough friends. For instance, Girl 7 talked about not liking another child, who most agreed was popular:

I don't like her at all. She is really popular but I think she is stuck up really. I think it is just because her [parent] works at the school.

Girl 4 and Girl 3 suggested that popularity with teachers could flow over into popularity among peers, but that this did not, in their opinion, translate into likeability:

Like, it is not fair coz the teachers totally favour them so they are really popular. They think they are really cool, but I don't like them. [Girl 4]

Oh yeah like, yeah it does actually, like if you take Connor and Roseanne because their parents work at the school so they are quite popular and like Alison's mum works there too and they all like think they are really cool. [Girl 3]

In other cases, children talked of the different ways in which popularity worked for boys and girls within the school. For instance, Boy 4 suggested that popularity for girls was tied to endorsement by adults and reflected the extent to which girls were seen as being 'good'. He felt that recognition by teachers flowed into popularity within their peer network. On the other hand, he considered that popularity among boys was linked to the extent to which they would challenge teacher authority. This meant that boys could be popular with each other but were unlikely to be favoured by teachers as well. He considered that boys liked to "*show off*" to each other, and implied that they were willing to sacrifice good relations with teachers in favour of the prestige among peers gained from overtly challenging teacher authority.

Damien had been temporarily moved to a different class and the teacher held a class vote on whether or not he should be allowed to return. One of the girls made the following observations about this process:

Well, we had to take a vote on whether Angus could come back to our class. He was really violent and scary sometimes. He broke two desks and threw a chair out the window. [Teacher] said he made her feel like a failure. I didn't want him to come back because he frightens me and we can't concentrate when he is in our class. But Roseanne is really popular because her mother works at the school and is his friend, she said we should give him another chance. So everyone voted for it.

The girls quoted above challenged the boys' views of popularity by suggesting that the social relations children brought with them into the school setting played the determining role in popularity rather than their behaviour or personal characteristics. However, there was also a price to be paid for this sort of popularity:

The pressure is on to be involved in everything. Even things I don't want to be. I am a house captain next year. I got in! I got in! But what I don't know is who voted for me, because teachers vote as well as kids. So I am not sure whether it was the teachers or the other kids at school that voted for me.

Of course, these sorts of worries were not mere idle speculation; they were grounded in daily experience and the ongoing interactions between all the children at school. These sorts of questions were raised regularly in the communication the children had with each other. For instance, Girl I questioned the fairness of an award given to another child whose parent was involved at the school, and it was clear from conversations with a number of the children that these sorts of questions were voiced openly in the playground:

Ross is a smart alec and I don't like him. He got a [special award], and everyone wondered why he deserved that, because he doesn't deserve it.

Some of the children felt that they were not very popular and found this distressing and difficult to manage. Girl 6 wished to make herself more popular and felt that this would mean that she would have more friends:

Girl 6: Probably make myself popular, I would like to be a bit more popular at school. Because, like I don't feel very popular. I am like the geek.

Jackie: *You think you are a geek?*

Girl 6: Oh everyone says so, yeah.

Jackie: *You are clever.*

Girl 6: Everyone says I am a geek. I don't want to be known as a freak. And I want to have lots of friends.

Interestingly, however, a number of other girls identified Girl 6 as a friend. So while she may have felt that she did not have sufficient friends, and that she was not popular, many other children at the school saw her as a friend. Girl 6 believed that her network of friends was small and considered further that this reflected her place in the popularity stakes at school. She did not, however, confuse either of these two notions with likeability, because later she commented that she considered that she was the type of person who was very good at appreciating other people's feelings and that these were the qualities of a good friend.

In other situations, children were not identified as being popular, and did not identify many friends themselves, yet talked of contentment with their relationships and expressed a sense of belonging at the school. Boy 8 had two primary friendships and was not identified as being popular by any of the other children. He still expressed a sense of satisfaction with his sense of belonging and place:

I have two friends at school and I play with them sometimes at the weekend. I know practically everyone at the school now, from being there for so long ... it doesn't really bother me being split off from my friends at the beginning of the year because there are so many others I know.

Clearly, popularity was something the children thought about a lot and over which they held somewhat different views. On the other hand, there was greater consensus on the issue of likeability and this was connected to the personal characteristics a child was perceived to have by others. So, for instance, several of the children said that matters such as empathy and trustworthiness were critical to likeability. Others talked of liking particular children, despite their apparent lack of popularity, because they possessed these sorts of characteristics.

Neither popularity nor likeability was connected to whether or not a particular child felt that they had sufficient friends. For instance, Boy 4, noted as popular by several other children, talked about wanting to develop new relationships to add to his two close friends:

I would like more friends, but it is hard when no-one seems to be so interested in the things that I am interested in. It would be good though, to have someone else to invite round to my place and stuff.

Gender differences

In general terms, the children played in gender exclusive groupings, but there were some exceptions to this. For instance, one boy and four girls had been friends from pre-school days and maintained their friendship throughout the fieldwork and beyond. While they did not routinely play together during lunch and interval times they did, on occasion, participate together on the basketball/netball courts and talk together during their free times. They all identified each other in their eco-maps. Another boy had two female friends he spent time with at school and one of these was a longstanding friend.

The children's views on boys' and girls' friendships were interesting. Both boys and girls considered that girls liked talking together and boys liked playing games that involved running around and doing other physical things like "*chucking things at people*". Some of the children recognised that, through talking, the girls focused a lot on the relationships they had with each other, with their families and also their emerging relationships with boys. The intimacy this afforded the girls was seen as something very positive as illustrated in the following quotation from one of the boys, who also had friendships with some girls:

Boy: Ah, girls are more open I think. They can talk to each other better. From [observations of the friendship between two girls], I think they are. They are really good. I can talk to [female friend], well my relationship with her is much better than it is with my best friend.

Jackie: *Right.*

Boy: Well I can tell my best friend everything. But he can get uncomfortable and stuff and so can I talking about stuff. Whereas [female friend] and I are real sweet talking with things. Because we have known each other for so long.

Jackie: *Yeah. So is that because you have known each other so long, or is that because [female friend] is not a boy?*

Boy: It is because [female friend] is a girl.

In terms of the intensity of relationships, however, there were no noticeable differences between the boys and girls. Although the girls may have talked more to each other, this did not mean that their relationships were more meaningful and intimate emotionally than was the case for the boys. Several of the boys had enduring and intense relationships with their friends, and it could not be concluded that these relationships lacked emotional meaning simply because the boys talked together less or talked about different things. Observations of the boys strongly indicated that they focused very much upon their friendships and used activities like basketball, rugby, 'pens', 'army man' games and rough and tumble to express and develop this intensity. While there seemed to be a consensus among the children that

girls talked more together than boys, the following quotation from one of the boys suggests that, in fact, boys also engaged in a lot of intense talking:

Yeah I am trying to make new friends. I am trying to find some new friends, someone like Boy 3, but I can't. Because Boy 3 is interested in everything that I am, we can talk about sport and stuff. It is not easy, because not many others are interested in sport like I am, it is hard to find friends that want to talk about sport and play sport and that.

Both the girls and the boys also thought that girls tended to fight more than boys. Girl 3 offered an interesting analysis of this tendency:

Girls fight more because they talk more. And like they can have reasons to fight. But boys, they just say, they say, "Come on let's go and play basketball", and that's all they think. So they distract themselves from fighting.

The boys felt that the girls had certain advantages over them in their friendships. For instance, Boy 2 suggested that he saw girls "*sticking together in a big group*". Boy 4 and Boy 6 expressed the view that because all girls were 'good' they could draw from a much larger pool of potential friends and not be restricted to a small group of 'good' boys. In this they drew similar conclusions to Boy 8 who also considered that girls' popularity stemmed from their capacity to be 'good'. This view is noted in the following quotation from Boy 4:

Boy 4: Well girls, I don't know, they can split up and maybe go and make friends with other girls really easily and boys it is probably harder to make friends with another group.

Jackie: *OK, so why do you think that is?*

Boy 4: Girls are good and all that. And boys there are different types of boys, kind of thing. Sometimes it can be hard to find boys that are the

same as you to be friends with. It is tricky because I don't like getting into trouble in class but boys are the ones who get into trouble and stuff.

Some boys suggested that girls had too many friends to count, while boys' networks were much more limited:

Boy 6: Boys don't have that many friends, whereas Girl 3 is friends with Girl 2 and Girl 1 and millions and millions of other girls. There is just heaps of them.

However, it was not this simple for the girls. Some talked of an abundance of friends while others felt excluded from what did seem like a big network. This carried with it consequences in terms of the ways in which school was experienced, as Girl 6 explains:

Girl 6: I am trying out for house captains, but I don't think I will get in because I am not popular.

Jackie: *OK*

Girl 6: I don't have enough friends to vote for me ... like I could be a lot more popular and it would help me.

Both the boys and girls agreed that boys tended to have one or two close friends and that they got along together better. A number of the boys also suggested that boys could be loners at school but that this did not happen with girls. Of course, not all the girls agreed with this viewpoint, and some talked about the experience of being a loner at school as well. The content of girls' talking aside, the children saw the nature of friendship and friendship groups as being quite particular to the individuals concerned rather than being associated with gender.

Conclusion

In conclusion then, the following key observations can be made about the nature of the children's relationships with each other. To begin with, the highly particular and localised character of their relationships was apparent. They arose in specific contexts, to meet particular needs and grew out of the raw material presented by the other children in their various milieux. So, for instance, Boy 7 needed to learn to make friends anew several times as his parents moved, and he was able to articulate a clear set of strategies he used to work on this. Boy 5 talked of enjoying relationships with friends at school, but preferred to spend time on his own out of school. The friendships he developed as a consequence were different to Boy 1 who had a very intense friendship with two other boys. Girl 6 talked of having created a school friend and a home friend from the girls she associated with at school, and these friendships met her relational needs well. Other girls, however, had extensive friendship networks that transferred between school and home.

In a similar vein, the significance the children attached to their relational experiences was quite particular. Some experienced loss and the need to make new friends keenly while others took a more pragmatic approach to the ups and downs of relationships. Some had fairly modest relational needs outside of their families. Still others found the need for a highly active and engaged social life both at home and at school and thus created around themselves a diverse group of friends. The different approaches they took reflected the way that context and individual needs interacted together. Despite the fact that the children all lived in a relatively small community and many had lived there for all of their lives, their relational experiences and needs varied quite markedly and so the impact of individual need and micro context can be clearly seen here.

There were some differences between the boys and girls, particularly in terms of how they expressed the intensity of their relationships with friends. For instance, girls told me that they spent a lot of time talking to each other about relationships and their friendships. Through this they seemed to create and recreate their relational worlds with their friends. This meant that they engaged in the business of friend making and friendship maintenance in very direct ways. The boys, on the other hand, expressed the intensity of their relationships

indirectly. They played together and talked about their interests as the vehicle through which they created their relational worlds. Because they did not tend to directly talk about emotional and relational matters they seemed more vulnerable, friendships could cease with no warning, and there was no process around this that explained or made sense of it, or provided ways back. So, in this sense, their friendships seemed more fragile and could feel unpredictable. The next chapter considers the children's experiences of their relationships with adults.

- Chapter Eight -

The children’s relationships with adults

Introduction

In previous chapters it has been suggested that adult actions, values and beliefs have an impact upon the possibilities for childhood generally and for the specific experiences of individual children. This chapter brings these ideas into sharper focus by considering the children’s experience of their relationships with adults. It explores a range of relationships and considers both the children’s actual experiences of relationships as well as their views about what makes for a positive and a not so positive relationship. The chapter is divided up according to different adult roles. It begins by providing five case vignettes, derived from the fieldwork, that elaborate upon different sorts of experiences the children described. These vignettes have been selected because they provide an overview of a range of different relational possibilities and they are referred to in both the remainder of the chapter and also in Chapters Nine and Ten. Discussion next considers the children’s relationships with parents, grandparents and other adult kin. It then explores their relational experiences with teachers. Finally, consideration is given to the children’s help-seeking strategies.

Case vignettes

Lizzie

When I first met Lizzie, I came to her classroom and asked for permission to take her to the interview room. I felt like the Dental Nurse as she looked at me with uncertainty about what was going to happen. As we left the room, Lizzie asked me how long we would be? Would she miss maths? That was her favourite subject. Would we be going past her brother's room? He was in Room six, and he liked Pokemon, but she did not understand why. He would wonder why she was going with me, and this would require explanation.

As I showed her the room, talked about the video camera, gave her

the opportunity to look through the lens at me sitting on "the chair" and showed her how to work the remote control, she quizzed me about what was going to happen. Would she know the right answers? If I asked her something she did not know the answer to, what would happen then?

She told me how she talked a lot to her mother and father, and through this they sorted out the things that bothered or confused her. She expressed the things she valued most about her relationship with her parents in this way:

I like just having Mum and Dad around me, just having them there really. So that if I need them I can talk to them. Sometimes we talk a lot, sometimes we don't. But we like being around each other really. I like Mum

and Dad to be able to listen to me. And it's because sometimes at school people say you have done something And I like them to hear my side. If I say 'No', they will believe me, because I never lie to my parents. If I lie to them, I know they will always wonder 'Is she telling the truth?'

The trust her parents had in her was very important.

As we moved through the interview, she told me she was not sure about her teacher. Sometimes she seemed angry and Lizzie did not know why this happened, but she thought that the other kids in the class really "drove her [the teacher] crazy". She spoke about times when the teacher seemed to pick on one boy, who was not very clever, and this did not seem fair:

Sometimes I think she is being a bit unfair to kids. Like she tells off a kid in my class because he isn't very clever. So he doesn't do good things. But I don't really know. I feel too scared to say anything about that.

She explained to me that his father hit him a lot and was involved with drugs. So, she asked me, "*what chance was there for him?*"

Both she and her parents felt that it would be nice if the teacher would treat him differently, then maybe school would be better than home and then "*he would know that not all adults were horrible*". It was hard to know what to do in such situations. Sometimes she wanted to say something about it to the teacher, but she was frightened about what would happen to her if she did this.

Lizzie watched the teacher a lot to try and pick her mood. She knew that she was clever at maths and reading, and was very good at colouring in and drawing nice lines around the outside of her exercise books to make borders that she decorated creatively. But there was always the worry that she might miss something, and not understand; then she might feel shamed in front of the class.

--ooOoo--

Tim

Tim was very skilled at managing interactions with adults so that he could protect himself. As a consequence the first two interviews with him were very challenging for me and quite successful for him – he

managed to participate, but at the same time to effectively manoeuvre me into asking closed questions that (predictably) got closed answers. When I tried to follow up with expanding probes, he responded with "*I dunno*", and smiled engagingly at me.

Tim missed one of our group sessions because something happened in class that left him angry and frustrated and not confident to be in a group with the other children. He told me later he had got a week of detentions for "*losing it*" with the teacher. He told me "*I was so totally fucked off with the teacher that I wanted to run away*".

I planned for our final interview wondering how I was going to move beyond my previous failures, determined to make a connection. We

completed the interview at his favourite place; the trampoline and his large black dog joined us for the encounter. It was spring and quite chilly, but we stayed outside. He showed me the motorbike he was building with his dad.

He told me about a good teacher he once had:

I had a good teacher once...She was real nice and kind, and she cared for everyone. She helped me with all my work.

However, he found it hard now at school, he seemed to be “*stuck in classrooms all the time doing boring stuff and hardly ever getting to go out for games*”.

He found it difficult in class because teachers only seemed to explain things once, and then to get

angry if he did not understand. Rather than doing it deliberately, as they assumed he did, he explained to me that he found it really difficult to concentrate on explanations, particularly if they were long and complicated. There did not seem to be the opportunity or time to get simple explanations and as a result he often did not get his work done which, of course, got him into trouble. His view was that teachers needed to:

Well I think like... how do I say this? Like telling them what they have got to do, like really clear. Not all the fancy words and the curriculums of this and stuff like that. Just make it really clear heaps. I reckon that there is not enough time for explaining at school. There needs to be more time for that,

and using little words so that we understand.

He chose to sit next to one of his friends, Nicolette, because “*she is really brainy and will explain things to me when I don't understand*”.

--ooOoo--

Lucy

Lucy had just come back from a holiday in Fiji with her family. She had lots of enjoyable, new experiences there. As we talked she tied and retied her long hair up in a ‘scrunchie’, and twirled the result round and round her hand. The room we were in had a swingy-chair that she could rotate around on as she wound her hair around her hand.

She really wanted a budgie.

I have been asking Mum and Dad, and they said 'No', because we were going away. But now we are back, I might get one for my birthday or something. I have been studying really hard about them, and how to look after them and everything. Mum and Dad said that I have to be responsible if I have a pet of my own, to look after it and that, and so if they see me studying about it they might let me have one because I will know how to look after it and stuff.

Like Lizzie, Lucy did not have problems with her performance in the class, in terms of achieving tasks and standards. She preferred the option of not listening when other children got into trouble and unlike Lizzie, who had worried about the way that things like family circumstances influenced

children's classroom experiences, did not reflect upon the impact of external events on classroom interactions.

She would really have liked them to be quiet so that she could get on with her work. In concluding, she reflected on this and thought that if the teacher chose them more for special things, and did not make them stay inside while everyone else was out having fun, that they might not be so naughty.

Lucy could remember a time when she found it really hard at school. She was shy and did not want to ask questions:

I had to go to this class because, if I didn't understand, I just sat there because I was too embarrassed to go and ask the teacher.... It was just like working in a

group with other people who didn't know how to do it either... they gave us quite hard questions so we could not understand, kind of thing, and that meant we had to learn to be OK about asking. We did a lot of quizzes.

Lucy had really appreciated these lessons, although they were very scary to start with. Now she had the confidence to ask questions, and she often found that her classmates asked her to go and ask the teacher questions for them. She was very proud that she had mastered this difficult skill.

---ooOoo--

Toby

When I met Toby, he was practising for the speech competitions. Even though we had met previously to discuss the research, he was so excited

about the speeches that he had forgotten this encounter. Instead, he thought that I was the parent-help who had come to listen to children rehearse while the teacher was busy. We started the interview with the speech, an extremely funny and engaging presentation about what he would do if he was the Prime Minister and he had practised to such a high level that he could do it without notes at all.

As we moved into the interview he told me, quite spontaneously, that he had a very special relationship with his father and that this was founded on his father's trust of him.

Well my dad trusts me to do things, and him trusting me, it feels good. So I think if we gave people a chance to be trusted if they take the good choice, then I think they would

feel pretty good.... He (Dad) trusts me and I wouldn't be allowed to do something like swear at parents or something like that. But they don't have to set rules for us because they can trust us.

Toby and his dad did a lot of very interesting things together, and sometimes these were challenging for him. Because he trusted his dad as much as his dad trusted him, he knew that even if it was a bit scary it would be alright because his dad would not make him do things that would hurt him. This meant that he got to have lots of exciting adventures that he would not be able to have if they did not have this sort of relationship.

--ooOoo--

David

David talked with frustration about the difficulties about being the oldest of several children. This seemed to mean that he was always to blame for things going wrong with his younger siblings. David said with feeling:

Don't have too many children. More than two is too much. There isn't enough to go around otherwise.

He thought it would have been better if he had been born in America, because parents there "*just give their children money to go out and spend*". He felt that he was old enough now to be more independent and to do things on his own away from his family.

He enjoyed the company of his grandfather, who was his best mate and

took him fishing. He liked spending time with his granddad, and his grandmother was also special. He liked to cook with her. They saved recipes out of the newspaper and cooked them together. These were the best times, just him, Grandma and Granddad.

He had decided that if the teacher at school did not work out for you, then you just ignored it and did whatever you could. You could not really control it anyway and had to make the best of it. The best teacher for him was one who read them lots of stories:

[Having a story read in class] is important because it can settle the class down.

One of his teachers had read them lots of stories on 'the mat' and let them draw pictures on each others'

backs with their fingers and wriggle around, because you had to be able to do these things to really appreciate stories. The teacher said that you could not listen to a story properly if you had to sit still. "She even let the girls play with each others' hair", he said with amazement. As long as everyone was quiet, it was OK. Another thing she did was to always ask if this was their "best work" before they handed their books in for marking. If it was not then they could go back and try again. She said that she really liked children, but he was not sure if the teacher he had at the moment did or not because, as he said: "We seem to make her grumpy all the time".

David had also had a very confusing experience with another adult at soccer:

One time, like, I had this very seriously weird coach who just picked on me all the time, even when I was doing good stuff, weaving in and out of people with the ball, or once when I was goalie and I tried really hard, but I let one [ball] through, only one, I tried so hard. But the coach just nudded off at me, it was stink and made me hate going.

He did not know why this happened to him but was pleased that his parents did not make him carry on to the end of the season. They usually insisted on this with after school interests, particularly, as was the case with soccer, for those that took place on the days that both his mother and father worked.

Relationships with parents

The children's experiences were of parents who had a high level of positive involvement in their lives, and their views were that this was a fundamental characteristic of a 'good' parent. They talked of seeking, and receiving significant amounts of encouragement and support from their parents. They were all able to respond quickly to the question about what made a good parent, and to provide examples from their own experiences. Ellen, Joshua, Brendan and Hannah talked about their view of the ideal parent:

Be like another best friend. Someone who understands you and you can talk really easily [with] and if you are going through a stage ... they would understand how you feel.... Like they say everyday that they love you, and it isn't an occasion or anything, they just say it everyday.
[Ellen]

Joshua: Funny, easy going, involved in what you do. Encouraging. Like what you are doing, they are right behind you.

Jackie: *Does that happen for you?*

Joshua: Yeah, a lot. It is good.

Someone who thanks you when you do what is right. Someone who talks thing over with you if you are not sure. And someone who can answer your questions. [Brendan]

We don't normally buy lollies and all of that. But Mum sometimes buys lollies for us. She is nice and she is not mean and she is not a rich person. But she does buy us the things we need. She brought me these pants the other day. Yes, she is a really nice mum. She is not too strict. If we don't get our lunches made in the morning, she does it. She puts up with [sister] through the teenage years, and that is not easy. [Hannah]

When discussing things that they would and would not change and making wishes, the children also frequently mentioned their parents as illustrated in the following quotations:

I wouldn't change my parents, I wouldn't change [sibling] because I really like having [sibling] there with me. [Steven]

I wouldn't change how lovely my mum is to me. [Hannah]

I wouldn't change my mum or my dad, and I wouldn't change how my family is. How nice they are. [Lizzie]

In the vignettes, Toby's special relationship with his father could be seen. This was founded in trust, and clearly the work his father had done in creating a meaningful sense of what that trust involved had a significant impact upon Toby. This meant that not only did Toby feel good about being able to make the right sorts of choices, but it also enabled him to have many exciting experiences with his dad; not only did his dad trust him, but he also trusted his dad to keep him safe. Lizzie also noted the importance of the strong, supportive relationship she had with her parents in the vignettes.

The children also noted the importance of parents activating them to do things. Good parents were not passive, nor did they necessarily always accept the choices the children made. They identified that parents had an important role to play in their lives as motivators to extend their boundaries, so that they would have new experiences and develop new skills. Ellie explained this:

They just don't forget about you, that you are there. They need to push you a bit, so that you can reach your goals.

The caring and nurturing dimension of parenthood was another prominent feature on the children's list of key characteristics of a good parent: *"Helping your kids out and looking*

after them". "Always being there, helping out with stuff like homework. Supporting them at games".

Availability was very important to the children. Some talked of time as a key aspect of this availability. Others talked of family size as being important. Like David (see the vignettes), some children felt that small families were best because this meant that there would be more time and other resources to go around. However, others suggested that larger families were better because this meant that children learned to share and support each other:

More than two children, definitely, to help them to grow up so they learned to share and they weren't selfish. They can also help each other out. [Emily]

Time, you have to have time for them [the children]. That is probably the main thing. You have to have time for the kids you have. [Karen]

Lizzie's vignette also touched upon availability. She talked about valuing "just having Mum and Dad around me", the regular, routine presence of her parents was important. Talking was also valuable, but this did not have to be all the time, sometimes, just being there was sufficient.

Five children identified child-management and guidance as important dimensions of parenting. Two said that parents should not yell and scream when children made mistakes:

Jackie: *What do you think makes a good parent?*

Karen: They don't yell and scream at you when you do wrong. They hear you out.

Two felt that parents needed to be strict, but not too strict, so that children learned the things they needed to learn, and so that children would respect parents:

Strict sometimes, but not strict all the time, yeah They had to make you tidy your room otherwise you wont tidy it. [Lydia]

Joshua: Strict, quite strict

Jackie: *Why is strict important?*

Joshua: Because if you are strict, you get the kid's respect and it makes them sort of listen to you then you don't have to scream at them to make them do what you want.

One of the girls said that parents needed to be able to growl at children, adding that her mother was a nice person, and did not growl that often anyway. She also told me that her dad liked her to help with domestic chores because he could trust her to do them properly, whereas her brothers were not so reliable.

Some of the children identified a need for privacy. This was discussed in relation to the value of having their own bedrooms, and it was also linked to their desire for parents to recognise that some of the things that happened at school needed to stay there:

Don't butt into your personal life, like your social life and stuff at school. If it is really serious they will find out anyway, but some stuff they don't need to know about anymore. [Joshua]

While parents were very important, not all wished to keep them exactly as they were:

I wish my mum and dad would be more presentable. Their hair is always frizzy. I have got friends' parents and they have always got makeup on and they all have really nice clothes. Sometimes I wish Mum and Dad were more like that. And that Mum was a bit more into fashion.

The positive characteristics of their parents far outweighed the negative in the children's narratives. Love, care, support and availability in a wide range of ways (including encouraging and helping, and being actively involved) were all things that the children believed were important dimensions of the parent role, and were also things they experienced with their own parents. Listening, talking and spending time featured prominently as did the need for parents to make demands and have expectations.

Grandparents and other adult kin

Grandparents and other adults in the extended family network played a significant role in many of the children's lives. In some situations grandparents provided care when parents were working and they were also a popular holiday destination for many of the children. The grandparents who figured prominently were those who had invested particular energy in building relationships, making it their business to play a strong role in the children's lives.

I asked the children who talked about special grandparents what it was about these people that made them so. David and Karen both had such relationships with their grandparents and they elaborated on some of the experiences they had:

My Grandad is my best pal. He takes me to the stock sale in the holidays.
We do stuff together, he is my mate. [David]

Nanas give you little presents. Sometimes they play cards with you and take you for walks. Sometimes they give you lollies. They are just fun.
You are around Mum and Dad all the time and sometimes it is good to be with someone else. [Karen]

Having access to adults who were not parents, but who also had demonstrated their unconditional commitment to the children was clearly important. There was a gentleness in the children's narratives about their favourite grandparents. The relations focused around activities like cooking, gardening, fishing and going for walks together. These activities had

a highly interactive dimension to them. The grandparents made time available to the children so that they could give their undivided attention. In turn, the children bestowed gifts of poetry and art on their grandparents:

The last poem I wrote, I gave it to Dad to give to my grandma. It was about spring. [Hannah]

Yesterday in art I did a picture of a sunset and I am going to give it to Nana. [Isaac]

When they made a connection with the children, grandparents provided a special anchoring point and the relationship between the child and grandparent loomed large in the child's mind.

Proximity was important and certainly helped facilitate these relationships, but it was not essential. Several of the children talked of very special grandparents who were at a distance. In these situations, grandparents and parents had gone to considerable effort to make sure that the relationships were established, nurtured and maintained through regular contact.

Not all grandparents were adored, however. In some situations the children talked of discomfort when around a particular grandparent. This is illustrated in the following two quotations:

I don't like those ones [grandparents], they are weird. When they come around here no-one laughs or has fun. It is not nice and I don't like it. They don't like to see happy people really. [David]

Sometimes Nana can be hard to get on with. I think that is what you expect with old people though. [Ellie]

However, where the relationships worked, they worked very well, and the children benefited from having these additional adults in their lives.

Uncles and aunts also featured in the children’s narratives. Talk of these relatives occurred mostly when the children were recounting family events, celebrations and holidays. The children enjoyed being surrounded by their families and having all these people of different ages as part of their lives. David and I considered the benefits of being able to share celebrations with family as opposed to participating in public events with friends and neighbours:

David: Yeah and then we had a massive big family party for New Year’s. It was party down hard on New Year’s Eve. Half my cousins were there and my uncles and aunties and all that. There was a whole lot of kids, more kids than adults and we were all partying.

Jackie: *Do you think it is more fun to have a party like that with all your family or with a whole lot of other people, like friends and neighbours?*

David: Family really, because you know them all and you are not worried about what am I going to do and that. I quite like having my friends around too though.

Other adult kin provided alternative perspectives on life for the children. They often sought advice and new ideas from these people. They also engaged them as advocates when trying to change their parents’ views on certain things. Equally, there were times when these adults represented and reframed parental perspectives for the children so that they could accept decisions their parents had made. Finally, they provided a source of adventure and attention so that the children could expand their horizons beyond the activities engaged in at home and school. The quotations below highlight some aspects of these wider familial relationships:

We were complaining to [Aunt] about why did we have to go to swimming. We said ‘Why do we have to go?’ And she said ‘Oh because

when we were little we never got to do any of those things.' And that is nice because it means that everyone in my family cares, and that is what I like about my family. [Gemma]

Then because our parents were working through the holidays, because we are trying to save, our uncle took us out in his boat because we hadn't done that ever before. And we had lots of fun going in the biskit⁶⁵ and everything like that. [Brendan]

Relationships with teachers

Children are experts on what makes a good teacher. They have a breadth of up to date experience and are ideally placed to talk about the components of teaching that enable them to learn and function well in classrooms. Given that the children were selected for this study partly on the basis that the school had no concerns about them, it could be concluded that they had adjusted well to school life and that they would have had little direct experience of difficult teacher-pupil relationships. Their academic achievements would further suggest that, for most of them, learning had not presented any major challenges and their experiences in the school context had primarily been well targeted to their needs. Observations in classrooms suggested that these children, in the main, were rarely the target of negative teacher attention, even in those classrooms which had a high level of ongoing conflict between teachers and pupils more generally. I asked the children open-ended questions about what made a good teacher, coach or other instructor.

Some of the children sought the same qualities in a good teacher as they had identified for a good parent. Most, however, expanded on this to identify things such as inclusiveness and fairness. This involved treating children in an even-handed manner and involving all of the class in activities. As Tim noted in the vignette, a particular teacher stood out in his memory because she had been "*nice and caring*" and she had also taken the time to explain things

⁶⁵ The biskit is a round inflatable tube that the children could sit in and be towed behind a motor boat.

and make sure the children understood. Other children cited examples of particular teachers who had demonstrated these qualities. More often their narratives were of a theoretical nature, identifying qualities in the abstract. The examples below illustrate both of these response types:

I had a teacher in standard three⁶⁶. [Teacher's name] was really cool, and really kind. [Teacher] was into computers too. [Isaac]

They help with any troubles you have, and explain things quite thoroughly so we understand. [Ellie]

Someone who tries to involve everybody in the activity that you are doing. Some days she only chooses all the people she knows wont have any answers or who haven't been listening. I don't like that at all. [David]

Not picking on one person. Not having a pet. Working with someone to sort out their problems. [Sophie]

The children identified a cluster of characteristics around positive interaction between teachers and pupils. Factors such as listening, including, praising and encouraging all pupils, even those who were difficult, were common:

Teachers who praise the kids a lot are good. [Joshua]

It is important for teachers to be kind and make the kids feel like they like them. [Tim]

Even the bad ones [children] need to be encouraged, sometimes they could include them too, then they might not be so bad. [Lizzie]

⁶⁶ Standard three equates to year five, children in standard three are usually aged between eight and ten years.

Other characteristics of good teachers included taking the class out for games as Tim noted in the vignettes, while David suggested that reading stories helped to settle the class down (see the vignettes). Karen had other ideas, she considered that:

They could make a bit of an effort to make our work interesting. It can be pretty boring being there all day, and if they tried to make it so we were interested we would want to do it more, that's what I think. [Karen]

As Tim suggested above, kindness was an important quality in teachers. This was spontaneous kindness. Most of the children considered that in order for them to learn it was really important to them that they felt that the teacher liked them, individually and specifically. This feeling of being liked was linked in with a sense of being safe and included in the classroom. Without it, they were anxious and this got in the way of their learning. The need for an individual connection between themselves and their teachers was a strong theme:

Sometimes you can feel a bit neglected because the teacher is focusing on a different group of children... . It can get to you sometimes and you don't do better work because of it... and then I go up to the teacher and ask a question and then the teacher focuses on you a bit more. [Ellen]

If they were liked, they were accepted for who they were and this meant that they could get on with the task at hand:

If I have to work with a teacher that I think doesn't like me, I can't really concentrate. I am always waiting for something bad to happen and then I don't learn. [Lucy]

If they don't like you they don't let you join in with most of the things, and they don't pick you sometimes. [Brendan]

Some teachers just don’t respond at all, and so you could be trying really hard and no-one would notice. So what’s the point? [Steven]

Some of the children also talked of the impact on them of what they perceived to be unfair treatment by the teacher towards other children. For instance, in the vignettes Lizzie talked of a boy in her class who often seemed to get into trouble, and she felt that the teacher could have adopted a more encouraging, inclusive approach with him. However, she was afraid of the consequences of trying to intervene. Attempting to interrupt interactions or to subtly modify a teacher’s approach posed risks to the children. They might only succeed in deflecting the anger onto themselves or in escalating the situation. Generally, then, they used covert strategies or avoidance to manage these situations. However, several children wanted to try to devise ways to calm their teacher down or to modify what they perceived to be unfair treatment. Others spoke of times when they managed to achieve such a goal. Ellen reflected upon one such successful intervention:

Well yesterday [teacher’s name] was pretty crabby all day. She was picking on Danny heaps and I thought he was going to start crying, because he does sometimes when she nuts off at him. I put my hand up and asked if she could help me with my maths, I knew the answers anyway, but she was being really mean to Danny and it wasn’t fair because it wasn’t his fault. She came over and helped me with my maths and then it was interval and so she didn’t shout anymore.

A number of children considered that teachers needed to have control of their classrooms. By this they meant that they needed to be able to get the children on-side. They talked of the use of aggressive tactics to try to gain control as evidence that the teacher had really “*lost it completely*”, as Steven indicated when referring to the teacher’s shouting:

No it doesn’t solve anything. It just shows that you can’t handle them and you have lost it. [Steven]

Some of the children said that they listened intently to the ‘tellings-off’ received by their peers to make sure that they would not make the same mistake. Others talked of feeling sympathy, and wishing they did not have to witness these sorts of encounters. Brendan and Gemma recount some of their experiences:

Sometimes [teacher’s name] is pretty wild at us... it bothers me a lot, I just get really annoyed with her. [Brendan]

When we had our student teacher⁶⁷, she always yelled and sometimes that was really, really annoying. I wanted to say ‘Shut up, I am trying to do my work’. Even when people didn’t know what they were doing wrong, she would just yell at them. [Gemma]

Sophie noted that things such as detentions were effective for “*good children*” because a single experience was generally enough to change their behaviour. However, she felt that these sorts of strategies were ineffective for children who got into trouble frequently. Her observation was that these children either became angry and more difficult to control, or they made getting more detentions (or other punishment) their goal. David spent a morning in a class where the level of tension and anger was almost palpable. The children had talked to me of feeling locked into a situation none of them could control. This engendered a sense of hopelessness and anger, and several wanted to move classes because of the negative atmosphere. David described the class in this way:

I had to go and sit in [another classroom] because I had a cold and couldn’t go outside to play games with my class. I hated it in there. It was so dark, that is a very, very dark classroom. No-one likes it in there. It is like a horrible cave. And the teacher is angry and she shouted all the

⁶⁷ In Aotearoa/New Zealand teacher training programmes have a high practical component. This means that children frequently have the experience of being taught by trainee teachers.

time. I spent a whole hour there having my ears blasted by the teacher’s yelling while everyone else in my class was playing.

This “*dark room*” was next door to David’s usual classroom and, in fact, had the same light levels as his own. It was a north-facing classroom and so received a lot of natural sunlight. Presumably, the darkness he recalled was the emotional atmosphere created by the teacher.

Getting help and solving problems

The children were aware that they often needed adults to help them sort out problems, to develop their knowledge and skills and to make sense of their worlds. We talked together about the strategies that they thought were most effective in these situations. Sophie began by talking about a good way of approaching the task of helping children to learn a new skill:

You have to, like talk to kids, ... you don’t have to yell at them. If they are doing something wrong, don’t yell at them. Just tell them that they are not doing it right. Instead of yelling. Because that is probably what makes them go and do it wrong again anyway.

Luke told me about a really good experience he had when an adult had helped him to learn how to control his dog:

They helped me to understand how to get the dog under control without using a bad tone in my voice. So I could make it clear but without making it feel that it is being really punished.

Toby talked in the vignettes about how important it was to him that his father trusted him. He told me that trust and making good decisions went hand in hand for him. Other children talked about their autonomy in terms of wanting to be able to choose what they did rather than being forced to be involved in different sorts of activities. This related to things such as

after-school activities, choices of project content and layout at school, and also to the freedom to make their own mistakes and learn from them:

[I don't like] having decisions made for me. I don't like adults making choices for me. I make my own now. [Luke]

I really liked doing them [the projects], she [teacher] let you do any project you wanted to do and she also gave you free time to read, write or draw and that was really good. [Isaac]

Some of the children also identified times when an adult had singled them out for special treatment to help them accomplish a particular goal. Far from taking it for granted, these children talked of how grateful they were that this had happened. The capacity of these sorts of acts of genuine kindness to make a real difference in their lives was clear. Toby gave an example of this:

I do rugby with him [teacher]. He saw my kicks, and he was just thinking to himself, 'I have got to help him'. And then he offered to, like in his own lunchtime, to help me with my kicks and passes and stuff like that ... I reckon that was cool because it was off his own back, and he didn't have to do that. It was his lunchtime. I reckon it was really nice of him.

Support and encouragement were high on the children's lists of the things that adults could do to help them to be the best they could be. The type of support they needed varied quite widely, but often they were seeking a background kind of support that was consistent and unconditional rather than active support that meant the adult got involved in the activity too. Joshua explained it this way:

You need to be there to support them. You need to be able to tell them that they can do it. You don't do it yourself, we don't want that. Let us do it but keep on telling us that we can.

Putting the time into providing practical support and assistance as well as participating in the children’s activities was also important:

Getting them interested, maybe doing it as well. Instead of saying, ‘Why don’t you do it?’ actually doing it too. To help them by spending time with them doing it too. Like my mum has done that helping me with my maths at home. [Steven]

In addition to the above types of input that helped children to do their best, some appreciated a more pragmatic approach to motivation, as Joshua indicated:

Bribery, ah bribery works really well. Like saying, if you do this, then I will get you that as a reward. But it is really bribery, because otherwise you wouldn’t do it.

Parents featured prominently in the children’s lists of people they would seek support from if they had a problem. Some were also beginning to feel a degree of independence and had a number of issues they would resolve on their own or with the input of friends, and they also were seeking opportunities to be able to do more things without the direct involvement of their parents:

One of my things is that my parents always seem to get involved with helping me with my homework. And often I reckon that it makes it worse because they are, like, ‘You haven’t got time for this’, ‘You can’t do that’, ‘What are you doing that for’, ‘I will take that to work tomorrow and photocopy it’, and all that. And I just feel like I want to do it myself. [Gemma]

This segmentation of their lives into areas that required parental/adult input and matters that did not was important to these children because it provided them with domains in their lives

over which they had a sense of control, but equally they knew they could also get help from their parents if issues became too big.

Following this theme, I explored with the children the sorts of situations where they found adult involvement helpful and those where they felt it was better to be left to problem solve on their own. The largest category of issues to which the children felt adults had the least to contribute were those involving conflict with other children. Steven and Joshua expressed it in these ways:

If someone wants to have a fight with you, you have got to say 'No', or sort it out by yourself. [Steven]

Joshua: [Other child's name] is one that should be left [to children to sort out for themselves]

Jackie: *Why is that?*

Joshua: Because if we got a teacher involved, he would not care and he would kill us. Well, he wouldn't kill us, but he would be way even madder and any time he saw us he would chase us and really want to beat us up. So [involving a teacher] would make it way worse, because the teachers can't stop him outside the school.

The frequency with which they identified parents as an important component in their advice and support arsenal is consistent with the stories they told about their relationships with their parents, based as they were on intense support, ongoing communication and involvement. Mostly the children identified their mothers as their first port of call when something was bothering them. Some identified both parents and a small number of the boys identified their fathers. The narratives also identified that some of the children would use different types of people for different things. Luke and Ellie summed up their use of support up this way:

Mum, teachers sometimes at school. But sometimes she [the teacher] is angry and I have to solve it myself. Adults can help me if I have been in a fight. Problems I need to solve myself are maths. [Luke]

It depends on what kind of issue it is. Like, if it is, I dunno, a school problem, or if it is to do with people being mean or anything to me, I just go to my friends. I will talk to my friends and then I will take it to Mum or Dad, if I still can’t solve it. If it is that I have got a problem on my mind, I will go to Mum and Dad. [Ellie]

Two children noted that they would go to the teacher, and that they would do this when they knew the teacher was not angry. Several children identified friends as a common place for support and advice and this was for school and peer-group related matters. One of the twins in the study noted that she would go to her twin first and said that; “*She practically knows everything about me and I know everything about her*”. The other twins did not identify each other as a place they routinely sought support from. Pets were also a source of support for some of the children.

Tim and Steven considered that avoidance was the best route for the challenges they faced. They had learned that sometimes a problem would go away if you did nothing about it. Thus, their first response in most situations was to do nothing, and only to work on a response if the problem proved more persistent. Tim told me about the strategies he used sometimes:

I think just leave it [the problem] like if I get in trouble and stuff I just leave it and forget about it.

Some of the children had developed very complex internal management strategies so that they could continue to function when being “*shamed*” by adults in front of their peers. Many of them closed down, physically shrinking themselves and emotionally closing off. Karen explained it in this way:

Well it doesn’t happen very often to me, but when it does I just go ‘Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no’ in my head and I stare at my desk with my head down really low.

Even the well-behaved children found the loss of individuality and the pressure to meet what often seemed like meaningless standards difficult. Sometimes they found that they could achieve some small victories by passive resistance and trading on their reputations as essentially good children. Gemma, who produced exceptionally neat, beautiful work talked about the way she dealt with the pressure to change her writing:

With my English book every single time I handed it in, she would write all through my book, ‘Smaller handwriting’. And I was trying to write smaller, but I like writing quite big and my writing is really neat anyway. And she has written it through all of my book in big red words, she has been writing ‘Smaller handwriting’, and I started getting bigger and bigger. And I did it on purpose just to annoy her.... she has stopped writing in my handwriting book now.

Thinking about seeking help during school time, Tim suggested in the vignettes that adequate explanation was a critical matter for teachers. He also suggested that simple information was needed so that he could work out what he needed to do. Lucy had been to special classes to gain confidence at asking questions. Her class experience was different to that of most of the children, because she no longer had difficulty in asking for repeated explanations. Her experience aside, all of the other children referred to their need for many repeats of instructions and considerably more time to ask questions and seek clarification. They suggested that asking for clarification would most likely be met with an angry response from the teacher and this meant that they would usually not take the risk of asking. Brendan, Lydia and Sophie had developed strategies for finding out what they needed to know without reference to their teachers:

I don't ask the teacher, she will just get cross. I ask the form twos⁶⁸ because they did the work last year and understand. [Karen]

Well I normally know how to do most of the work. When I don't, I just ask my friends again. Sometimes I try to ask the teacher, but it never works out too well though. I don't get answers. [Lizzie]

I just go and ask someone else in the class. I don't bother [teacher] otherwise she will go, like angry at me, and say I haven't listened. She will say 'stop interrupting me, stop bothering me'. [Tim]

Lucy's friends would often come and ask her to ask the teacher on their behalf because, as she explained in the vignettes, she had had question-asking training. The other children knew that she was confident at asking questions. Isaac, Gemma, Ellie and Steven each develop the theme of children's need for explanation and the anxiety attached to taking the risk of asking for clarification:

Sometimes I put my hand up and ask. But I have got this teacher for maths, and she goes like 'Any questions?' And you feel too scared to say anything, so you don't ask. I think a lot of kids are like this in my class. [Isaac]

I am too scared to ask the teacher, I am really shy in class. [Gemma]

Because if you go and ask them they will go 'I told you, I told you, I told you'. [Ellie]

They could explain the things better, if they could explain more. Like most times the people in our class don't understand the maths problems

⁶⁸ The children were in mixed year class groups at this school, the form twos being referred to are year eight, aged between eleven and twelve and a half years.

the teacher gives us and we ask her to explain it to us, and she, like, she explains part of it, but not all of it. And so you still don’t get it. [Steven]

These comments can be contrasted with the following from Luke, who identified a new entrant teacher who had been especially approachable and willing to explain:

I had [teacher’s name] two years in a row. She was just really friendly. She went through things, like it was really easy to ask her questions if you didn’t understand something. And ... when she was explaining, she would make sure that you understood and then she would go through it a few times with you if you still didn’t understand.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the children’s experiences of a number of different types of relationships with adults and the roles that these relationships played in helping them to problem solve. The children’s narratives clearly established the primarily positive nature of the relationships they had with their parents. Their specification of the characteristics of positive parent-child relationships included support, nurture and care as well as demands and expectations. Time for talking and time to just simply be together were very important to the children, who valued the availability of their parents. Parents also played a very important role in helping the children to solve problems, learn new skills and providing them with guidance.

Several also had regular involvement with other adult kin. Grandparents, in particular, were significant for this group and held a special place in their emotional worlds. Grandparents often provided care for the children. In doing this, they made time available and allowed the children to define the activities they would share. Grandparents set their pace according to the children’s needs, and pursued their particular interests with them. Where there was a special relationship, the children spoke of grandparents more as if they were friends, and so there were elements of equality in the relationship. In these cases, the grandparents

concerned seemed to have muted the authority aspects of the relationship in favour of comradeship. Grandparents were not often cited as a source of support in relation to solving problems, however they featured prominently in the acquisition of new skills, and it was often through these sorts of activities that the relationship was maintained between grandchild and grandparent.

Other adults (teachers, coaches and others with a formal role) also featured prominently in the children's lives. Interestingly, several children suggested that the characteristics of a good teacher or coach, were really the same as those of a good parent and in doing this they focused attention on the possibilities for active pedagogical relationships. Most of the children could identify one or even two teachers they had experienced who demonstrated these characteristics. However, none of them suggested that such experiences were common. Feeling confident about asking for help in learning situations was unusual and most sought each other's assistance in preference to asking the teacher for help. The children had all developed strategies to manage tense learning situations. Mostly these involved trying very hard to be quiet, still and not draw attention to themselves. However, some of the children also developed passive resistance strategies to build a sense of control in situations where they felt that they were subject to unfair treatment.

The following two chapters provide an analysis of data presented in Chapters Five-Eight. In doing this it seeks to align what is learned from attending to the experiences of the eighteen children who shared time with me with the experiences of other children reported in the literature.

- Chapter Nine –

Self and relationships

Introduction

Chapters Nine and Ten provide an analysis of the data discussed in the preceding four chapters. The current chapter begins by considering the way in which material collected in this study contributes to our understanding of the identity work that children perform. While the thesis as a whole rejects a view of children as purely developmental beings, as adults in the making, it is nonetheless clear that children (like adults) do important work on their identities as they go about the business of daily life. Findings here provide support for the view of children engaged in critical work on the project of their own lives (Edwards and Alldred 1999, p. 263; Mayall 2001b, p. 120). The children held a view of themselves as good people and their work around their own identities could be seen in four areas: their talk about themselves, their thoughts about the future, their relationships with others (particularly parents), and their emphasis upon stability and predictability.

Research has paid relatively little attention to the everyday experience of peer relations for this age group unless they raise particular concerns, such as boy gangs, believing instead that children's most significant relationships at this time are still largely family-based (see, for instance, Borland et al. 1998, p. 26). However, while the children valued their families highly (particularly parents and grandparents), their narratives also suggested a richly textured personal life centred on friendships and peer activity that included both positive

experiences as well as conflict and loss. Rather than being a matter of little concern to the children, friendships and a sense of belonging were very important, particularly at school.

Contrary to other research findings, the boys in this research worked hard at their friendships and talked about them with an emotional intensity that equalled that of the girls. While there were clear differences in the outward manifestations of the boys' and girls' friendships, the level of emotional intensity was not noticeably different. These findings draw attention to the value of attending closely to children's own accounts. They underscore both the diversity and the commonality of children's emotional experiences and the importance of recognising that in the process of becoming cultural beings, children learn that broader socially constructed definitions of what it means to be a boy or girl sometimes require that they hide different facets of themselves.

Relationships with adults played a significant role in the children's lives. Parents formed a pivotal reference point for them, and it was clear that considerable effort had been expended in creating strong, nurturing familial relationships. In a number of cases these relational networks included the extended family, and adult kin were important for a number of the children. Building on the notions of the child as subject and object, discussion suggests the concepts of open and closed relationships as a way of understanding the different ways in which adults and children constructed their relations with each other. Open and closed relationships reflected the different roles that power could play in these interactions. The nature of these two different sorts of relationships is explored and the possibilities they hold for different sorts of childhood are considered.

Self and identity

The first section of this chapter considers the ways that the children's narratives revealed the understandings they had about who they were and where their lives might take them. The children talked of the complex ways in which they thought about the different sorts of selves they could present in different contexts. The strong sense of themselves as competent and acceptable people could be seen throughout their narratives, something others have noted is

critical for children (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 45-46). They seemed to be truly children of post-modernity; fully aware of their capacity to fashion a range of identities out of a diverse set of raw materials from their immediate and wider environments, yet they still retained an inner sense themselves as ‘good’ or acceptable children that sometimes they revealed in social situations, and at other times they kept hidden.

There were four areas that reflected the ways in which the children went about shaping their own personhoods, and in each of these the reflexivity of these processes can be seen (Edwards and Alldred 1999, p. 263). The four areas were: their talk about themselves, their thoughts about the future, their relationships with others (particularly parents), and their emphasis on stability and predictability. Attending carefully to the ways in which children talk about and present themselves in public encounters enables us to learn about their understandings of the different things their social contexts demand of them and the ways in which they create and recreate themselves in relation to these contexts.

A good person

The sense of being a ‘good’ person was a consistent theme across the children’s narratives. When given choices and wishes several talked about not wanting to change the ‘good’ person they believed themselves to be and in so doing highlighted both the strong sense of self they had developed and their concern with stability and preservation of what they knew (see Chapter Nine, Stability). Brown and Gilligan (1992, p. 87) explored the way that children spoke in a variety of voices in order to protect themselves from relational risk, and suggested that through this process they also learned how to present themselves in socially acceptable ways. Borland et al. (1998, p. 32) similarly underscored the understanding that even quite young children had that they could choose to reveal or hide important matters, such as feelings, depending on the situations they found themselves in. Gantez (1995, p 78) suggested that children hid their true selves behind a “socially and culturally constructed mask”. There is, thus, clear recognition in the literature that the presentation of different facets of self is done partly as a response to contextual clues, but also in order to protect an inner core.

This acceptable inner core of self was important to the children. It provided them with a safe emotional place to retreat to when faced with difficult or confusing situations. This good person was also an important dimension of their self-confidence and it helped them to be resilient. Knowing themselves to be acceptable people provided a strong foundation upon which they could create the range of different selves they used in different public contexts.

The girls in the current study elaborated complex strategies for managing relationships with each other and with adults and for managing the impact that these relationships had upon their sense of themselves. In particular, they were very wise about how they presented different selves in different contexts, while at the same time maintaining the very strong sense of a core self. They were often seen as the ‘good girls’ at school, and there were certainly elements of what Brown and Gilligan (1992, cited in Rogers, Mikel Brown and Tappan 1994, p. 14) refer to as the “tyranny of the nice and the kind” in the way they presented themselves. However, they also mounted carefully crafted and managed acts of covert rebellion that challenged authority when it became oppressive. Because of its frequently startling degree of success, these rebellions generated a sense of personal control and power that was very productive for them in their creation of identities as both good and strong. It is here that they diverged from the girls in the work of Rogers, Mikel Brown and Tappan (1994) and their actions were more akin to the fourteen year-old girls these authors studied, except for the fact that they had retained the strong sense of self (see Chapter Two, p. 46).

A central core that was good and true was an important component of the sense of self articulated by both the girls and the boys in this study. While the girls were able to mount successful challenges in public contexts, the boys’ challenges were less effective in the sense of providing reinforcement for their sense of self as good (see later discussion relating to gender differences, and likeability and popularity). Their sense of being a good person appeared to be created in more private actions.

Throughout this study, the engagement of the children in the process of learning about and constructing a positive sense of themselves as ‘good’ and as particular sorts of people could

be seen. The children had clearly learned already that they could present a range of different identities. These identities were often chosen in response to the particularities of the different contexts in which they found themselves. At other times, they chose to present a particular sort of self, observed the reactions of others and learned what the projection of this self meant. Several of the children also talked very clearly about their inner sense of themselves and the type of person they considered themselves to be. They could clearly differentiate between this self and the other selves they presented, but in some cases were less clear about the way that this sort of knowledge applied to others around them.

Future thoughts

The second area where identity work could be seen concerned the thoughts the children had about their own futures. In thinking about the future the children imagined a time when they were adults, a time that was sufficiently far away that anything seemed possible. It was a time when they could imagine being in control. As their more general ideas about the future suggested, they were very competent at utilising fact and fantasy, concrete and abstract ideas (Hallden 1994, p. 65; James 1993, p. 132) to create exciting possibilities. In thinking about what they might be doing in these far off times (10 years, a whole lifetime away), their ideas divided almost completely along gendered lines.

The instrumental focus of the girls (reflected in their exclusive focus on occupation) was interesting and different to the findings of other research where mothering and family themes have been shown to structure girls' future thinking (Hallden 1994; Rogers, Mikel-Brown and Tapan 1994). This employment focus was not superficial, occupation was the dominant feature of their futures and when they did not have clarity around this, it caused them to worry a lot. The intense link between occupation and identity suggested that an absence of ideas about future employment was almost synonymous with a lack of identity, and the degree to which those girls who lacked occupational goals worried about this can therefore be easily understood. Like Alanen's (2001a) family-domain children, many of the girls expressed a very clear sense of themselves as children in the here-and-now, and so for those who did not have occupational goals, this sense of an "identity-less" future was extremely powerful.

The boys' futures included a range of dimensions (relationship, activity and employment), and this resonated with other research, which has suggested that boys are more interested in having fun than pleasing others and meeting social expectations (Hallden 1994, p. 68). The boys who did not have clear occupational goals did not express concern over this issue. They either filled their sense of future with their interests or alternatively a lack of clarity around employment did not cause them concern. They had other things that they expected to be doing. Hallden's work (1994, p. 76-77) offers reasons why the boys may have responded in this way, arguing that boys are more likely to see family as a place for activity and enjoyment.

While developmental and socialisation theories help explain why there would have been differences between the boys and girls, they do not totally explain the patterns observed here. For instance, the girls were not completely conformist, and even those who seemed to outwardly conform, like Brown and Gilligan's (1992) girls, spoke of their covert acts of resistance or produced creative work that suggested their inner worlds were full of thoughts that extended far beyond merely meeting the expectations of others⁶⁹, particularly adults. Neither do standard, gender-based explanations account for the way that family and relationships featured so prominently in the boys' accounts of their futures and were largely absent from those of the girls, but were nevertheless present in other areas of the girls' narratives. As noted previously, Hallden (1994, p. 66) found girls to be considerably more relationally focused than boys, while Rogers, Mikel Brown and Tappan (1994) suggested that, at this age, girls could be expected to have more complex and rich narratives about the way they saw their futures reflecting their identities. In this sense, the boys' narratives were more akin to what would be expected of the girls at this age. Yet, in thinking about their own futures, the boys, unlike the girls, included relationships, among other things. In fact,

⁶⁹ These have been identified in previous chapters. For instance, Gemma discussed her quiet rebellion against her teacher's insistence that she use smaller handwriting. Ellie's self-portrait reflected a very neat and compliant girl in the present and a rather wild one in the future. Lydia's self-talking enabled her to get through activities after school that were run by grumpy adults and she recounted her pleasure at talking to one of the boys in her class when she was supposed to be working. These examples all illuminated the different ways in which the girls managed to successfully mount carefully crafted rebellions.

Sophie's book plan suggested that, in the future, friendship might be lost in favour of occupation.

Explaining why the boys and girls selected such different identities for their futures would seem then to require further exploration. In the current study, the social context in which the children lived, and that shaped both their experience and the ways in which they were able to structure the meanings around their lives, provides one place to look for understanding. Interestingly, the girls all came from families that included both sons and daughters, while half of the boys came from boy-only families. Information from several of the children suggested that the domestic division of labour was quite traditional, both in terms of mothers carrying primary responsibility for day-to-day domestic tasks, and daughters making a greater contribution than sons to routine household chores, if and where the children contributed at all. This has strong parallels with research reported elsewhere (Mayall 2002, p. 46-48). Recall Hannah's suggestion that her dad preferred her to undertake domestic tasks because, unlike her brother, he knew he could trust her to do these things properly and so did not have to check up. Furthermore, all of the mothers in this research were either engaged in paid work and/or formal tertiary study, in addition to the caring and household responsibilities that they carried.

Children listen carefully to the verbal and non-verbal messages of those close to them and boys and girls take different meanings from this communication (Hallden 1994, p. 76; McNeely et al. 2002). These figures play a central role in shaping children's lives not only through direct conversation, but also through the complex patterns of interactions that constitute everyday life. Children also have a very clear understanding about the way in which responsibility for domestic tasks is divided up. They understand that parenthood is hard work, and that motherhood can be especially hard. These responsibilities seem inescapable and often conflicting (Mayall 2001b, p. 118). It is not surprising, then, that the girls were less likely than the boys to include relationships in their desired futures. Observing their mothers balancing the competing demands of busy households with work and/or study, the girls may well have concluded that adulthood for mothers constituted busyness and the complicated juggling and balancing of competing demands.

The radical transformation of women's lives that had happened during these children's lifetimes did not appear to present the girls with sufficiently attractive adult female identity possibilities. They did not, in this sense, aspire to be like their mums. Even those girls who did not have a clear idea about what job they might have, did not choose instead to become mothers, rather, they simply worried about not knowing. In defining the future as employment, the girls resisted their gendered socialisation and stood in contrast to girls elsewhere (Hallden 1994; Mayall 2001b). They appeared to have not only recognised the double-bind they would face later as women (see, for instance, Steedman 1982) but to have resisted it. They also appeared to have recognised the critical role that employment played in social participation (Child Poverty Action Group 2003, p. 33). Boys, on the other hand, recognising family as care and fun (Hallden 1994, p. 68-70), did not see combining work with leisure and family as problematic. Further, in the absence of ideas about occupation, these two matters (family and leisure) enabled the boys to avoid worrying about their futures.

I returned to the children to talk about these patterns and the explanations offered by other researchers about children's future thinking, and asked them if they could shed light on the reasons why boys and girls might have had such different thoughts. They saw future thoughts as very individual, suggesting some support for contextual explanations. However, Isaac and Luke both wondered whether the girls' desire for occupation was linked to the fact that they were 'good' at school; 'good' referring both to the way the girls behaved and the nature of their schoolwork. By the time I returned, "*being good at school*" was seen as akin to having a job as an adult. The children also considered that mothering was harder work than fathering, and that consequently this might have been off-putting for the girls, but they could not explain why the girls did not expect to be pursuing wider interests as adults. Joshua reflected upon his family, and wanted to be able to create a family like this for himself when he was older. He thus saw it in very personal terms. Ellie, who drew such an expressive set of self-portraits, told me that she really wanted to have control of her future. While she did not know what job she wanted, she was nonetheless very determined that it would support her financially and enable her to make lots of individual choices. Similarly,

Gemma felt that it was very important for girls to be able to take care of themselves so that they were not reliant on others too much. While not explicitly rejecting the paths chosen by their busy mothers, these two girls had retained their focus on independence and believed that employment was the best strategy for achieving this.

Relationships

Attending to the ways in which children talk about their relationships with others can provide insights into the ways in which they think about themselves (Lieblich & Josselson 1994, p. xii). Relationships, and especially the relationship they had with their parents mattered to the children. It was clear from their narratives and their creative work that they understood the key dimensions of the parent-child relationship and they highlighted the nurture and care they received as an important facet of their lives, and one that they would not want to change. They also recognised the asymmetrical nature of this relationship, and hence did not seek to give back this care and nurture. Rather they expressed a desire to contribute to their parents' material circumstances in order to balance out the relationship. Perhaps in giving material things back they felt that they would alleviate parental worry and this in itself, of course, is giving back care.

The reciprocal nature of relationships children seek to have with key adults such as parents has been noted elsewhere (Borland et al. 1996; Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 72-79). The prominence of meeting parental needs in the children's wishes illustrated the moral work that the children engaged in as well as the sense of interdependence they had as members of family groups. It highlighted the way that they incorporated these things into their own mental landscapes. For instance, the young people who wished "*for Mum and Dad to be able to travel overseas*", or to have sufficient money so that "*Mum doesn't have to buy second best all the time*", did not generate these thoughts in isolation; they arose out of their social context and reflected their intense and intimate connection to the important people around them and also the interdependent way in which they thought about themselves as parts of families. In moving beyond the developmental concepts of ages and stages, the new social studies of childhood are accumulating a mass of evidence of children's capacities to act as moral agents. It is clear that not only are they capable of thinking and acting in these

ways, but that their understanding of moral issues is quite complex (James 2001, p. 250) and, furthermore, that they have a passionate desire to engage in debate on such matters, a desire to be included in the creation of discourses on moral issues (Alderson and Goodey 1996; Matthews 1980; 1984).

It is interesting to reflect upon the differences between the children in the current study and those in Finland who participated in Alanen's (2001a) work. While these two groups of children occupied very different cultural contexts they were subject to similar global forces, namely the quite rapid urbanisation of small nations, both coming from a strong agricultural base, and the movement of large numbers of mothers into the workforce. In Finland, children's narratives suggested a range of identities derived from different sorts of relationships, reflecting family, friends, school and their wider interests. In contrast, the relational configuration of the Aotearoa/New Zealand children in this study was predominantly family based. Their sense of self was very strongly located in the home/family domain. Despite the fact that they also created intense friendships and many had high levels of participation in extracurricular activity, unlike Alanen's (2001a) children, their identities seemed particularly strongly coloured by their familial connections.

In the Aotearoa/New Zealand context, the dominant social discourse is individual in nature and locates responsibility for children as predominantly a parental matter (Atwool 1999; Blaiklock et al. 2002), while the Finnish situation appears to spread this responsibility more widely (Solberg 1990). In a period of rapid social and economic change, naturally occurring, informal networks in many instances have fallen away in Aotearoa/New Zealand, leaving small family units as the primary site of significant relationships for many children. As a result, the children saw themselves reflected through the lens of these relational bonds. The Finnish children, on the other hand, seemed to have been presented with a more diverse range of relational contexts, with the result that they perceived themselves as having correspondingly more diverse identity choices. The children in the current study forged their identities out of the relational material that was available to them, and this was predominantly from tight-knit family groups. While Prout (2002, p. 69-70) suggested that broader, conflicting social processes pull contemporary childhood in different directions,

clearly the particular shape of childhoods that result are also influenced to a significant extent by the nature of the local contexts in which such forces play themselves out.

Stability

Stability and predictability mattered a lot to the children. Issues to do with preserving relationships and material markers in their lives (such as homes) featured prominently in their narratives. In fact, the children were more easily able to identify things they wanted to preserve than to think of wishes and things that they would like to change. Rather than being a matter which simply formed part of their taken-for-granted reality, home and family constituted a part of their thinking, conscious world views. They were also things that the children could easily counterpoint against the insecurities they saw in the wider world. Their secure base allowed them to confidently go about the business of living their daily lives. They could take risks at school, for instance, by refusing to do smaller handwriting, and in so doing feel out the boundaries not only of their situation but also of their identity and learn a range of strategies for effectively managing the relationships they had with each other and with the adults around them. The security enabled them to get on with the business of being a child.

Through their wishes the children sought to make sense of their world, in all its contradiction and complexity, and in doing this they made full use of all the strategies they had at their disposal, freely mixing fantasy with their everyday experience (Hallden 1994, p. 65; James 1993, p. 132). In their search for security and understanding, the children called upon a powerful mix of abstract and very concrete thought. By doing this they created an intellectual space for themselves that was both safe and exciting. Some of their wishes highlighted the things they worried about the most; what would happen to their parents when they were older, trying to compensate when parents did not have sufficient resources, as well as the threats that waited in the world beyond home. While they knew that they could not control these things themselves, they wanted to think and talk about them. To make them manageable they called upon their imaginations to create contexts where they could be powerful enough to have an impact and reduce the worry to manageable proportions. Reality and unreality, fact or fantasy, then were not mutually exclusive categories, but rather

integrated sets of repertoires they used as they needed to in order to both understand and seek to create a sense of control over the terms on which they engaged with their world.

This section has focused upon the work that the children undertook around identity and self. Stability and preservation were important facets of their lives, and their intense relationships with their parents played an important role in the ways they thought about themselves. While familial relationships were a fundamental component of their sense of themselves in the present, the girls did not project this stabilising feature into their futures. Instead, they secured their ongoing sense of themselves as good, strong and capable, by thinking about the sorts of jobs they might have. The boys, on the other hand, entertained more diverse future identities and saw forming their own families as an inevitable, but almost unexceptional part of this. In contrast to other research, the boys elected to discuss relational matters, while the girls' future identities were entirely characterised by occupation. Given the limited arenas in which children are able to exercise a degree of control (Haudrup Christensen 2002) and achieve a sense of genuine participation (Prout 2002; Stafford et al. 2003), the sense of a 'good' self the children carried seems particularly valuable. It provided them with a safe intellectual and emotional space.

Irrespective of the weight given to developmental or contextually sensitive theories of childhood, it is clear that childhood is a time when individuals undertake critical identity-development work. The children were active generators of their social context; while they recognised and took account of the impact that adults had upon how they went about the activities of self-development and daily experience, they also engaged actively in the tasks of making meaning. They were aware of the links between their own local, private experience and the wider world around them, and saw mostly positive constructive possibilities in their daily lives, while apprehending both excitement and worry in the wider world. Their representations of time reflected the way in which the power and control of others structured the meanings they took out of their experiences. The safety and nurture provided by their parents provided a context within which they could take risks and push out the boundaries of experience. Through this they were able to develop a positive sense of self

and a diverse repertoire of skills for managing themselves and the relationships they had with other children and with adults.

Children's relationships with each other

As with other areas of thinking and theorising about children, the work on friendship exhibits a degree of ambivalence about the role of peer relationships (are they good or bad?) and the significance of the emotional experiences that go along with having them. In some cases, writers have suggested that friendship experiences are not in themselves significant, their importance residing in the social and relational training they provide (for example, Dodge et al. 1986; Hartup 1992). Others, however, have found that matters such as the loss of friends and the sense of loneliness generated by being new to a situation can have a profound emotional impact (Hill and Tisdall 1997; Rubin 1980). There is a long-standing interest in the differences between boys' and girls' friendships and the specific nature of any differences that might exist has fuelled considerable research and speculation.

This section considers the particular character of the children's friendships. It explores the ways in which they represented their experiences of making and losing friends, issues of popularity and likeability, and it addresses the matter of whether their friendships varied according to gender. Finally, it considers why the boys in this study did not appear to associate in pre-adolescent gangs, something that the literature suggests is a common pattern for boys at this age.

The nature and meaning of friendship

The children were clear that they needed to have friends to have a full life and in doing this they challenged the developmental view of these relationships as advantages rather than necessities (Hartup 1992). Rather than being something that would become more significant for them later as adolescents and adults (Erwin 1995, p. xx-xxiii), being able to experience friendship was very important for these children. In fact, given the amount of time they spent in large group settings away from family (for instance, at school), the availability of friends as companions and allies was often critical to their emotional wellbeing and did not

duplicate familial bonds and experiences at all. The children's narratives located their friends within a network of significant relationships and they represented important emotional resources that helped them negotiate and manage potentially vulnerable social terrains. Contrary to Cullingford's (1991, p. 50) claims, the sheer number of children in settings like school was not a reliable indicator of the extent to which the children felt that their relational needs were met.

Each child's particular relational needs were, however, particular to the person and reflected both the context in which they lived (which influenced factors such as access and availability) as well as their personal characteristics. Friendships, as the children attested, played an important role in their happiness, sense of wellbeing and belonging. All of these factors were critical in the creation of strong, positive identities. They also made daily life enjoyable. Brown and Gilligan (1992, p. 53, 69 and 106), who conducted extensive research with girls aged between eight and fourteen years, also talked of the diversity in children's experience and the ways they constructed relationships with each other. They highlighted that children's relational worlds were complex, context specific and also subject to ongoing change. In a similar vein, Savin-Williams and Berndt (1990, p. 277) noted the diversity of friendship relationships and the particularly individual way in which they were usually configured.

For some children in the current study, friendships could transfer from one context or setting to another, but others had different friends in different contexts. Unlike research reported elsewhere (for a summary of the literature, see Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 95), for the children in the current study transferability did not always seem to be related to intensity. In other words, friendships that were transferable were not necessarily the most intense or important friendships, again drawing attention to the very particular nature of the children's friendship styles. Shared interests were usually, but not always, a basis for friendship. Some children valued a particular person highly and sought to retain them as a significant presence in their lives, while at the same time commenting that they did not really enjoy the same activities. So while context was important in friendship, in terms of providing or constraining the

choices children had, there was also clearly a sense in which they were led very much by their own individual needs to create styles of friendships that worked best for them.

Making and losing friends

It was clear from talking to the children that they thought intensely about how to manage themselves in different relational environments. They were skilled at balancing the needs of self against the demands of their different contexts. Most of the children were able to articulate a clear value base that they used to evaluate potential friends. Like children elsewhere (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 95), this focused on key dimensions of relationships such as reciprocity, openness, trust and equality, clearly demonstrating that they were tuned into both the contextual and personal cues that coloured these encounters. The children's stories were different to those told in some of the literature (Cullingford 1991; Dodge et al. 1986; Herron and Peter 1999) where it seemed that all that was required to make new friends was that the child stood close by, made a good impression and then waited for an opening to join in. While the children who had needed to break into new groups did eventually build friendships, this took time. It entailed hard work and required that they became quite inventive about the ways in which they approached this key challenge; a challenge that could cause a lot of worry.

Despite the importance of friendship for the children, these relationships were not all plain sailing. Making and changing friends was an activity that consumed a lot of their time and could be fraught with anxiety. Friendships were complex matters that required constant attention and could be subject to sudden, unexplained endings. In the current study, disputes or conflicts functioned in three different ways. They served as emotional 'glue' as noted by Rizzo (1992), but they also provided a socially recognised method for exiting from relationships. Boy 1, for instance, explained how he used the opportunity presented by Carl telling a secret as a pretext for ending a friendship that he had already decided he no longer wished to participate in. Of course, sometimes conflict also simply represented disagreement or irreconcilable difference. The experience of conflict and tension in friendship relations was complex and layered. Accordingly, recognition of children's agency and a willingness

to listen carefully are required if efforts by adults to intervene in conflict between friends are to be effective (Brown and Gilligan 1992, p. 98).

Borland et al. (1998, p. 29) note that adults tend to underestimate the impact of loss on children and to operate on the assumption that it will be easy to replace a lost friend with a new one because of the assumed ready availability of other children. I was interested in the way that loss was experienced by the children because I also gained the impression from reading and talking to other adults that there was a tendency to downplay the effect of friend loss. This might be because of a lack of confidence in supporting them to express grief, or because loss is not always convenient for adults to acknowledge and deal with. Adult priorities, such as the scheduling of classes, career and mobility needs, or simply the pressures of time, can provide compelling justifications for leaving until later consideration of the impact of loss upon children⁷⁰. It is easy to convince ourselves that children will ‘get over it’ and are more resilient than we are; after all, they live their daily lives with what appear to be large groups of potential replacement friends.

A big group of children might appear to be an undifferentiated mass of potential playmates to an adult, but to the children it appeared more like a complex set of pre-existing and already networked relationships that was intimidating and could be difficult to penetrate. Teachers who dismissed children’s discomfort in joining group activities because they did not contain any friends, completely misunderstood the relational landscape of the classroom and, in so doing, denied the reality of the children’s experiences with each other.

Several children in the current study had moved schools and thus been faced with the need to establish themselves in new friendship groups. A boy and a girl had both experienced moving and talked of beginning to make new friends by building relationships with children who occupied the social margins, and then working their way around the networks to find friends that met their needs. They did not find this very large school to be a rich source of potential friends. Where they differed, however, was in the emotional meaning they took

⁷⁰ Hill and Tisdall (1997, p 20) argue that such discounting happens in children’s lives more generally and is a product of their lesser power.

from these experiences. The boy adopted an active, reflective response and was not troubled by the challenges he faced. The girl, however, found the challenge distressing and was worried by the impact her early misreading of some social cues had upon her acceptance among peers.

While Rogoff (1990) notes that finely age-graded play groupings are not a universal characteristic of children's friendship patterns, they were a very strong feature of friendship networks in this study and this pattern has also been observed elsewhere (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 94). Boy 7's strategy of adopting a leadership role with children younger than himself in the early days at the new school was useful in occupying his time, but it did not generate friendships. These had to await the passage of more time and came later in his school career. We might think it rather sad that he began by playing with younger children because he did not immediately find a sense of place with his peers. However, he was not sad about this and we could equally affirm his approach as a very effective adaptation to his particular situation. Even the children who expressed confidence, as he had, at their capacity to meet the challenge of making new friends, found that time and effort was required to build valued friendships.

Establishing new relationships was not only required when the children moved to a new school, for many this also happened at the beginning of each school year as they were allocated to new classes. Some were philosophical about being separated from their friends during class time. So Cullingford's (1991, p. 50) observations applied to some extent because these children were not fazed by the need to find new friends. Others, however, worried that a special friend made last year was now going to be lost because they no longer shared class time. That friendships could be so fragile was highlighted by the narratives of other children who talked of how they used changes in class placement to end friendships from the previous year. The first term of the new year was an anxious time for many of the children, and this was so even for those who had large networks and had been at the school for many years. Rather than being background matters that were insignificant or that took care of themselves, having friends in the same class was of great importance to the children.

Being placed in a class away from friends, or being new at school, had a significant impact upon the children's emotional wellbeing and also upon their readiness to learn. Cullingford (1991, p. 49) talked of the "hidden curriculum" at school and suggested that it played an important role in children's school experiences. Pianta (1992) observed that readiness to learn involved the whole child, emotions and relationships included. Yet, the pervasiveness of the developmental paradigm in the management of schools has accorded the emotional needs of children lesser importance than more obviously educational matters. As a result, factors such as not knowing anyone or feeling disconnected from peers have been seen as a relatively unimportant aspect of the learning experience (Holloway and Valentine 2000). The children's own accounts, however, underlined the impact that isolation had upon their ability to concentrate and to do well at school. They painted a more complex picture of their emotional and relational worlds than suggested in the literature (Erwin 1995, p. xxiii-xxiv). Losing friends caused very real grief. The way in which adults supported the children to name and work through their feelings and develop strategies to manage what could be very confusing and hurtful situations was a critical ingredient in their capacity to work through these experiences.

When I returned to the children during 2001 and 2002 their recall of the meaning and significance of friendship and the desire to feel included was still strong and they could recount their experiences of loss. Some also spoke of the challenge they had found trying to make friendships that would last. School remained a significant place to see friends and be with a number of other young people, and the power of this setting to crush them through humiliation or exclusion remained. A number of the children talked of making particular subject choices at high school to increase the likelihood that they would be placed in the same class as special friends. The potential of subject options at high school to allow the children a sense of control over areas of their school experience (rather than to make choices about their educational careers) had not been lost on them, and they were clear that relationships would play a role in the choices they made about the classes they would take.

Working within a new social studies of childhood framework, Hill et al. (1995, cited in Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 49) found that children wished for adults to recognise their deeper

feelings of distress and to provide them with effective support to deal with the impact of emotionally intense experiences. Children become very adept at predicting what sort of ‘face’ to present at different times and demonstrate considerable wisdom in managing their public responses to difficult situations⁷¹. So while some may give the surface appearance of coping with separation and loss, it may well be that they do not allow us to see its full effect because they have learnt that this sort of experience will be discounted or ignored (Rubin 1980, p. 89). Of course, in other situations, the experience of loss or separation may genuinely not cause distress. They may have generated an internally consistent way of understanding their situation and of incorporating this experience into their own way of seeing the world⁷².

This presents adults with a conundrum, because clearly a lot of the learning about impression management takes place in contexts where adults actually define what are acceptable and appropriate responses for children. Being able then to move beyond children’s masks to really know the impact that difficult experiences have on them is a major challenge and requires that we learn new ways of listening. Brown and Gilligan (1992, p. 21-25) call this process of learning how to listen “centering on voice” and encourage us to think of each child’s voice as “a new voice, a voice worth listening to”. Prout (2001b, p. 197) refers to the symbolic interactionist notion of “deleting work” to refer to the systematic silencing of different views about the nature of productive activity. In a similar way, stronger adult voices of what is valid in childhood appear to ‘write-over’ children’s accounts of their relationships with each other.

The new social studies of childhood, in fact, developed out of just this desire; to listen attentively and hear children’s own voices, and to actively include these new perspectives in our understandings of what it means to be a child and to live in childhood in different places and times (see, for instance, foundation work by Brannen and O’Brien 1995; Hill and Tisdall 1997; James, Jenks and Prout 1998; James and Prout 1990a; Mayall 1994a; Qvortrup et al.

⁷¹ See, for instance, the work of Brown and Gilligan (1992) and Rogers, Mikel Brown and Tappan (1994, p. 1-36), with girls in this age bracket, and Fine (1995, p. 312) with pre-adolescent boys.

⁷² See, for instance, a particularly compelling discussion of the many different and highly contextually dependent ways in which children’s experiences can be understood in Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992, p. 21-24).

1994; Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers 1992). Such approaches are critical if adults are to effectively support and encourage children to develop their own constructive ways of working with loss and to manage relationships positively.

The social construction of the child as ‘the other’ (Brannen and O’Brien 1995; Christensen and Prout 2002; Jenks 1982) in our society enables the conversion or redefinition of matters that would be defined as problematic if they happened to adults (such as losing a soul mate) to be redefined as unproblematic when they happen to children. The predominance of this view of children, and the consequent relegation or redefinition of things that happen to them as only significant in terms of the material contribution it makes to their movement towards adulthood (Brannen and O’Brien 1995; Holloway and Valentine 2000; James, Jenks and Prout 1998), can be seen when we listen to children’s narratives. Perhaps the reason why Cullingford (1991) and others were able to dismiss the impact of experiences such as loss and unpopularity as of no material significance reflected the extent to which children also internalised this view of themselves as ‘other’ (Oswell 2001, p. 181).

Likeability and popularity

Popularity is an issue of interest in the literature and it also featured in the children’s narratives about their relationships. Again, the children’s accounts of how popularity arose, what it was connected to, and the way in which it was socially sustained, were diverse. The girls considered that popular children were those who had parents employed at the school and who could, therefore, bring powerful social resources to bear in their interactions with each other. Their observations converged with the observations made by Hill and Tisdall (1997, p. 99) who referred to the fluidity of the boundary between children’s own rankings of each other and adult recognition. The boys, on the other hand, felt that the issue was more complicated than this. Boy 8 explained that popularity for girls was connected to the extent to which they conformed to adult expectations. However, he considered that, for boys, popularity was connected to their willingness to challenge authority, an observation also made by Hallden (1994, p. 73). Accordingly, as Boy 4 suggested, boys needed to choose between being popular among peers and being accepted by adults.

Several of the children in this research directly critiqued the way that popularity with adults flowed into the popularity children had with each other. They observed social resources and power in adult-child relations being used by their peers to gain leverage in child-child social relations. Drawing attention to their acute sense of fairness (Mason and Falloon 2001, p. 108; Stafford et al. 2003, p. 364), they also distinguished between this way of achieving popularity and what they saw as a more legitimate popularity achieved by children through their own efforts. However, the children whose popularity rested, at least in part, on their parents, saw this recognition as fragile and as a burden as well as an advantage. Adult interference in children's relationships, through things such as controlling who gets appointed to positions of power and influence, disrupts children's relationships with each other and undermines their confidence in adult processes more generally (Morrow 2000; Prout 2000b; Prout 2002; Williamson 1996). For instance, Stafford et al. (2003, p. 368) have found little evidence that children and young people consider youth forums and councils to be an effective method for advancing children's participation in decision making because such processes are seen to be subject to adult interference and manipulation.

There was no evidence in this research that lack of popularity or being rejected by their peers was an insignificant matter in the children's lives. Where it occurred, the sense of being excluded was felt keenly. While not all children may have wanted to be very popular, they certainly did not approach the issue of rejection with the equanimity suggested by writers such as Cullingford (1991, p. 50). The children's accounts suggested that popularity was more complex than the literature indicated. In particular, issues such as the source of the popularity (for example, did it come through adult influence or not) played an important role in the ways in which they understood the social position of other children, and in the extent to which they were willing to take such rankings at face value. Furthermore, while they were clearly able to separate out friendship from popularity when talking about other children, it was not so easy to do this with reference to themselves. Being able to objectively assess the relative popularity of another child was different to being able to do this for oneself.

Being good at appreciating other people's feelings was an important component of likeability identified by many of the children. Being likeable related to the personal qualities

others perceived the child to have and in this way was linked to the characteristics of a good person. Although research has not specifically suggested this sense of being a good person as a critical ingredient in children's descriptions of likeability, some work has highlighted similar sorts of characteristics. Hartup (1996, p. 1) listed reciprocity and commitment as essential features of good friends and Savin-Williams and Berndt (1990, p. 278) further suggested that loyalty and intimacy were critical features most commonly cited by children.

Popularity and likeability were complex for the children and constituted social currency in many of their relational exchanges, particularly at school. These matters also had implications for the ways that they understood themselves and their position in relation to their contexts. In this sense, some of the children in this research were similar to the girls in Brown and Gilligan's (1992) work who talked with anxiety about being excluded and who developed a range of complex strategies to manage their membership in friendship and other social groups.

The children gave some interesting feedback on my interpretations when I returned to check out my analysis with them during 2001 and 2002. I was interested to see that the issue of adult influence on the social hierarchy of the school was a matter they could recall, even once they had moved on to high school. The children who had felt a sense of unfairness at the social capital their peers could bring into encounters as a result of parental influence still spoke of the way that this appeared to skew relationships at school. Lizzie and Hannah speculated on the impact that moving to high school would have upon the children whose parents had worked at their primary school and who, as a result, had seemed to be popular. Hannah thought that maybe these children would "*find out what it was like to be just an ordinary kid at school*" who could not call upon parental support in the schoolyard or classroom. One child, whose parent had been heavily involved in her primary schooling, was also contemplating the impact of going to high school on her own. Another had given thought to this, and could see advantages to not "*being known*". In particular, this child felt that there would be less pressure to be involved in everything and to consistently achieve certain standards.

Gender differences

Even casual observation will confirm that, in general terms, at this stage in life boys and girls tend to play in same-gender groupings for most of the time, and further, that girls and boys do different things when they are together. The friendships in this research were predominantly, but not totally, gender exclusive and with the exception of Boy 7, who played with children younger than himself while at school, tended to be concentrated in a very narrow age band. In these ways, the friendship patterns of the children from this study were similar to those reported in the literature for children in other western industrialised democracies (see, for instance, a review of the literature in Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 98-99). These patterns suggest a broad consistency across many nations in the processes by which boys and girls learn how to become male and female by participating in relationships outside the family as well as within it. However, the children's narratives suggested layers beneath the surface-level balancing and negotiating they engaged in to present an acceptable public self while still finding ways of meeting their emotional needs. For the children in this study, home provided a very safe venue where they could develop these other aspects of themselves, both with family and with special friends.

It was particularly notable that boys talked of intimacy needs, expressed an acute awareness of emotional atmosphere and were as tuned into the emotional cues in their social environment as were the girls. For instance, when David spoke of the “*dark classroom*” he was not talking about the quality of physical light in the room. His class and the “*dark*” one were next door to each other, were both north facing, and identical in character. In speaking of the darkness he was referring to the emotional atmosphere in the room. Furthermore, the boys more commonly identified specific relationships as a source of happiness (see Chapter Five) than did the girls. Two boys also talked of very special and intense friendships that survived across time and repeated separations⁷³. Finally, one of the boys talked of the different things he got from his female and male friends and clearly articulated his needs for

⁷³ Here it is important to recognise that the literature has suggested that matters such as proximity and opportunity to spend time together are critical factors in the survivability of friendship. And so it is particularly notable that these two boys actively managed their most significant friendships to ensure that external constraints (such as repeated class separations) did not result in the loss of the friendship (for example, see Fine 1995, p. 310).

emotionally intense interaction when he said he valued being able to “*talk about stuff*” with his female friend. Was this because inherently boy relationships did not allow for this, or because by eleven years of age social expectations about boys and girls had made their mark? That he could express the need for this sort of interaction suggests that the latter is probably the case. The literature has paid relatively little attention to analysing boys’ needs for emotional intimacy. Indeed, even contemporary studies of childhood appear to accept at face value that there are gendered differences in children’s emotional needs (see, for example, Ganetz 1995; Hallden 1994).

The boy who could “*talk about stuff*” was more fortunate than most of his peers, in having access to a girl who wanted to be his friend and was happy to function in this way in her friendship with him. Mayall (2002, p. 126) has suggested quite distinctive gendered patterns in children’s confiding, arguing that boys learn the difference between “girls’ things” and “boys’ things”, and that “boys’ things” cannot be talked about to girls and even to mothers at times. This is a comparatively new observation in the literature. Being able to find males who will listen and take seriously the issues young boys face can be a challenge, and if Mayall (2002) and this boy are both correct, many boys would appear to confront a wall of silence from a relatively young age.

Sandberg, Meyer-Bahlberg and Yager (1993, p. 125) noted that a number of significant studies have established the pervasiveness of peer pressure for gender role conformity. There was evidence that the children in the current study had internalised the cultural and social conditioning around sex-roles and understood that certain sorts of interactions were now mostly off limits for boys. Yet a deeper analysis of the boys’ material seemed at odds with many of the findings reported in the literature, social discourses and the surface-level descriptions of boys’ and girls’ needs articulated by the children. While intimacy needs certainly expressed themselves in different ways between the boys and the girls, there was no sense in which they seemed to be of a lesser order or significance for the boys.

Both boys and girls built specific relationships with other children and valued and nurtured them carefully. They exhibited a range of styles in friendship development and maintenance,

and these styles seemed to be at least equally a product of their personal circumstances, individual personalities and needs, as they were a product of gender. Friendship, in the sense of a close personal relationship with another person, did not seem to be less important for the boys than for the girls. Equally, making and sustaining friendship relationships (as opposed to congregating with a group of associates) was an activity that consumed time, energy and commitment by all of the children. Friendship held emotional significance for all of them, and dismissing this significance for any would seem to significantly downplay a very important part of their emotional lives. The boys clearly had intimacy needs and they actively created intense friendships with each other. The overt expression of these matters certainly differed by gender but this did not equate with significant internal differences in meaning or intensity.

It is hard to know why this group of children should differ from those discussed in literature where it is suggested that boys are not troubled by the loss of particular friends and seek the comradeship of the group rather than more intense dyadic friendships (see Fischer, Sollie and Morrow 1986; Hartup 1996; Matthys, Cohen-Kettenis and Berkhout 1994). Possibly they become skilled at reflecting the dominant discourse of themselves as less emotional. Perhaps because boys do not express intimacy and emotion in the same way that girls do, the conclusion has been drawn that they do not actually feel these things. This is dangerous logic because it allows the emotional experiences boys have to be discounted, downplayed or defined as something other than a reasonable emotional reaction to a particular experience. Mayall (2002, p. 106) has recently argued that the stereotype of boys as emotionally uninvolved and unhelpful is both inaccurate and damaging. This new finding has yet to gain a strong foothold in the literature and wider social discourse about boys. By accepting the dominant discourse of boys as less emotional, we run the risk of believing that how we treat boys matters less than how we treat girls because boys 'can take it'. In demanding that they take it, of course, it is likely that they will learn and outwardly appear to do just this and, in so doing, reinforce our belief that this is how they are. However, the impact upon their emotional wellbeing, and their later capacity to empathise and recognise

emotional pain in others may well be the casualty⁷⁴.

Pre-adolescent gang friendships?

Like some of the girls, several boys in this study played games in large groups while at school and they brought their special friends into these settings. It was these smaller, more intense friendships that flowed into out-of-school time-use. The larger groups into which they slotted during lunch and interval times at school did not routinely feature in their reports of out-of-school activities. These special friendships were usually recognised by everyone else (at school and at home) as significant, best friend relationships. Other boys could join in shared activity and even talk of them as friends, but still this prior and more significant best friend status was recognised. If their out-of-school movements took them to places frequented by the other boys they played with while at school, such as the pool, 'The Bowl', the BMX track or the river, these more intimate friendship units might join up for a while and share play with a larger group. Such encounters were unplanned and serendipitous, not a routine feature of the boys' out-of-school play landscapes. Other boys played in less intense ways at school with a range of boys and in their out-of-school lives would play with boys in a one-on-one way or engage in solitary recreation.

None of the boys in this study participated in the gang-type of relationships described in the literature as being typical of pre-adolescent boys (Erwin 1995; Fine 1995). In fact, the girls' friendship networks more closely resembled this gang-type of structure than did the boys', although their activities did not mirror commonly accepted boy-gang patterns. This is not to say that the boys did not get up to mischief, and while they certainly played in large boy-groups at school, the intense group focus and large amounts of time spent together without adult supervision that characterise gang membership did not feature in these boys' lives. This was so even when they had the opportunity. For instance, some of the boys who self-supervised because of parental work did not use the opportunity these occasions provided to associate in large groups, which is what the literature suggests they would be drawn to do. Rather, they remained at home and so the question arises as to why the boys in the current study did not associate in pre-adolescent gang-type groups.

⁷⁴ See Dore (1993) for a discussion of the critical role that the experience of having emotional needs recognised as a child has upon the capacity of adults to care for and nurture others.

Dishion (1990) among others (see Steinberg, Darling and Fletcher 1995; Wentzel 2002) suggests that parental values and involvement play an important role in influencing the nature of children's friendships but, interestingly, the way that these matters either constrain or facilitate participation by boys in pre-adolescent gangs has not been explicitly addressed. Yet, for the boys in this study, the role of parental expectations and concerns in setting the broad parameters under which they went about developing their relations with others was clear. They had very strong, attached relationships with their parents and this was critical in reinforcing their acceptance of parental boundaries. Furthermore, the familial relationships they had were intense, intimate and meaningful. In addition to opportunity for frequent interaction and absence of adult supervision, the accepted preconditions for gang formation (Fine 1995), a third ingredient would seem to be required. While they were not physically present, parents exerted a strong influence over the sorts of activities in which their children engaged. Strong intra-familial bonds were thus important factors in regulating the nature of activities the children engaged in when away from parents.

The literature on boy-gangs suggests a boy-impulse to group together and get up to mischief (Fine 1995, p. 295), and that consequently there are some important needs boys meet through these sorts of experiences. If this is so, how do the boys whose lives are subject to high levels of parental involvement and oversight gain these experiences? The attractiveness of electronic games and cyber space seem to offer boys opportunities to have some of the experiences that might meet these needs by providing them with complex and exciting adventures within their homes. However, it seems reasonable to assume that not all pre-adolescent boys left at home while parents work will be as compliant as those participating in this study. If the numbers of these 'latch key kids' increases it may well be that the number of pre-adolescent boy-gangs will also increase.

In conclusion then, the following key observations can be made about the nature of the children's relationships with each other. To begin with, the highly particular and localised character and meaning of their relationships is apparent. They arose in specific contexts, to meet particular needs and grew out of the raw material presented by other children and their

various milieux. The pre-adolescent boy-gang, as a particular type of children's friendship has been a focus of attention in the literature. However, gang-types of activity did not feature as a significant part of the social lives of the boys in this study. While the two key ingredients identified in the literature that facilitate the development of such gangs (that is, frequent, intense interaction and the absence of adult supervision) were present, it seemed that even while absent, the family values established by parents were effective in managing sons' activities, even from a distance.

Overall, friendships were important to the children, and contributed to their sense of wellbeing and belonging. They formed an important component of their self-image. While being critical for the children, however, these relationships were a double-edged sword, and their relational experiences could be soaked through with worry and uncertainty as much as they could be a source of significant emotional sustenance. The emphasis in the literature on the training role of relational experiences should not distract us from hearing children's own accounts of the way that these things affect them, and responding to their emotional cues when things go wrong. Both boys and girls felt the impact of lost friendship keenly and were able to express their emotional needs during interviews.

It is often suggested that children move between friends with greater frequency than do adults and that, as a result, the experience of loss may be less emotionally charged for them. This suggests that the significance of friendship lies in the fact of the relationship and that the individual quality of the person-as-friend is of lesser significance. It also ignores the fact that changes in children's friendships are often generated not by children themselves but rather as a result of adult action. Because children move in a world that is peopled by many other children, it is tempting to argue that the significance of the personal dimension in friendship is less important than is the case for adults. However, the children suggested that a very different situation applied, and in fact that friendships gave (Savin-Williams and Berndt 1990, p. 279):

... moments of enjoyment and companionship [that] contribute[d] to a generational sense of belonging with others who are respected and liked.

Relationships between children and adults

The ways that adults and children relate to each other clearly has a highly significant impact upon the quality of childhood. As Kovarik (1994) suggests, children's worlds are essentially relational. Material collected from the children in the current study suggested that these relationships coloured not only the moments in which they happened, but went on to influence the way the children felt about the places where such interactions occurred. In doing so they took on a life of their own. Mason and Falloon (2001) argue that children have an acute awareness of the power-based characteristics of the relationships they have with adults. Their work illustrates that children understand child abuse to be but one manifestation of this relationship of dominance, and in fact, they do not see this as an aberration. It is simply one extreme example of the everyday injustices they experience when interacting with adults. Given this understanding, the particular ways in which children experience their relationships with adults would seem to be critical, particularly if changes to the level of child abuse and maltreatment are seen as important social goals.

In this study, the children's narratives suggested that they experienced two quite different sorts of relationships with adults. Building on the notions of children as subject and object (Christensen and Prout 2002, p. 480; James 2001, p. 246), these relationships could be termed 'open' and 'closed' because of the different possibilities they held for the children to exercise agency. Open relationships allowed them to be active, engaged subjects, while closed relationships limited their capacity to have input into its nature and course, and also to exercise some influence over what happened to them. The data collected here further suggested that there were two types of open relationships while closed relationships clustered around one type. The following discussion considers the ways in which children experienced these different sorts of relationships and the possibilities that each held for them.

Open relationships

The vignettes contained in Chapter Eight drew attention to the different ways in which adults and the children related to each other. They noted that adults set the tone for encounters and primarily controlled the way in which relationships unfolded. The children

described the sorts of relationships with adults that worked best for them as involving a mixture of demands and expectations combined with positive encouragement and support. These were open relationships where both parties were able to have a different, but direct impact on both its course and the way in which the tasks occurred that were associated with it.

In principal, both adult kin and non-kin were able to have these sorts of relationships with the children. For instance, Joshua suggested that a good teacher was “*like a good parent, really*”, a similar view to those articulated by British school children (Mayall 2002, p. 99) and also by other children in the current study. When taken as a whole, however, it was clear from the children’s narratives that these open, positive and expansive relationships were predominantly a characteristic of their relationships with parents and some other adult kin, and that such relationships featured much less frequently in formal, public settings.

The children’s reflections upon their parents emphasised the nurturing and caring dimensions of these relationships and when thinking of changes or wishes they often sought to create situations where they could provide for their parents, particularly in terms of financial security. In this way the children’s thoughts produced an asymmetrical pattern that placed the nature of their parents in the present and the sense of care they received from them (evident in preservation statements such as “*I wouldn’t change how lovely my mum is to me*”) alongside their desire to provide material security for their parents in the future (reflected in statements like “*If I could have a wish, I would get a great retirement home for Mum and Dad*”)⁷⁵. The children clearly reflected upon the care they received from their parents and recognised the struggles faced around financial security within their families. As noted earlier in this chapter (see Relationships), their response was not to return in kind the love and nurture they had received, but rather to release parents from the burdens of providing by taking on this role themselves.

⁷⁵ It should be noted that this discussion is not intended to convey the impression that all children everywhere experience parents and family in this positive, constructive and enabling way. It will be recalled that in the current research, the children were selected on the basis that their home situations were known to be safe and nurturing, their families more rather than less stable and there were no outstanding concerns about their safety or wellbeing. That their narratives produced such positive pictures of their relationships with their parents is not, therefore, surprising. The point of the exercise here, however, is to consider how such situated children think about and experience their relationships with adults.

Current studies of effective parenting (Darling 1999; Munford and Sanders 1999; Wentzel 2002) confirm what the children in this research knew. The configuration of parental tasks and actions that worked best for them comprised support and nurture, expectations and demands, and opportunities for them to make their own decisions. However, the parenting literature has paid less attention to the relational component of the enterprise. This was very significant for the children, and they looked to adults to get the balance right. They asked for adults to be there when needed, to be in the background when required and to listen and talk a lot, and to make it their business to have these relationships in a committed way. By attending effectively to these matters the children's parents had, in effect, created an environment where the children were able to be children. Thinking about the identity work in which they were engaged (see *Self and identity*), the safe environments provided by parents meant that they could develop and shape their identities and subjectivity through experimentation, something others have noted as a very important facet of childhood (Edwards and Alldred 1999, p. 263; Ganetz 1995, p. 87).

The children, then, had daily, primarily home-based experiences of relationships with adults that reinforced their position as children who could engage actively with adults in the construction of their social worlds. They participated as subjects rather than objects (Mayall 1994a; Oldman 1994a). The investment that adults made in creating these relationships was very significant to the children. Under such circumstances, childhood, became a viable position in the social structure, not merely a frustrating and confusing position on the way to adulthood.

It was notable that, unlike Phadraig (1994), neither the children nor their parents were attracted to the idea of parents as friends. Rather, they sought an authoritative relationship that was warm and nurturing and that also included expectations and demands. In a sense they described a Weberian type of legitimated authority where the nature of the relationship meant they could broadly accept the direction and control that came from the adult. This was similar to findings in the United Kingdom (Hill, Laybourn and Borland 1996; Prout 2001 b) but in marked contrast to recent work in the European context which indicates the

emergence of a new family form; the symmetrical family. The children did not identify out-of-school providers as a source of guidance or as playing a role in their social learning and development. To the contrary, their predominant descriptions of after school care likened it to baby-sitting. For their part, parents squeezed their parenting in and around the time taken up by other activities, but it did not appear that they consistently passed care-as-responsibility to any other adults.

A small number of the children had extended family actively and routinely involved in their lives, or went to formal out of school care providers, but none of this care appeared to substitute in any way the parenting provided by the children's parents. Their enjoyment of after school care was related to the overall approach that the caregiving adults took to their role. In this research, grandparents, in particular, seemed able to provide care that the children enjoyed and participated actively in. Formal providers or non-family child-minding adults provided care that the children did not routinely enjoy. It is unclear whether or not this difference in experience was due to the kin relationship itself. On one hand, Phadraig's (1994) work suggests that this might have been so. On the other hand, however, the way in which the grandparents managed their relationships with the children seemed to be the critical factor uniting their descriptions of positive after school experiences. In principal, there was no reason why non-kin adults could not have related to the children in these ways. What may have been lacking was the will and commitment to place a priority on building open relationships and to keep the children and their needs at the forefront of their minds. In other words, the grandparents were singularly successful in working with the children as active, engaged subjects.

The children's narratives indicated that interesting relationships were formed between other adult kin and themselves. Several, principally grandparents, had established relationships that wove together components of a best friend and a caring adult. While these adults retained an adult sort of responsibility for the child, they mostly avoided having to take authority more typical of adult-child relations. The children often referred to these individuals as their "*best mates*". This rather gentle blend of comradeship and caring served the children well. These were boundary-breaking relationships and as such suggested wider

possibilities for adult-child relations more generally. Clearly adults did not always have to be in direct authority or control.

Writers such as Mayall (2001a), Alanen (2001b), and Jackson and Scott (1999) speak of relations between adults and children as inevitably power relations, however the narratives of the children in this research suggest that this may not always be so. They provided a confounding sense of relations between ‘big people’ and ‘little people’. Given the children’s relationships with their grandparents, it appears that the notion of generation developed by these writers may need to be extended to include relationships that contain only minimal amounts of power, and even then of power that is primarily concerned with protection rather than control. Alternatively, our theoretical definitions of the adult-child relationship may need to become more flexible in order to accommodate what seems to be a diverse range of realities for children. The children who were fortunate enough to have these extended family relationships had a rich set of relational experiences and, as such, they add a new dimension to our understanding of the way in which the generational order can be structured. To date, the literature has focused on adult-child relations as inevitably organised in such a way that mateship is conceptually unlikely. Yet what these children tell us is that these sorts of relations are not only possible, but that they added value to their experience of childhood.

Their narratives about positive relations with adults also reminded us that, contrary to the developmental account, they could and did act in morally competent ways and that they functioned best when their agency was recognised and taken account of (Hill, Laybourn and Borland 1996; Morrow and Richards 1996; Thomson and Holland 2002). Importantly, it appeared that it was precisely within the open adult-child relationships that they had the greatest chance of being able to have child-like experiences of childhood. These sorts of relationships reduced the chances they would have to act beyond their competence while at the same time allowing them to be fully engaged as subjects (Christensen and Prout 2002). Through this they could systematically advance their skills and knowledge in a safe and supported context. They also allowed the children opportunities to learn by making mistakes, to practice emotional work and to engage in reciprocal relations with key adults (Mayall 2002, p. 107). These findings indicate possibilities for generational relations

(Alanen 2001b) to allow children their own agency, without endangering the social fabric; something that schools particularly seem to fear if they allow children genuine participation in decision-making (Prout 2001). Others (see, for instance, Cockburn 1998; Gilligan 1999; Punch 2001) have also suggested a need for recognition of diversity in children's relationships with adults, and that a strict demarcation based on generation does not capture this diversity well.

In summary, in open relationships the children were co-participants in relational activity and they were able to influence outcomes and actively learn from experience. They were dynamic negotiators who could exercise some choices about the ways in which they experienced the position of child. These relationships were usually, but not exclusively, situated within the private, familial sphere. This category could be further broken down into two distinct subsets:

1. with their parents they had access to the authoritative (power-based) sorts of relationships that mixed support and care with expectations and demands
2. with other adult kin, some children were able to have engaged relationships that were akin to comradeships.

Both of these sorts of relationships enabled them to be children as active subjects. Independence manifested itself here as autonomy in carefully specified arenas of action, premised upon children's increasing capacity to be self-reliant.

Closed relationships

The children also had experience of relationships with adults that did not work well for them. These relationships were often a source of confusion and stress, challenging their belief that adults were there to look after them. They knew what a good relationship between an adult and a child looked and felt like and they also knew what it felt like when it was not working. They were less sure, however, of what to do when things were not right. They implicitly recognised the unequal power they had in relationships with adults and the risks they would take should they unsuccessfully attempt to change them. Most often these

difficult sorts of relationships were encountered in formally organised settings such as school and so the following discussion draws heavily on the children's experiences of these places.

In closed relationships the children were given pre-defined relational roles within which they were required to act. Here the position of child was largely predetermined as a passive object and there were relatively few ways in which they could influence the nature of experience. Their learning was primarily by listening and doing as they were told. Closed relationships lacked opportunities for genuine engagement and participation. These settings did not accommodate the notion of child agency, rights and active involvement (Hill 1999a, p 10; Prout 2000b). Independence was framed here in terms of children learning how to comply with expectations and demands, and was situated within a wider discourse of children as lacking competence (see Christensen and Prout 2002; Mason and Falloon 2001; Thomson and Holland 2002).

The children's descriptions of how they dealt with asking questions at school provided a very clear example of the impact of closed relationships. It was unusual for them to express confidence that they could ask questions, seek repetition of explanations or clarification of instructions from teachers. They talked of the need for teachers to realise that it was very scary when they did not understand what was required of them. They would have valued an environment where it was acceptable not to know or understand, even when something had been explained several times. These experiences stood in marked contrast to research elsewhere which has suggested that children found that teachers over-explain, and in so doing waste time that they could spend completing tasks (Mayall 2002, p. 77-78).

In the current study the children suggested a significant disjunction between adult perceptions of the amount of explanation that was necessary for learning to take place, or for communication to be effective, and the actual level of explanation they required. They elaborated upon the strategies they used to avoid detection when they did not understand rather than strategies to effectively seek out clarification. This was surprising, because this was a group of academically competent children who did not usually come into conflict with

teachers. However, their responses pointed to a set of beliefs about children and learning that reinforced their object status and their position in the generational order as subordinate, passive and disengaged from critical points of influence (Christensen and James 2001, p. 79; Holloway and Valentine 2000, p. 769; Prout 2001b, p. 198). When Tim talked in the vignettes of how hard he found it to understand and concentrate on explanations, he was expressing a common experience among his peers.

Paradoxically then, it was in their formal learning contexts that the children were least likely to seek support, guidance or clarification from adults. In effect, the structure of these formal learning encounters got in the way of their learning. Asking for help was difficult, and it was notable that the school had recognised this with the provision of 'question-asking training' at some previous time, as Lucy noted in the vignettes. The lack of confidence in asking for clarification was, however, much more generalised than this, and other than Lucy, who had been to the special classes, none of the children were confident that they could admit to not knowing, not understanding or to having missed part of the explanation at school. Pianta (1992) has drawn attention to the need for schools to take account of children's emotional needs as well as their learning requirements, and from time to time educational research turns to the social and emotional culture of classrooms to try to explain why pupil achievement rates are not as we would like them to be (see, for instance, recent Aotearoa/New Zealand work by Phillips, McNaughton and MacDonald 2003).

Oldman (1994a, p. 46) suggests an inevitable opposition between the interests of children and the interests of adults who engage in childwork (this is adults doing paid work involving children). Closed relationships are more likely to be the norm in school settings because they reflect the discourses in which contemporary childhood is embedded (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998). A pedagogical model that allowed teachers to step across this divide would, in effect, need to recast these relations and with it reframe one major site at which child-adult relations are played out. Of course, schools are an integral part of contemporary society, they reflect and reinforce, as well as create, how we understand children and define childhood. This interactive process involves schools enacting prevailing discourses as well as creating them. Exceptional teachers somehow manage to resist this both in daily

interactions with students and also in how they think in broad philosophical terms about the task of teaching as a socially embedded act.

Through experience, children develop strategies to manage the situations they confront in places like school (see, for example, Christensen and James 2001, p. 83 regarding the way children manage the need to appear to be focusing when class time gets boring). These strategies are often covert. Sometimes I observed children at school directly acting, rescuing each other from risky encounters with adults. This was usually achieved by the high-stakes strategy of attempting to distract the adult from the ‘offending’ child. These rescue strategies underscored the almost inevitable tension that such structures created for both children and teachers. They reflected a shared identity between the children as a social group (Mayall 2002, p. 126-127). Recall, for instance, Boy 1’s rescuing of Damien (see Chapter Seven) and the absence of any ongoing friendship between these two children.

Mayall (1994a, p. 126) provides insight into the way in which the structure of the school enterprise makes closed relationships more likely:

At school, however, teachers are shielded by social conventions and shield themselves from direct interaction with individual children, and thereby from the lessons such interaction would provide. In an earlier study, my colleague and I observed a similar insulation: health visitors who had children of their own did not use their experiential knowledge in their paid work, but like their childless colleagues, relied on book learning about the management of children.

Indeed, the dominant paradigm at school emphasises the developmental account of childhood (Pianta 1992) and, therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the primary pedagogies most commonly utilised within schools approach children as lacking competence and with little to contribute to the overall enterprise (Holloway and Valentine 2000).

The children often experienced closed relationships as relational failures and commonly took responsibility for these on their own shoulders, or believed that other children were to blame. This attribution of responsibility may in fact be more structural than the children's reports suggest. Recall Gersch and Nolan's (1994) findings in Chapter Two that dysfunctional teacher-pupil relationships were an important precursor for pupil exclusion from school. Does this finding, alongside children's sense of responsibility for relational failures, suggest that children learn to shoulder blame for such failed relationships? Mayall (2001b) would suggest that this is so. Being a child in such situations is the equivalent of being wrong "since the school is a model environment, the fault must lie with the children" (Mayall 2001b, p. 122). Further, her more recent work (2002, p. 127) indicates that children actively seek to build relationships with teachers. The relational components of the interactions children have at school are therefore of critical importance, and their failure likely to have a significant impact.

In this connection, when talking about things that made them angry, none of the children identified adult actions. The children focused upon their own actions or those of their peers as causing them anger in much the same way as they usually shouldered the responsibility for things going wrong in relationships with adults. In taking the burden of responsibility for these experiences on themselves, and being unable to name anger as an emotion that adults could provoke in them, the children demonstrated to us that they had learned their relational lessons well (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 104). Given their low social status (Alanen 1994; Brannen and O'Brien 1995), they were scarcely likely to contemplate the possibility that anger was an appropriate emotion to have in relation to adults. To be angry would be to raise the possibility that they might have been wronged, and this was not a viable option for a child. Children clearly can and do get angry with adults. Their consistent inability to cite adult actions as examples of things that made them angry indicated the extent to which they had learned not to speak the unspeakable, as speaking up can be dangerous and disruptive (Brown and Gilligan 1992, p. 48, 77 and 146). This knowledge was what held Lizzie back from interceding on her classmate's behalf.

When I returned to the children during 2001 and 2002 to obtain their feedback on my developing analysis we talked about their school experiences. The unfairness of encounters with adults at school and the lack of power they had to actually put their point of view was a very salient issue for them. They observed that at primary school adults seemed all powerful, they were so much bigger than the children. Now that they were at high school, and physically bigger, several commented how overpowering the adult presence had seemed when they were younger. In doing this, they provided an interesting counter-point to commonly held adult views of primary school as a very safe, nurturing sort of environment where children receive a relatively gentle introduction to institutional experience. Indeed, such reasoning lay behind the development of ‘recapitated’⁷⁶ primary schools, such as the one these children attended.

David, recalling his time in the “*dark classroom*” of 2000, noted that this teacher had subsequently been removed from classroom contact; an action he attributed to a build-up of parental resistance to having their children placed with this teacher. He commented to me that “*it took two whole years*” for the school to respond, and that it was only after parents became involved in significant numbers that anything was done; “*no-one listened to us, but we knew what was happening all along*”, he said. Others recalled being humiliated and not believed (in effect, an absence of natural justice) when problems arose at school. They confirmed the difficulties in seeking clarification and asking questions, highlighting the ways in which they relied on each other to fill in their knowledge gaps rather than risking humiliation by asking the teacher. The children confirmed my sense of their relationships with teachers as primarily closed and their status as passive objects. They recognised that they could not successfully challenge this state of affairs in any direct way and recalled the covert strategies they had used to make these situations more manageable. The children had also retained memories of those special teachers who had created class environments where they could be engaged subjects.

⁷⁶ Recapitated schools are primary schools that have chosen to extend their enrolment policy to include year seven and year eight (form one and form two) pupils and so to cater for children from new entrant level until the point at which they leave for high school.

In summary, closed relationships were embedded in adult views of children as not competent and therefore as requiring adult management. The interactions that flowed from this view required the children to be passive and disengaged. It was paradoxical that in learning encounters the children were least likely to be able to demonstrate and develop their competence because here the dominant definition of what it meant to be a child was one that required them to behave more as vessels into which knowledge would be poured, than as participants who were engaged in a learning encounter.

Implications of open and closed relationships for children

The children felt embedded in a set of important familial relationships with key adults that brought with them both obligations and protections. As a result, they had a strong sense of loyalty and responsibility to these people, particularly their parents. In Weberian terms they actively participated in a power-based relationship that they saw as embodying legitimate authority over them. They clearly accepted their positioning as children within this relational order (Alanen 2001a). When thinking about how difficult relationships might change they emerged in Prout's (2001, p. 198) terms as "reformers not revolutionaries"; they wished for modifications to the ways in which adults related to them and opportunities to influence decisions and processes (Hill, Laybourn and Borland 1996), not an absence of rules and expectations.

Their experience of child status was qualitatively different at home than it was in other settings, particularly at school and some of their after-school activities. While relationships are usually subject to negotiation and can and do change over time, the extent to which school relationships could be modified in response to the children's own agency was more limited than was the case at home. The sense of interdependence fostered at home worked well for the children and enabled them to develop some areas of functional independence and autonomy within a context that was protective and forgiving.

The private nature of home life contained greater possibilities for them to act as agents in their own right. Their positive narratives in relation to adult kin are therefore not surprising. Their adult non-kin relationships were predominantly in public contexts, such as schools and

formal after school activities. Here the institutional character of the setting had a profound influence on the way in which relationships were structured and as a result upon the way in which the position of child was experienced (Mason and Falloon 2001, p. 112-113). Two of the key social processes that significantly influence the nature of childhood in contemporary western industrialised societies, familialisation and institutionalisation (Edwards and Allred 1999, p. 262-263; Prout 2002, p. 70), had generated quite different sorts of experiences in the generational order for these children. Their experiences of childhood were segmented along these two axes with private family relationships being more open and institutional relationships being more closed.

It is interesting, in this connection, to reflect upon Valentine and Holloway's (2001, p. 67) observations that by embracing technology for play children often become more competent computer users than the adults around them, and in the process, reverse the traditional casting of adult-child relations. Given that knowledge is a critical component of power in relationships, the growth of new technologies may yet interrupt or reshape the nature of child-adult relations more generally. The ways in which adults and children relate over technology, particularly in the home and the classroom, where adults may find themselves in the position of requiring the technological expertise of children to solve problems (even for relatively mundane activities like programming and resetting the clocks on video recorders) underscores the contextual sensitivity of childhood as a social status⁷⁷.

In considering the complexity of children's location as child within the generational order, Prout (2000a, p. 16) asks the question "How is it that sometimes children exercise it [agency] ... whilst on other occasions they do not?" Reflecting on the children's narratives collected in the current research, this question would seem to be answerable, at least in part, by the fact that in some settings adults expressly allow for it and in other situations they expressly forbid it. Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn (1998) would concur when they suggest that the different levels of powerlessness children experience in different settings

⁷⁷ However, for a very different analysis see discussion in Chapter Ten (Time related thinking) reporting findings from Facer et al. (2001b) suggesting that children's engagement with technology is primarily concerned with fun and peer relationships rather than related to skill acquisition. These very different findings again underscore the multiple and sometimes contradictory nature of childhood experience (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998).

depend upon the adult definitions of appropriate child behaviour in each context. Hill and Tisdall (1997, p. 20) argue that:

...it is the power which is the main differentiating factor between children and adults. Children have little formal control of space and time, decisions and resources. Adults constrain children's choices ostensibly in the interests of children, but this can too readily become a rationalisation for marginalising children for the convenience of adults.

Thus the social constructs that adults have of children and childhood exercise a significant influence over the type of relationship and interaction that is possible (Edwards and Alldred 1999; Edwards and David 1997). As a result, these definitions structure the particular experiences of childhood that individuals have in different places and times.

The children demonstrated their capacity to have engaged interactions with adults by referring to the many varied types of conversations they had with their parents, and in often nominating them as their first port of call when needing support or advice. In fact, their capacity to be active participants in this research project in itself provided testimony to their capacity to be engaged subjects. What this meant was that lack of active engagement as a subject and having 'voice' (Alldred 1998; Mauthner and Doucet 1998) could not be attributed to their lack of maturity or capacity, as a developmental perspective might suggest, but rather to the structuring of the social relations/situations they found themselves in, and their lesser power to influence the way such relations and situations were experienced.

Discussion now moves to a consideration of the spatial and temporal dimensions of the children's experiences.

- Chapter Ten -

Time and Space

Introduction

Temporal and spatial matters form an increasingly significant focus for the new social studies of childhood (Haudrup Christensen 2002; Holloway and Valentine 2000; James and Prout 1990b). This chapter explores a number of different dimensions of time and space. It begins by considering the ways in which the children thought about and represented time, and this discussion links to earlier material (Chapter Nine) that explored the connection between the children's future thinking and their thoughts about themselves.

The discussion next highlights some critical dimensions of home; representing stability, as containing opportunities to work on relationships with parents and as a place for children to have their own time. The children placed a premium upon 'family time' and external pressures (such as work) eroded the capacity of parents and the children to spend regular, unexceptional sorts of times together. Time as free time or play time was found to be a somewhat problematic concept, as well as a resource that was in relatively short supply. Several of the parents placed a high value on busyness by their children and they actively encouraged them to be involved in a wide range of extracurricular activities. This further increased the scarcity of time, as both free and family time. Finally, home was experienced as a place of self-management for a number of the children.

School was divided up into two different sorts of time; time to play with friends and socialise, and schoolwork time. The former time was understood as a richly textured exciting time while the latter was experienced as a large, relatively undifferentiated block. This was managed in a variety of ways, but was not a meaningful part of the children's daily experiential landscapes.

The global resonance of the risk culture (Beck 1992), particularly in relation to the social construction of childhood (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998), could be seen in the current study. Reductions in availability of local environments as safe, welcoming places for children, the pressures on parents to provide financially and the linked need to ensure that children were safe, worked together to increase the likelihood that children would spend much of their non-school time at home or in formally organised activities. Regular and easy access to open spaces was the casualty of the need to balance all these competing pressures. Accordingly, ideas of home as a safe haven and the outside world as a place of potential danger played a powerful role in influencing the ways in which the children were able to use their time and the places they frequented.

Time-related thinking

While time, particularly its logical sequencing, is an important aspect of adult sense of self, and adult theory and discourse (Barglow 1994, p. 198-200; Jenks 1996, p. 15), the children did not appear to be so connected to it, in its linear, literal sense. School, for instance, did not routinely feature as one of the pathways that connected them to their occupational goals, even when they talked of jobs that had educational pre-requisites. In fact, only three of the children saw schoolwork as either directly or indirectly contributing to their futures. David wanted to become an actor, and he articulated a quite specific pathway that connected the present to the future so that he could accomplish this. However, this was unusual and his plan did not involve school at all. Some of the children talked of going to university as part of their pathway to employment, and this was so even when they had no specific occupation in mind. Like David, they did not identify school as a first step on the way to their futures, although they clearly knew in a general sense that they needed to complete school in order to

access tertiary education. Others talked of school as something they needed to get out of the way in the process of becoming an adult. In these cases, **leaving** school was a marker for the beginning of the transition to adulthood, but not significant in terms of actively contributing to the achievement of any particular dimensions of their futures, occupationally or otherwise.

Consistent with the children's narratives, others suggest that children see learning time at school as a relatively undifferentiated block in their days (Christensen and James 2001) and advance the lack of control they experience over such time as the reason for this. Looking more widely, Thomson and Holland (2002) argue that children respond with a sense of fatalism to situations where they have little control. In a similar way, perhaps the children's perception of the medium term as subject to adult control and definition was the reason why they did not often think in such time frames, and did not see them as the route to their futures. Sophie and Ellie, the only two children who produced material that was located in the medium term, both took this as an opportunity to explore their own agency and their work was distinctive for these two reasons (its location in the medium term and its emphasis upon their own agency).

In demonstrating clarity about the distant future without a sense of logical progression to that later time, the other children tell us a deeper, possibly more worrying, story about the disconnection they feel from the progress of their lives. They also draw attention to the different ways they have of thinking about themselves and the time-present orientation they have to their life projects (Edwards and Alldred 1999, p. 263; Mayall 2001b, p. 120). Facer et al. (2001b) have recently highlighted children's immediate orientations. These authors have found that the primary meaning children attach to their use of new technologies is practical; they are interested in how they can use these materials to advance their interests (that is, to play) and relationships in the present, and have little interest in developing competence for the good of their futures.

The children's responses to the two strategies adopted by coaches in the Major Production provided another window into the ways in which they managed themselves in relation to

time. In much the same way that many of the children indicated that they did not think a lot about the future when we talked about turning ten or eleven, preferring instead to enjoy each age as it came to them, so the interactions I observed between the adult coaches and the child-performers at practices suggested a very strong in-the-moment thread to their management strategies. The most successful coaching strategy was the one that retained a present-time focus and which also linked into the playful aspects of their thinking. It emphasised creative and imaginative dimensions and de-emphasised the future focus. In this way, it engaged with their capacity to imagine (Hallden 1994; James 1993), step outside their everyday selves and to adopt new selves through their own creative power, while retaining the present-time focus. This strategy was a very productive medium for engaging with the children over this shared task.

The children also thought more widely about the future and here a sense of progress competed with worries about what might happen on the world stage. They constructed fantasy techno-futures where the power of technology to create as well as to destroy was evident. Their narratives posed technology as both champion and as the ultimate threat to their security. By wishing for the elimination of world poverty, an end to war and the cure of disease, the children demonstrated their acute awareness of the wider world. More importantly, as has been noted elsewhere (Borland et al. 1998, p. 32-37; Christensen and Prout 2002; Mason and Falloon 2001; Stafford et al. 2003, p. 364) they also hinted at their moral agency, something the developmental account and dominant discourses of childhood have been reluctant to acknowledge. The children thought and worried about what happened elsewhere. In the same way that they would, if given the chance, have redressed the unfairness they sometimes observed closer to home (such as when a teacher appeared to 'pick on' another child) they also wished to create a global order that was more fair⁷⁸. In identifying the dual potential of technology, they clearly also understood the critical role of humans in creating different sorts of outcomes through its use. At the same time, they drew

⁷⁸ In fact, fairness is a consistent theme in research involving children internationally. For example, on a slightly different but related topic, Stafford et al. (2003, p. 364) noted that children's views on consultation were that it must be "fair, representative and inclusive", suggesting that much of their experience of being asked has not, in fact, historically been experienced as equitable. Elsewhere (Mason and Falloon 2001, p. 108) children and young people explain their experiences as "similar to minorities, but we don't get as many rights".

attention to their struggles to reconcile the inconsistencies they saw in the social world they inhabited.

Home and family

Home as stability

Home was a very important place to the children. It recurred as a theme in many different areas of this study, and was connected strongly to their sense of being part of a family and also to their sense of themselves. Stability, security and predictability for themselves and those close to them featured prominently in the material the children generated. This was seen, for instance, in the frequency with which they identified the positive dimensions of home and their concerns about financial security within their families. Of course, the powerful nature of home and family could be posed as problematic (Alanen 2001a), reflecting as it did their constrained capacity to use other spaces. Notwithstanding this, in terms of the narratives of these particular children, a sense of home as a place of safety and stability was an important and very positive component of their narratives.

While houses may be thought of as concrete, material things, the emotional significance of this place was also clearly a matter that influenced several of the children's choice of their homes in their lists of things they would wish for and that they did not want to change⁷⁹. For instance, for the children who sought to preserve their homes unchanged, the fact that significant individuals, such as grandparents, had contributed to home renovations was the factor that lay behind their inclusion of home in their lists. Some children had lived in a number of houses, or after parental separation lived between two homes, while others were living in the only home they had ever known; the physical space for all of these children was intimately and strongly connected to their sense of their family and their individual identities. Even when the children had lived in more than one house, their attachment to their home as a place of safety, predictability and significant emotional meaning was clear. Home for these children was very much where the heart was.

⁷⁹ It will be recalled that during the interviews, I asked the children to make three wishes, and to tell me three things that they would and would not change (see Chapter Four).

Time for relationships with parents

Time was a critical component of strong relationships for the children, particularly with the key adults in their world. They spoke of seeking adult availability, not only for shared activities but they also sought more common sorts of time such as the active and engaged presence of their parents in their lives. Toby and Lizzie both highlighted these time-related qualities when referring to the listening and talking that went on in their households. Taking a slightly different approach to the matter, David suggested that parents needed to exercise care about the number of children they produced in order to make sure there was sufficient time and other resources to go around. The children's narratives resonated with the views expressed by their northern-hemisphere counterparts in seeking not so much 'quality time' with their parents (Haudrup Christensen 2002), but rather access to the persons their parents were. They were seeking a continual investment of relational everyday time, rather than an artificially created sense of special time. It was this sense of ordinary family time to which Haudrup Christensen (2002, p. 81) referred when she differentiated between things done "as a family" and things done "with the family". The latter notion encompassed all the routine and ordinary activities of daily life, and it was this that the children particularly valued.

Like children elsewhere (Borland et al. 1998, p. 52), the children in the current study resented the way that other pressures (such as work) intruded into family time. Time to be together with no particular purpose was a critical ingredient in the children's conceptualisations of good families, good parenting and childhoods that conformed to their views of what 'ought' to be. Mayall's (2002, p. 107) work also drew attention to the significance for children of ordinary family time. In particular, she highlighted the way that such unhurried, unexceptional times allowed children to engage in reciprocal emotional work, caring for parents in ordinary ways such as spontaneously making them cups of tea and putting things away.

Building on the sense of family life as ebb and flow, rather than as the creation of intermittent bursts of exceptional engagement, the children in the current study drew attention to the way that time availability was linked to opportunities to talk and where there was enough time for them to be heard. This sort of time facilitated the development of

strong, trusting relationships between themselves and their parents and contributed to their sense of belonging. Both the children and their parents had to balance competing pressures and demands on their time. Time to do their own things and time as a family was often in short supply. These sorts of time experiences were often fitted in and around other time demands to which the children and their parents were subject. Things such as family holidays became an important opportunity when parents worked to achieve a familial balance to the structured focus of their busy lives.

With their emphasis upon the importance of everyday time, the children's narratives challenged many assumptions about what it was that children needed from their parents. In doing this they questioned beliefs about what the 'good' family was and they also cast doubt upon the assumptions underlying welfare to work policies that expect that parents will sacrifice time with children in favour of paid employment (Frame and Berrick 2003; Frasch 2002; Maharey 2004). Further, they questioned the emphasis placed upon parents making 'special' times available to their children and the assumption that this sort of strategy would generate happy childhoods and contribute to social reproduction (Haudrup Christensen 2002, p. 79). The children in this research placed a premium on ordinary family times together and more than this, upon having easy and frequent access to such times. Acceptable parenting to them meant having sufficient time to be around their parents. In this they echoed the voices of children elsewhere (see, for instance, Montandon 2001, p. 58)

Children's free time?

Play is of profound significance in childhood where fun is understood to be a fundamental child right that to some extent balances their dependency and lack of control (Ennew 1994; Mayall 2002, p. 132-135). The literature suggests that broader social beliefs about what 'is good for children' also influences the sorts of things they are able to do, particularly the extent to which they can choose how to use their non-school time (Matthews et al. 2000; Petrie 1994; Ying 2003). As others (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 107; Punch 2001) have noted, the unsupervised free time of children is also conditional upon meeting parental expectations about safety, acceptable behaviour, activities and peers. In the current study, high levels of workforce and tertiary education participation by parents meant that the children needed to

budget their out-of-school time in more rather than less structured ways. Some of the children needed to choose a range of after school and holiday activities to cover times when parents could not be home to supervise. The time use patterns for a number of girls were heavily influenced by the value their parents placed on participation in formal activity and about children being busy. These busy girls also had brothers (not participants in this research) and their lives were similarly busy with after school activities. What at first seemed like a gendered difference in time-use was actually a product of the values parents held about what were appropriate things for children to do with their time. The significant amount of time taken up by formal activities meant that many of the children experienced childhood in quite highly structured ways. Prout (2002, p. 70), in this connection, suggests that childhood internationally is increasingly coloured by institutional practices and it would seem that even in small town Aotearoa/New Zealand a large proportion of children's experiences are generated through adult-managed institutional activity.

Given the overlapping sets of motivations that lay behind participation in extracurricular activity for the busy children, many of which had little to do with their expressed desires, it was perhaps not surprising that they did not seek or find organised after school activity to be an important source of friendship. Rather than providing opportunities to spend time with friends, such participation appeared to be focused upon ensuring the effective and safe use of non-school time and upon the development of certain sorts of skills and competencies valued by their parents. This conclusion is supported in an indirect way by current work in the new social studies of childhood in the United Kingdom and Western Europe (see Ennew 1994; Facer et al. 2001a; Morrow 1994; Ward 1994) that suggests that parents are increasingly using structured after school activities to manage perceived risks to children's safety and to expose them to developmental opportunities. As the purpose of the activity has changed so too, it would seem, has the way in which children engage in it and the things they derive from their participation. Given the shrinking spatial boundaries of children (Hillman, Adams and Whitelegg 1991; Hillman and Adams 1992) and the increasing extent to which their experience is accumulated in institutional settings (Edwards and Allred 1999), the capacity to have truly free time, time to do with as one wishes, can be thought of as an increasingly scarce childhood resource.

The children who had lesser levels of extracurricular participation spent some of their free time with friends and also reported enjoying being able to have time to themselves at home. They achieved a balance between social and solitary time, and their solitary time was used to read, to pursue interests, to write stories and to engage in fantasy play in their rooms or outside in their yards. When the institutional presence in their lives was more muted, they created other sorts of experiences for themselves. Their solitary activity patterns suggested a rich personal life that they managed themselves. The loss of social understandings of play as fun, as something children do because, quite simply, it is enjoyable (Huizinga 1949, cited in Mayall 2002, p. 132-133) has been the casualty of both increasing risk sensitivity by parents and the power of popular and developmental discourses about childhood as a time of preparation (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998). Freedom to engage in self-directed creative and fantasy play, in particular, appears to have been significantly eroded in contemporary childhoods.

Electronic media were a popular free time activity for many of the children. In the current study, it did seem that these technologies offered new frontiers to be explored and some exciting possibilities for children in a time when their ability to freely explore their physical worlds appeared to be subject to increasing restrictions (Matthews et al. 2000; Valentine 1996). Console games were popular with many of the boys and several girls. Computer use was more evenly distributed across the whole group. Use of the Internet was a feature of their recreational repertoires, and they were also learning how to use this resource to assist them in their schoolwork⁸⁰. Similar to their peers elsewhere (Suss et al. 2001) the children usually played electronic games either by themselves or with peers, but seldom as part of ongoing social interaction within their families. Television watching was more often a family activity. Indeed, children often report that watching television is a valued component of family time (Kovarik 1994).

⁸⁰ 'Texting', the use of mobile phones to communicate brief text messages, a popular activity in 2004, was not in evidence in 2000 when the fieldwork for this project was completed.

While they may at times have played electronic games in a solitary way, it was clear that these devices also functioned as relational tools. This could be seen in the way that they developed their own lexicons that were wider than simply the games or characters that came to them in the game packages or programmes. They used technology in complex and creative ways adapting plots, characters and other materials in their play, in their schoolwork and in their social interactions with each other. Furthermore, for some, knowledge of the games, characters and plots was a pre-requisite for group membership.

Some authors (for example Ganetz 1995, p. 87) have argued that the use of technology by boys is not a relational activity:

...boys do not stay at home to work on relationships but because of an interest in technology.

However, in the current study, rather than an isolated and relatively solitary activity, game playing appeared to extend across the boy's different contexts. The things that happened 'around' game playing were equally important to those that occurred within the games (Casas 2001, p. 57). The conversations they had about their games represented a dense, meaningful set of child and game-specific talk that was an important part of their recreational repertoires. Through these conversations the children continually created and re-created themselves. Indeed, as Hutchby and Moran-Ellis have noted (2001, p. 3), technology played an important role in the "cultural presences of childhood". Through their talking, they defined and secured their sense of belonging in their friendship groups, and because of the global nature of the technology they were participating in, a more diffuse sense of belonging to a very large virtual peer group was also possible. In the same way as happened with very different sorts of children's games in the past, these games provided opportunities for rich, engaged conversation, shared activity and fun.

The separation between parents and children in this study over electronic games, while not total, was notable. Most parents did not play these games with their children. Only one boy talked about the various consoles he shared with his father, and these times of shared play

were important to him. While parents may have gate-kept around the boundaries of the game-playing, like some of their European peers (Casas 2001, p. 44), their comparative absence from actual game encounters meant that the children experienced considerable autonomy over use once they were playing. Of course, the separation between children's and adult's intellectual and experiential worlds is not new; generations of children have played games away from adults. The implications, therefore, of this new form of separation may not be at all significant. However, it is relevant to consider to whom they now explain their experiences in these games, with whom they share their perceived values (Casas 2001, p. 57) and whether or not these sorts of encounters have the potential to alter the strong attachment between parents and children that was so apparent in this study.

Self-supervision

Several families could not access formal out of school care and neither did they have access to informal family or non-family care. This meant that some children had to care for themselves when parents could not be home to supervise. When self-supervising the children were required to be at home, inside, sometimes locked inside, and to not have other children around; they were very private times. Overseas research (for example, Alanen 2001a; Phadraig 1994; Solberg 1990) from different cultural contexts, suggests that the pattern of children occupying home without adult oversight is not something that is necessarily and inevitably unsafe or bad for children. Rather, the context within which it occurs has a profound impact upon whether it works well. The way in which parents managed these times, rushing home during the day to check on their children, underlined the particularly provincial context in which these children were living and reflected their Anglo-Saxon context. Alanen (2001a) found that Finnish children and parents, in contrast, managed the work-family interface very differently, and with less anxiety, because social structures there actively supported high levels of workforce participation by parents. This cross-cultural juxtaposition of childhood research underlines the socially constructed nature of childhood by drawing the eye to the different possibilities for everyday experience that these different socio-cultural contexts have thrown up.

The colonisation of home space by the children while their parents were at work is something that may not be at all new, but there is little local research on this dimension of children's lives. In fact, the prevalence of self-care is unknown at this time. However, even casual work-place conversations with parents who have children aged between eleven and fifteen years will reveal that there is likely to be a substantial and increasing number of young people in this situation. The implications of increased workforce participation for childhood and for the capacity of families to provide safe and positive environments for children have to date not been a consistent focus of policy or research interest in this country.

There was clear evidence of children developing their own ways of occupying their homes unsupervised from a relatively young age. In such situations, home became the children's domain at different points during the day, and they had some control over how this space was used. Sometimes home became a contested space, as siblings used the freedom to play out ongoing dramas amongst themselves. Despite this, the emotional attachment to home remained for the children. The self-managing children both here and reported in other research (Phadraig 1994; Solberg 1990), illustrate the ways in which beliefs about children's capacities to be independent can change in response to changing adult needs. Rather than being fixed, their capacity to manage these situations expanded or contracted in response to the particular circumstances they faced. For example, Ellen's narrative illustrated the way in which she could become more independent when her circumstances required this (see Chapter Seven, p. 163).

In the current study, parents used electronic products to assist in the management of times when work commitments meant that they could not directly supervise their children. Electronic products played two roles here. They functioned as a form of electronic baby-sitting and the products themselves also helped make home an attractive place to be. Through these complementary forces, home became a preferred play space and computer/electronic game-use an indispensable component in parents' time management and the children's time use patterns. During self-supervising times the children made extensive use of these products (see Chapter Six).

For the children in the current study who self-cared while their parents were at work, their role as home-workers in terms of taking up household tasks was less prominent than reported by key writers in the new social studies of childhood, such as Solberg (1990). The children did talk at different times about enjoying the beginnings of independence but this was primarily linked in their minds with being able to do things on their own, rather than picking up domestic responsibilities. Involvement with domestic chores was related to parental views about what was appropriate for children to contribute to the family rather than a direct contribution to household work requirements (see Chapter Five).

In summary, the positive, strong sense of home portrayed by the children is particularly salient for the nature of childhood given the increasingly dominant role it plays as a site where they gain much of their experience and engage in significant amounts of recreation, and this point is developed further later in this chapter (see Time and space as risk). The children's time had a managed and organised character and opportunities for the idealised childhood 'free times' (Matthews et al. 2000) were relatively rare. This was a product of familial need for organised and safe out of school care because of parental employment or study commitments, and/or because of the values held about what was appropriate for children to do with their time. Education in both a formal and an informal sense was a major component of the children's time. Consequently, the sense of development and growth was a prominent dimension of these children's childhoods. However, despite the large amount of time they spent in formal and informal learning contexts, learning time was not a notable part of their narratives. The times over which they experienced greatest control, play time and free time at home, featured more frequently. In a similar way, they had greatest clarity about the immediate and the distant future, while the medium term, a period in their lives that would be largely controlled by others, was the least clear. Their representations of time reflected the way in which the power and control of others structured the nature of their experience (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 20).

The pattern of children spending time at home self-supervising is a clear example of the impact of wider social changes upon the nature of childhood. These care experiences reflect

the profound changes in the social and economic environment that occurred during the children's short life times. These changes were not prompted by concerns with the needs of children and parents, and took place largely without reference to their impact on them. While approaches to parenting and family values create one sort of context within which children live their lives, here it can be seen that the macro-political and economic context can also exercise a significant influence upon the nature of specific childhoods. It is unclear whether self-supervision constitutes a risk for children (and society) or represents an important opportunity for children to develop their agency and demonstrate their competence (Christensen and Prout 2002; Holloway and Valentine 2000). There is little knowledge about this dimension of contemporary childhood in this country. The location of self-care within the private sphere creates some challenges for researchers in terms of accessing information. But this is unlikely to be the only reason why it has received such little consistent attention to date. Self-care by children under the age of 14 years involves parents acting outside the law⁸¹ and so research on this matter is likely to face some resistance from parents. Furthermore, the knowledge that may be generated from such research could raise social and economic issues that are difficult and inconvenient for adults (such as, parents, policy makers and employers) to deal with. However, if for no other reason than it causes us to reconsider how we think about childhood, it constitutes a very important site for further research.

School time

While the children's narratives about family time and the times they spent pursuing their own interests suggested richly textured times that could be in short supply and which contributed important things to relationship development and their sense of wellbeing, their school narratives suggested different ways of experiencing time. International research that explores the social construction of childhood (for example, Christensen and James 2001; Mayall 2002) has indicated that children are clear that school is the first step in a working life and, accordingly, that it is important to spend this time wisely and work hard. It has also

⁸¹ In Aotearoa/New Zealand children under fourteen years of age are required to be adequately supervised. This means that parents who leave their children at home while they work or participate in training expose themselves to the risk of legal sanction.

noted that children recognise the disjunction between such socially legitimated views of school, as time well spent, and their daily experience that does not always seem to have a direct relationship to this productive sense of moving forward. In the current study, the children primarily experienced schoolwork as boring and did not think of it as an important first step in an overall life plan. More commonly, school was seen as a good place to meet friends and to play physical games in bigger groups than was usually possible outside of school.

The priority the children accorded to play and social time at school is not a new finding and has resonance with other work (Christensen and James 2001; Cullingford 1991; Holloway and Valentine 2000). However, the lack of connection between school and the future was more pronounced in this work than elsewhere (see, for example, Cullingford 1991, p. 45; Mayall 2002, p. 75). That the children did not generally attach strategic importance to school was connected to two things. First, the meaninglessness of many of the demands made of them was a common theme. For instance, Gemma could not see why she had to do smaller handwriting in her English book when her work was always complete and of good quality. The children reported enjoying applied subjects like technology. These seemed to have currency beyond the school gate and allowed them to be active. Unlike their counterparts in Christensen and James' (2001) work, technology held their attention because it seemed to have a point outside of school, and because it had a hands-on dimension to it⁸².

Second, the quality of relationships with teachers also exerted a strong influence upon how the children thought about class time. The feeling of being liked was linked with feeling safe and included. Without it, the children worried and they said that this made it hard for them to think and "*stay on task*". Not feeling liked created feelings of anxiety that got in the way of their learning. This has profound implications for the way in which teaching is approached and recent work on literacy among primary school children has pointed to significant improvements in learning when teachers approach children as engaged subjects

⁸² It is possible that the reason for this difference in part lay in the fact that in Aotearoa/New Zealand, technology is defined more broadly to include food, textiles, wood and metalwork subjects as well as computing, whereas the children in Christensen and James' (2001) work were referring to computing only, and, as they noted, this subject, in particular, seemed to link quite directly into the work the children were doing around identity and relationships.

(Phillips, McNaughton and MacDonald 2003). Mayall's (2002) work is similarly clear on this dimension of teacher-pupil interaction; she argues that children invest considerable energy in attempting to construct relationships with teachers. The social construction of children at school as not capable and as objects of adult work (Oldman 1994a; 1994b) makes it easy to overlook this emotional work and also to misinterpret it as attention-seeking or wilfully disruptive.

The children were considerably more expressive when talking about their non-learning time than they were about class-work time. These children, like their counterparts overseas, were clear that the best parts of school time were the play times (Christensen and James 2001; Cullingford 1991; Kovarik 1994). Perhaps in discounting or ignoring the things that happened during class time they underscored the way in which the education system is structured around the needs and priorities of adults (Oldman 1994a; 1994b; Phadraig 1994). They had the most to say about the times when they could exercise some direct control and choice. Of course, as Fook (2002) notes, where there is power, there is also resistance. Indeed, there were numerous examples of covert resistance, by the girls in particular, in their accounts of class time. Ganetz (1995, p. 85) suggests that the development of sub-cultural style among young people represents acts of resistance to the oppressive use of adult power and control. In the school setting, these children did not usually elect to overtly challenge. They more frequently chose less obvious, more complex strategies to maintain a sense of themselves when their contexts became oppressive. The message, however, was clear; when they had the chance to act as engaged subjects their capacity to be effective learners increased.

The value of adding a social constructionist analysis to pedagogical theory and practice can be clearly seen from the children's accounts. Approaching children from a base of respect, considering their wider social and emotional needs and engaging with them over learning as a shared task, would seem to have much to offer given current concerns about lower literacy and numeracy levels among children and increasing levels of child exclusion from primary schools. These perspectives help explain how learning encounters are experienced by children, the meanings they take from such encounters and the manner in which these

matters feed into the way in which they position themselves as different sorts of learners in settings like schools. They also provide teachers with new repertoires for approaching students and understanding the way in which they, as teachers, understand the things they observe children doing in classrooms.

Time and space as risk

Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn (1998, p. 691) suggest that the particular ways in which childhood is socially constructed in late modernity is increasingly sensitive to risk and risk anxiety. Parental concerns about the safety of their children in public spaces are clearly a global trend that has a highly significant impact upon the way in which childhood is experienced in the current era (Facer et al. 2001a, p. 17; Holloway and Valentine 2000). In practical terms, these concerns appear to significantly change the places where children engage in leisure activity (Boyden 1990; Brannen and O'Brien 1995; Ward 1994). Smith (2000a, p. 3-4) has argued that parental anxieties and sensitivity to risk has "re-patterned" the physical manifestation of children's social interactions, and risk sensitivity appeared to play a similar role for the children in this small Aotearoa/New Zealand town. The impact of discourses of risk (Beck 1992; Bessant, 2003; Furedi, 2002; Lupton 1999; Wilkinson 2001) could be seen in the narrow spatial ranges of the children and the structured way in which much of their time was organised⁸³.

Autonomous exploring and play in the open away from adult supervision was not a significant feature of the children's lives. They confined their unstructured activities primarily to formal public play or sports areas, their own homes, those of friends and town. Given that the research took place in a small town surrounded by open country, the limited extent to which they reported using open spaces on their own or with friends was something of a surprise. Some of the children, and many of the parents, identified a big park as a risky place that required quite active management and boundaries around its use. Yet it was also an important place for both the boys and those few girls who did use parks sometimes. Risky

⁸³ The structured use of time was also partly a product of parental work and study time commitments, something that was discussed earlier in the chapter (see Chapter Ten, Children's free time?)

places can also be a lot of fun (Hart 1979; Hill and Tisdall 1997; Matthews 1992; Opie and Opie 1969), and fun is an important compensation for being a child (Mayall 2002, p. 132-135), yet these sorts of places did not feature prominently in the lives of the children in this study. The patterns of space use observed by writers in highly urbanised contexts such as the United Kingdom (Hillman 1993; Hillman, Adams and Whitelegg 1991; Holloway and Valentine 2000; Mayall 1996; Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998) were similar to those observed here. These writers have all signalled a progressive tightening of children's spatial boundaries and also an increase in the age at which children are able to act with some autonomy (Hillman and Adams 1992).

The children's use of public spaces was defined by clear rules from their parents about which parts could be used and under what circumstances. This pattern of 'remote control' parenting has been noted in sociological studies of childhood elsewhere (O'Brien 2000; Valentine 1999, cited in Mayall 2002, p. 101) and the ways in which children accept and then adapt these rules has also been recognised as a strategy they use to balance their desires to both comply with and resist adult authority (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 107; Punch 2001, p. 33-35; Robinson and Delahooke 2001, p. 82; Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998 p. 694-695).

Safety issues also differentiated the boys' and girls' use of public spaces. The boys had more autonomy over the way they used open space, but even then there were clear parental limitations around its use. For instance, Luke had just been allowed to ride his bike to his friend's house but was not yet allowed to ride home because of the right hand turns on a busy open road. Joshua enjoyed playing at the river because there were no rules, however, at the same time, he knew that he was not allowed to swim in the river without his older sibling there to watch over him. Clearly there were not "*no rules*" at the river at all. Within boundaries such as these, the boys were able to enjoy some free time outside, away from home or the homes of friends and relatives and they were also able to exercise some choices about getting to and from friends' places.

As has been noted in other places (Hillman 1993; Katz 1993), access to outdoor spaces and freedom of movement was different for the girls who, with only two exceptions, were transported to and from friends' places and had greater restrictions on their use of public, unsupervised play spaces. By using their bedrooms for play, the girls exercised some autonomy over how they spent their time, even if they had less choice about the places they played. These gendered patterns are consistent with other research that has sought to tease out the ways in which risk-related discourses influence the nature of boys' and girls' childhoods (Hillman 1993; Katz 1993).

The choices children are able to exercise about their use of recreational space is also heavily influenced by what is available and within easy reach, and so context is a powerful determinant of the experiences children are able to have (Berg and Medrich, 1980). The ways in which the children spent their non-school time in general, and the way they used open space in particular, reflected the interaction between their personal preferences, understandings of what was possible and these broader constraints.

Electronic media were a popular form of recreation and, as has already been noted, these devices were an important component of parental child-supervision strategies because they encouraged the children to stay home. Internationally, the re-configuration of home as a recreational environment is not without its problems. While middle-class children are able to use home-spaces in a variety of ways, their less well-off peers do not have this sort of luxury (Boyden 1990) and, indeed, for some children home is a dangerous place (Holloway and Valentine 2000). Facer et al. (2001a, p. 22) argue that access to techno-leisure is not at all straightforward for children, and the compensations theoretically offered by such resources for the loss of spatial freedoms may be more illusory than real. For instance, adult fears about how the Internet may expose children to risk, results in restrictions around its use. Further, the cost of such resources means that their distribution is uneven. Concern about the health consequences of long-term electronic use can also result in limitations on the length of time children are able to play (Attewell, SuazoGarcia and Battle 2003). Care, therefore, needs to be taken in assuming that electronic freedoms balance the loss of spatial autonomy.

The Internet was not a major site of risk for children when I completed the fieldwork for this study. However, my return visits to the children during 2001 and 2002 allowed me to see the way that Internet safety had become an issue for many. Adaptations around the use of chat rooms and decisions about the location of computers in homes that had Internet access were two of the more prominent examples of familial responses to the evolution of our understandings of the threats that the Internet posed to children. These responses have a clear parallel with the approaches adopted by parents elsewhere to managing computer and Internet risks (Facer et al. 2001a, p. 22; Holloway and Valentine 2000).

The permeable barrier between the local lives of the children in this study and the wider world could also be seen in the children's worries about wars and famine overseas and the impact of pollution on the future of the planet. The broader forces that play themselves out in local childhood experience could also be clearly seen when we talked during the fieldwork about the ways that the children used time and space. As Holloway and Valentine (2000, p. 768) note:

...children's worlds of meaning are at one and the same time global and local, made through 'local' cultures which are in part shaped by their interconnections with the wider world.

These authors speak of the 'porosity' (Holloway and Valentine 2000, p. 774) of the boundary between local lives and the wider layers of context. These interconnections are thrown into sharp relief when adult approaches to risk management around children are considered. Adult actions and decisions are critical factors that influence the way in which context is experienced and understood by children (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 20; Holloway and Valentine 2000; Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998). In addition to the conditioning effect that children's own exposure to the wider world has upon the choices they make, adult understandings of the nature of the world and the needs of children in relation to this influence the ways that children are able to use space and time. Perception of risk, and beliefs about the most appropriate ways of responding to those perceptions played a significant role in the way the children used their time and the places they went.

The competing pressures of familialisation, individualisation and institutionalisation are argued to pull childhood in different directions (Edwards and Alldred 1999; Prout 2002, p. 70). Discourses around familialisation and individualisation in particular are relevant here because they place responsibility for navigating a safe course through childhood and the wellbeing of children squarely at the feet of individual parents and families. The sense of retreat of other stakeholders in childhood (such as the state and community) from the lives of families then fosters the expectation that families will provide all things for their offspring and will shoulder all responsibility for their successful growth and development (Valentine 1996, p. 585). The pressures to participate in the workforce or to retrain, combined with the demands to be good, independent carers and providers, placed families in a double-bind. The casualty was often time with children, and while the families in this study had still retained a strong sense of attachment and family identity, it did come at a cost to both parents and their children.

Thinking about this wider context, it is not surprising that the parents of the children who participated in this study focused them increasingly in home domains. As Valentine (1996, p. 590) has pointed out, parental conceptualisation of risk in relation to their children is inherently spatial. Most of the risks are believed to reside away from home, outdoors and in uncontrolled public spaces⁸⁴ (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998). In the current study, most risks at home were a known quantity and strategies could be developed to manage them. Consequently, ensuring the children stayed at home while they were at work and encouraging them to use home as a significant place of recreation gave parents the confidence that they had reduced the chances that something might go wrong. These then were the understandable responses of parents who took seriously the dictates of their unforgiving social and political context (Engelbert 1994); they were ultimately and in all ways responsible (Jackson and Scott 1999, p. 89). Discourses of risk, which have a broader resonance, appear to be playing an increasingly pivotal role in the social construction of childhood. Risk management by shrinking boundaries seemed an inevitable response to the

⁸⁴ Although the uncomfortable fact remains that home is a more dangerous place for many children. This does not dissuade parents from perceiving risk to be associated with the unknown and with those situations where they are not able to exercise direct control (Holloway and Valentine 2000).

social context in which parents and children found themselves both in this research and internationally (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998). Under such circumstances, children's spatial limitations became an acceptable casualty and children's needs for gradually increased freedom, their rights to some autonomy and to choose how they spent their free time were sacrificed in favour of a sense of control over an unpredictable and uncompromising world.

The next chapter concludes the thesis. It considers the implications of the findings for the nature and position of children and adults as members of society. This discussion attends to both the everyday nature of their relationships and experiences and also to wider policy and practice implications of the findings. It also reflects upon the research process in terms of methodological learning gained from the project and suggests areas for further work.

- Chapter Eleven -

Conclusion

Introduction

The aim of this thesis has been to advance a social constructionist interpretation of childhood by undertaking an analysis of the everyday childhoods of untroubled children in a small Aotearoa/New Zealand town. The motivation for this study grew from a reflection on the contradictory discourses of children and childhood and an interest in exploring the ways in which these contradictions worked themselves out in everyday lives.

Specifically it intended to:

1. Provide an ethnographic account of the everyday experiences of a group of healthy and safe, small town, Aotearoa/New Zealand children. This account would be informed by a 'new social studies of childhood' framework across several domains identified as a result of both local data collection and a review of the literature
2. Generate a locally embedded understanding of the experience of childhood for these children
3. Draw conclusions about what these experiences meant in terms of broader discourses of children and childhood
4. Consider the implications of these findings for the ways that adults relate to children both at a personal and at a structural level.

This chapter is divided into three sections. It begins by revisiting the framework for the study, this sets the scene in terms of the broader traditions in which the work was located. The implications of the key findings are then considered. Two particular aspects of the findings are addressed here, those that diverged from the literature and those that supported conclusions reached about childhood elsewhere. This section also includes recommendations for new ways of approaching children and understanding childhood in terms of research, policy, practice and everyday relationships. The final section reflects upon the research process and makes suggestions about directions in which future research could proceed, in relation to both potential research topics and research methodologies.

The framework for the study

Children's standpoints

The approach taken in this study is consistent with the new social studies of childhood perspective that has been articulated over the past 15-20 years (see for example, Butler and Shaw 1996; Hill and Tisdall 1997; Holloway and Valentine 2000; James and Prout 1990a; 1990b; James, Jenks and Prout 1998; Jenks 1982; Mayall 1994a; 2002; Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998). This approach, which has developed in response to a perceived over-determinism in the developmental accounts of childhood, brings to the foreground the need to document more fully children's standpoints (Prout 2001b, p. 195):

Social life looks different when viewed from their [children's] positions.

Of course any one child sees and speaks from multiple, combined and intersecting positions – of gender, class, ethnicity, disability and so on.

Diversity, ambiguity and contradiction

Following on from this, these perspectives assert that all accounts are partial, that there are multiple pathways (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 48 citing Woodhead 1990) through childhood and, further, that there is no endpoint to development, the demarcation between adult and child being somewhat arbitrary and fluid (Valentine 1996, p. 587). In this important sense, then, these works stand separate from the developmental accounts of childhood, which have been concerned to identify regularity, commonality and to define the 'universal child' (Mayall 1994a, p. 118). These new social constructionist discourses argue that detailed

examination of multiple and locally situated accounts of childhood will provide an understanding of the complexity, diversity and contradictory nature of contemporary childhood.

The contradictory and contested nature of childhood becomes apparent even when exploring the experiences of relatively homogenous groups of children, such as those who participated in this study. Themes of contradiction and ambiguity were apparent at the beginning, when I considered the different ways in which childhood was seen in legislation, policy and practice, and they became more apparent as I watched children maintaining the delicate balance between being themselves, and being what a child was expected to be as they went about the business of living their lives. Diversity, ambiguity and contradiction appear throughout the following discussion as significant themes that need to be taken into account when thinking about children and childhood and the ways that children respond to these expectations to be contradictory things.

Everyday, untroubled

Working from Berger and Luckman's (1966, p. 35) proposition that the everyday is the site "par excellence" for social constructionist analysis, and bearing in mind the observations of key writers such as Mayall (2001a, p. 1), that everyday childhood experience is an important site for research attention, this study focused upon children and situations where I did not expect to see things out of the ordinary. This enabled an exploration of childhood as a social status, rather than a particular or problematised manifestation of it. Ethnography provides a strong intellectual and methodological framework for producing locally embedded accounts of everyday experience and, accordingly, it was used to structure this study.

I chose an area of childhood (late-middle childhood) that has been given relatively little attention in the literature (Borland et al. 1998). Late-middle childhood is a point when children are often allowed to speak for themselves. It was possible, therefore, to place them at the centre of the research and to work directly with them. This is also a time when children have accommodated a range of unfamiliar adults in their lives. Thus my presence, as a researcher, was likely to be less of an oddity and disruption than it might have been when they were younger, or an embarrassment, as it might have been when they were older. Finally, I elected to work with a small sample of children in order to attend closely to

the nature of individual experiences of childhood. This made it possible to explore the way in which broader forces played themselves out in individual situations and to consider the nature of children's agency in dealing with such matters (Mayall 2001a, p. 9).

Socially constructed nature of childhood

This project necessitated working at the intersection between children's own experience and the wider forces which shaped them, particularly the range of local, national and global adult-generated discourses that flowed through the children's experience. Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992, p. 79) suggest a need for constant awareness of the ways in which we, as adults, construct young people. In working from a social constructionist standpoint, it was necessary to recognise that separating out 'childhood' per se from its social manifestation was not possible. However, throughout this study, I attempted to provide space for the children's own accounts of their experiences, their positions and equally their representations of themselves to be seen.

Children are not passive products of socialisation (Prout, 2001a, p. xi) and neither are they simply a reflection of the social conditions in which they live. By attending to children's accounts of the ways in which they balanced themselves off against the wider social forces in which their lives were embedded, it became apparent that children exercised their **agency** in a variety of ways as they worked within the varying social contexts and institutions they moved between. It was also clear that **adult understandings** of what childhood was, and what children were, or should be capable of, played a critical role in the specific character of particular childhoods. Finally, the way that **wider social forces** shaped childhood could be understood when children's accounts were attended to. These three dimensions (agency, adult understandings and wider social forces) were balanced throughout this project, and the resulting analysis has attempted to provide an appreciation of the particular ways in which each dimension worked with the others to generate different sorts of childhood experience in what was a relatively homogenous group of children.

The socially constructed nature of childhood is critical to this study. It rests on the theoretical premise that childhood is created in and out of social interaction and the symbolic meanings that are attached to this. Therefore, within each dimension, the socially mediated nature of the manifestation of childhood will be seen. While children may have particular characteristics and these may be biologically based, or developmentally

predictable in some way, the precise way in which childhood is experienced will change depending upon the social settings in which that childhood takes place. Children and adults extract meaning from these contexts in dynamic and flexible ways. This means that the nature of childhood can and does change over time.

Implications of findings

Seven arenas (self and identity, their relationships with each other, their relationships with adults, time related thinking, home and family, school time and time and space as risk) were selected to structure the analysis. These were not original areas of investigation. Rather, they comprised the broad areas of interest within the new social studies of childhood and also for many developmental studies. As such they represented agreed areas where three critical dimensions; children's agency, adult understandings of childhood and the impact of wider forces could be expected to be observed working themselves out in daily life.

In many cases the findings from this study have parallels in other work (the clear sense of children as morally competent and intentional actors, for instance). However, some appear to be particular to this study or to contradict international findings. This section draws upon both the divergent findings from the current work as well as the parallels found in the children's experience with their peers elsewhere.

The children's own agency

It was clear that the children had learned the critical childhood lesson noted by both developmental and new social studies accounts, namely that they could present different parts of themselves in different contexts, and that at different times some important parts of themselves needed to be kept hidden. In this study, gendered patterns were different to those reported elsewhere in both the developmental and also the new social studies accounts. These different findings highlight the importance of listening carefully to the way in which children speak of themselves, and to attending to the way in which adult expectations of what they have to say 'writes-over' the stories they want to tell us. The adult domination of the research agenda has accentuated this 'writing-over', because knowledge of what childhood is has been empirically constructed by adult writing on children. Listening closely to the children's own accounts revealed not only the way in

which the stronger, adult accounts had shaped the possibilities for childhood experience, but also the ways in which children had exercised their own agency and their own creativity to create spaces for themselves within this more dominant story.

The boys knew that certain sorts of conversations and certain sorts of needs were off limits to them in their public interactions with each other and with adults. Yet their narratives made it abundantly clear that they had emotional needs for specific intimate connections with other children and for active relational engagement with adults around them. Their relational behaviour with each other told a very different story to the public discourses and much of the academic writing about boys. They simply played in ways that worked for them (seeking out intense two-way friendships most of the time), irrespective of wider assumptions about their lack of need for such relationships. They carried on these relationships in the bigger groups they needed to participate in to play their preferred games at school, while at home they worked on these more intense friendships. These boys were also fortunate in that their parents and other familial adults around them provided a lot of the talking that they required, the “*stuff*” the boy who had a close female friend referred to. But the clarity with which they could articulate their needs and describe emotional atmosphere told its own story and, in so doing, highlighted the way that they balanced the need to appear to be a certain way, while at the same time finding the holes and gaps in their context that enabled them to create the relational experiences they needed.

While the boys found opportunities to meet their emotional needs, it was clear that, publicly anyway, there was relatively little recognition of these. The early 20th century discourse of the boyologists (Lesko 2001) has endured, and while it may have over-written the story of boyhood, telling us that what we see is all there is, and at the same time telling boys how to be boys, it was equally clear that these boys found ways of having the intimate friendships they wanted within the crowded playground contexts they found. Of concern for practice and policy, is the damage this more powerful discourse may do to boys by always reinforcing (to boys and to adults around them) that they do not have these needs. It is a relatively small step to take from believing that boys have instrumental rather than intimate friendships, to consider that they don't have intimacy needs at all (Ganetz 1995, p. 85). If boys are believed not to experience emotions as intensely as girls, then their behaviour can be interpreted as calculated to disrupt and challenge when, in fact it, may be

an expression of grief, pain or an attempt to create a relationship in the middle of confusion.

It is possible that rather than indicating boy intransigence and aggression, challenging behaviours in places like schools represents attempts to engage with teachers, to establish some grounds on which a relationship may be forged and to find ways back into the relational life of the classroom. This sort of conclusion has particular salience given Gersch and Nolan's (1994) findings that stressed teacher-pupil relationships were a precursor to pupil exclusion. The discounting and dismissing of boys' emotions teaches them to bury what they feel beneath a façade of bravado and challenge, distancing themselves from their emotions in the process⁸⁵. The relative invisibility of boys as emotional beings in educational contexts was possibly less significant than it would have been had their homes been less attuned to their needs. However, their narratives suggest that if they can be responded to on an emotional level, learning may well be easier and classrooms less stressed.

The girls were faced with a different set of challenges. Confronted with the "tyranny of the nice and the kind" (Brown and Gilligan 1992, cited in Rogers, Mikel Brown and Tappan 1994, p. 14), they managed the expectation to conform publicly while at the same time reserving the right to be something quite independent inside. Like Brown and Gilligan's girls (1992), they had learned to interpret their setting and its expectations well. However, their self-talk was rather different. They were not inwardly concerned with re-interpreting experience by discounting their own feelings in favour of their understanding of the demands others made of them to be a particular sort of girl (Brown and Gilligan 1992, p. 130). Rather, their internal dialogues established and maintained their resistance to expectation. Instead of presenting an open challenge when the world asked too much, they opted for creating rich spaces inside where they developed their own unique themes of resistance.

They were adept at finding the cracks in this wall of expectation through which they could resist, without being crushed. They appeared to have resisted the idea that they would meet social expectations to be mothers while at the same time balancing pressures as adult

⁸⁵ This sort of behaviour is similar to the filtering of feelings through thoughts Brown and Gilligan (1992, p. 130) identified in young girls.

women to be economically productive. The futures they imagined (even when they did not know the details) were of economically independent women. While relationships figured prominently in their present-time lives, when projecting themselves into the future they shifted their focus to a more pressing concern with being able to control the course of their lives and they saw this as happening most effectively by being financially independent. Sophie hinted at the extent to which relationships might need to be sacrificed to occupation in her story (Chapter Five).

The girls demonstrated how well they had learned to resist when the label did not fit. The range of effective strategies for resisting, both overt and covert, provided them with the means to retain their dignity and a sense of autonomy when their situations proved demanding or excluding. It is difficult, however, to predict how they will apply their skills at resisting and re-thinking oppressive situations when they become women. Will they adopt the pathways chosen by their mothers, of combining working with motherhood? Will they resist this dual status and opt instead for financial independence, or will they choose motherhood? Their visions, bold and strong as they were, suggest that the road ahead may well contain major challenges for them in reconciling what they want for themselves with what others may demand from them. Their views of the future, when they were ten and eleven, demonstrate in a quite stark way the impact of the major social changes that had characterised their lives and the lives of their mothers. The almost complete absence of mothering themes in their work, something the literature (even the new social studies of childhood, see for instance, Hallden 1994) suggests should be strongly present, rather poignantly underscores the way that broad social changes play themselves out in the private lives and thoughts of children.

These girls expressed a very different sort of woman-future. Their strong connection with themes of independence can be seen as very positive, if it leads on to lives they actively embrace. However, if it represents their sense of the impossible burdens they might face, and that reluctantly they will sacrifice relationship for independence, then it is a cause for concern. While economic independence is important, does the way we currently organise work mean that girls will have to sacrifice relationships in order to achieve the independence they desired and which was championed as such a central social and economic goal (Maharey 2004)?

The children balanced off what they knew about themselves, with what others knew about them through the wider social discourses that defined what it meant to be a particular sort of child. Far from being passive recipients of knowledge about themselves, they actively worked with the raw materials available in their various contexts to create spaces for themselves, to be themselves and to work on their own life projects (Edwards and Allred 1999, p. 263; Mayall's 2001b, p. 120). The children's accounts of those things that were most germane to their inner sense of who they were give both a sense of hope and also cause for concern. They suggest a clear sense of self as good and as also being able to exercise control, even if at the time it is only to choose what not to reveal, or to inwardly reserve the right to act against expectations at some later point.

Much childhood research has focused on identifying the 'training' or developmental opportunities in the experiences that children have; the way that they contribute to, or detract from, the process of developing a socially well-adjusted adult. Research has tended to downplay the significance of play as a fun thing for children to do (Mayall 2002, p. 118-119) and in much the same way, relatively little attention has been paid to the experience of friendship as a regular feature of children's daily lives. This has meant that the impact of children's relational experiences with each other has been discounted in favour of a consideration of the developmental contribution that experiences such as loss and loneliness make to adolescent and adult experience.

The children's relationships with each other performed similar functions to those which friendships performed in adults' lives. While the children I spoke to could see the value of 'eating greens' for their health and long-term well being, and learning how to calculate the area of a triangle in terms of being useful later, they never talked of the significance of their friendships in terms of the training opportunities they held for them. Friendships were very much part of the here and now, and changes in them did not generally bring about a philosophical response; they mattered deeply.

The children's friendships also provided them with a fertile arena in which they could be children away from adult gaze where, for the most part, they could compose their own experiences without intervention. From the point of view of understanding children's views of the world and for considering children as agents in their own right, friendship would seem to be a critical research site. While it is often convenient to think of children's

relational needs as being driven primarily by factors such as age, stage or gender, such a focus can lead to a misunderstanding of their needs and experiences and a misinterpretation of their behaviours. Knowledge about child-adult relations has been significantly advanced over the past two decades as a result of contemporary theorising within the new social studies of childhood. Less attention has been given to the analysis of children's own relationships. Children's relationships with each other are thus an important area for further exploration, particularly in terms of advancing our understanding of the complex ways that they manage their own agency within the institutional contexts in which they spend much of their time and also when away from adult sight.

Technology also provided insights into the ways in which children actively appropriated materials from their worlds for their own use, both as resources for identity creation and also recreational tools that were enjoyable in their own right. The debates about whether technology is good or bad for children will, in all likelihood, continue to rage around them while they develop their own ways of integrating these materials into their lives. Leaving to one side the content of the games, and thinking about the processes of engagement the children had with them, it was clear that these materials were important currency for many social exchanges (especially, but not exclusively, for the boys). Participation in many peer interactions could be secured by being knowledgeable about the games. This knowledge was not easily acquired as the games were complex, requiring understanding of a large number of characters, complex rules and combinations of play. One could not simply possess the technology; regular work on it was required to become a competent player and, from there, a participant in these social exchanges.

Rather than a passive device that the children used to play out pre-constructed fantasies, there was active engagement by both boys and girls with these products. It was developed and used in a wide range of ways, in addition to the game playing itself. The games also provided the children with opportunities to place themselves in adventures and play out fantasies in an era when their capacity to do this outdoors was becoming quite limited. While it is true that the fantasies may have come to them from the games, and so not have been their own unique stories, it should be equally recognised that many of the fantasy games played by children historically came to them through the media and social events of the time. With the exception of one parent, the adults around the children had no involvement in these games. Their play took place around the adults in their lives, but did

not involve them. It represented an arena of private action that the children could develop without adult involvement, but which they could, nonetheless, carry on in the presence of their parents.

That children can and do perform moral work is a topic of interest within the new social studies of childhood primarily because the developmental account (and the dominant public discourses of childhood which have grown from it) has paid it so little attention. Beginning with the assumption that childhood was a time of apprenticeship in being human, meant that the developmental paradigm tended to background the caring, reciprocal relational work that children performed, preferring instead to highlight their ego-centric nature. While not a new finding anymore (see, for example, Hill, Laybourn and Borland 1996; Mayall 2002; Thomson and Holland, 2002) the extent of the children's moral work in relation to each other and those adults they cared about could be clearly seen in this study. Their passionate interest in the wider world and their desire to engage in debate about the implications of important social issues in their homes, their schools and in the world around them were prominent themes.

Children's exclusion from public debate, arising from adult concerns to both protect them and beliefs that they are not competent to consider fully the implications of their views, can be seen to more properly reflect adult desires to not be questioned by children⁸⁶ when the maturity and humanity represented in their perspectives is recognised. While the literature on children's capacity and desire to be engaged in decision-making is growing, concrete opportunities for genuine participation by children are still relatively few. The education system (including schools, state policy making and research) represents one very important area in which their active participation could be advanced, as does the Family Court and central and local government planning processes (see, for example, Gray 2002; Stafford et al. 2003). Increasing participation in all of these areas, in fact, would move Aotearoa/New Zealand closer meeting its obligations under UNCROC (Gray 2002). The new social studies of childhood have a very important contribution to make here by both developing the knowledge base with children, and also by advancing knowledge about the most

⁸⁶ For instance, in early December 2003, the Minister of Education, (Hon. Trevor Mallard) criticised parents and schools for allowing children to participate in rallies and public meetings about the closure of rural primary schools. He considered that these were adult matters and that parents and school staff were manipulating children. That the children might have a view about the schools they wished to attend, and that this should form part of policy-making was, apparently, not considered by the Minister to be important.

effective sorts of strategies for involving them in meaningful participatory decision-making processes.

Children and adults

Child-adult relationships are an important focus for the work in the new social studies of childhood. Central to these works are notions of children as significantly dependent upon adults to create or constrain the possibilities for childhood, and as intentional, engaged actors in their own right, who fashion their own life projects (Edwards and Alldred 1999, p. 263; Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 20; Mayall's, 2001b, p. 120) out of their social contexts in ways that are meaningful and coherent. The notion of generation has assumed a key focus for theoretical and empirical attention here as writers have argued, like race and gender, the generational order is a key dimension of social differentiation. The role of adults cannot be escaped even when, as was that the case in this project, the objective was to place children in the centre of the enterprise.

The children's accounts of their relationships with adults suggested that these were similar to those of their peers elsewhere (for example, Hill and Tisdall 1997; Mayall 2000b; Prout 2001). They reported intensely positive, engaged and active relationships with their parents. In many ways these relationships compensated for the other areas of their lives where they were more commonly confined to object status (Mayall, 1994; Oldman 1994a). In public settings, adult interactions with the children were often characterised by a lack of engagement and they could be subjected to a disturbing level of anger and intolerance. This was acute in those places where children had least control over the setting and almost no freedom to 'walk away', such as school and after school activities. However, when given the opportunity, they demonstrated a desire for greater involvement in decision-making in these places, to have their views and experiences accorded validity and included and, on this issue, they share a position with their peers elsewhere (Stafford et al. 2003)

While the children appeared to largely accept that the power differential between themselves and adults provided them with protection as much as it constrained them, they did not accept it fully and there were numerous instances of both covert and overt resistance. Given their fundamental acceptance of the unequal relationship they had with adults and their emphasis upon stability, their challenges cannot be understood as attempts to profoundly disrupt the status quo. Indeed, as has been noted elsewhere, (Hill, Laybourn

and Borland 1996, p. 130-132; Prout 2001b, p. 198) children tend toward reform rather than revolution. Their resistances need then to be interpreted as highly creative and intense efforts to engage actively with adults in the process of relationship creation (Mayall 2002, p. 127) through direct involvement with the key dimension of power, the capacity to determine how things are defined.

If children's challenges are, in fact, efforts to be engaged and effective relational partners, then excluding and punitive adult responses demonstrate to children that they are not important enough to have their participation needs considered. In effect, the message given is that the adult and adult needs are more important than the child and the child's needs in the process of raising the child. If, however, adults can engage with children positively and constructively then children can become effective participants in safely structured environments, and in the process, learn about the proper use of power. Even very young children and babies (see, for instance, Lancaster 2003) have been shown to work directly on relationships, and are able to express meaningful views about the things that they require from adults. What is often lacking is the willingness on the part of adults to find the right ways to listen (Hill and Tisdall 1997, p. 20). By constructively engaging with children, adults can create a safe stage on which the children can act out and learn effective strategies for managing themselves and their interactions with others. In doing this they stand to benefit not only from learning about what it means to be a child, but equally about what it can mean to be an adult.

Indeed, there were a number of clear examples of adults and children co-creating sustained, engaged and active relationships that provided opportunities to grow and develop and become competent in a range of contexts. These were the open relationships that provided children with the greatest opportunity to experience their position in the social order as a subject-child. Open relationships simultaneously allowed for protection and nurture as well as the possibility of developing competence and capacity. Alanen (2001b) found that family-domain children were more likely to see themselves as children than those strong in the interest, school or friend domains. The findings here suggest that children who are able to have strong, subject relations with adults are likely to see themselves as children, regardless of their strengths in other domains (recall the strong levels of interests and friend engagement of several). It also suggests that open relationships contain greater possibilities for relational experiences than do closed relationships.

It has been noted elsewhere (Christensen and James 2001; Thomson and Holland 2002) that children often act with fatalism or disinterest to those situations over which they feel little control and that they are not often confident that, even when asked, their views will be heard or taken account of (Stafford et al. 2003, p 364). It has also been argued that the project of the self (Edwards and Alldred 1999, p. 263; Mayall 2001b, p. 12) is a key task in which children are engaged in their daily lives. It is thus very important that the adults who have significant levels of involvement with them consider deeply the way that their interactions contribute to or detract from this project.

Mayall (2001a; 2001b; 2002) alerts us to the relational work that children do with adults. She concludes that, contrary to the developmental view of children, they are competent moral actors in their own right. Even in closed relationships, which tended to restrict them to passive roles, the children in this study were far from disengaged. In fact several spoke of the way they struggled with the moral dilemmas that attended upon, for example, witnessing angry exchanges between teachers and other children. This draws attention to a critical contradiction children must balance in their daily interactions with adults. Even when they are confined to passive, object status within a closed relationship that defines them as not competent, they nonetheless undertake significant relational and moral work. In doing this they demonstrate their considerable competence, despite the overpowering definition of them as not yet able to adequately perform relational tasks (Mayall 2001a; 2001b).

While research has suggested that children see schooling as a first step in their life plans (Christensen and James 2001; Cullingford 1991, p. 45; Mayall 2002, p. 75), the children in this study did not clearly locate school as a landmark in the development of their lives. The emphasis placed upon goal directed learning was noted in Chapter Five; the children's school lives were characterised by an emphasis on thinking ahead and mapping out how they would achieve learning and personal targets. Therefore, the absence of a focus on the medium term in their narratives is particularly noteworthy. For all the attention given to such thinking in the formal curriculum, the connection between the present, the medium and the distant future was not a prominent component of the children's time-related thinking about their own lives. If a central concern of the education system is to prepare children for the future through the honing of their own self-management skills, there would appear to be some merit in thinking again about how such goal-directed learning is

delivered to children. It may well be that the emphasis on writing plans and evaluating the extent to which they have been achieved is a particularly useful tool for adults, but not so relevant or effective for children.

Increasing the prominence of the new social studies of childhood within the education sector offers scope for development of child-sensitive pedagogies. As yet, there appears to have been relatively little engagement of this new paradigm in traditional developmental and educational thinking. These new understandings of children as active, engaged subjects provide a fertile ground for approaching the tasks of teaching and learning in new ways. The concept of supervision, now well established in social work, also has a contribution to make to the daily business of being a teacher. Schools have management systems that provide for the development of curriculum expertise and ongoing training. However, support for teachers who, like children, are often confined in over-crowded classrooms in intense teaching encounters, appears to be less readily available. Training and support, particularly over effective strategies for managing anger and frustration, appear to be needed. While anger and frustration may seem to be a very understandable response to many of the situations teachers encounter in classrooms, equipping them to deal with this effectively is necessary, as is enabling them to understand the emotional significance of their actions and their relational salience to children. Schools reflect as much as create our social context. The problems we observe in classrooms also feature in adult-child relations elsewhere. By looking at school we see ourselves reflected back, and so any agenda for change within schools, should properly be seen as a blueprint for wider social change.

Wider social forces

The work-family bind, and parental values about the productive use of children's time, influenced the children's experience of being a part of a family. The busyness created by parental employment and study involvement, and child participation in extracurricular activity was a notable feature of this group. The value placed upon children's busyness through engagement in useful activities, and the need to have children safely occupied during business hours meant that family time was in short supply. It was also something that the children valued and sought out. Like their counterparts in the northern hemisphere (for example, Haudrup Christensen 2002; Kovarik 1994; Mayall 2001b, p. 119), the children resented the way that work and other demands intruded into their family time. While doubtless the high activity levels of the children may have been preparing them well

for adulthood (if the nature of their parents' lives was a reliable predictor of what would happen to them), the children's preferences were for more 'free' time and more unhurried time with their parents. Indeed, the sense of childhood as a time of relative freedom from demands is not only something the children considered to be part of being a child (Mayall 2002) but it is also an important component in the myth of childhood, reflected in popular and academic discourse. Its relative absence from their lives, then, represented another contradiction that they needed to manage.

The constraints placed upon the children's free times were not just a product of the high levels of engagement of their parents in the workforce and tertiary training, they were also a response to the globalised discourse of risk that has had a particularly profound impact upon the way in which childhood is constructed in late modernity, particularly in Anglo-Saxon nations (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998). Alone, the movement of mothers from homes and into work and training does not inevitably mean that childhood will need to be increasingly institutionalised, in order to ensure children's safety. The Finnish and Norwegian situations (Alanen, 2001b; Solberg 1990) indicate a range of possible responses to the absence of a caregiver from the home when school is not in session. In the case of the children reported here, two options to the absence of parents were seen; an increased use of new technologies to child-mind, and a high level of participation in extracurricular activity. In this context, technology provided an opportunity for creative engagement and some compensation for the territorial exploration that was off-limits. Extracurricular activity, on the other hand, provided a range of experiences, the quality of which was determined by the approach of the adults providing the care. Rarely were formal activities a source of comradeship for the children, rather, they appeared to function much as class time, a way of occupying their time, but not especially memorable.

The positive, strong sense of home is particularly salient for the nature of childhood given the increasingly dominant role it plays as a site where children gain much of their experience. Home was a very important place for the children. It recurred as a theme in many different areas of this study, and was connected strongly to the children's sense of being part of a family and also to their sense of themselves. Stability and the importance of security and predictability also featured prominently in the material the children generated. This was seen in the frequency with which they identified the positive dimensions of home and their concerns about financial security within their families. Of course, as noted in

Chapter Ten, the powerful nature of home and family could be posed as problematic, reflecting as it did their constrained capacity to use other spaces (Alanen 2001b).

The provincial location conferred particular advantages for these children because their homes were all relatively spacious and had private outdoor spaces. Home was both a very positive place and also a place where they spent much of their time. However, for other children, home is a site of significant risk and/or constrained space. Increasing the amount of time they spend here comes at the cost of increasing their exposure to abuse and severe limitations on their capacity to use time and space. The shrinking territories for children are noted as an international phenomenon alongside the increased amount of time they spend at home and in institutional settings (Hillman, Adams and Whitelegg 1991; Hillman 1993; Mayall 1996). If home is a cramped, dangerous place, and school/formal activities do not provide for children's physical and emotional needs, childhood takes on a significantly different character to the idealised vision.

It is pertinent, in this connection, to consider the matter of pre-adolescent gangs. While they did not feature in the group of children participating in this study, they have been noted elsewhere, particularly involving boys. The conditions required for a gang of this sort to form are the absence of adult oversight and opportunities for frequent and intense interaction (Fine, 1995). Both the boys and girls in this study who self-cared experienced these conditions, and many, particularly the girls, had extensive friend networks. They lived in a small town, and could have relatively easily met up with each other during times of self-supervision, if they had so desired. Yet they accepted their parents' requirements that they stay at home, largely indoors. They recognised the power of the risk discourse and the dangers it told them that waited outside of home, and of course, home was a safe place. Given the girls' clear articulation of resistance as a viable strategy for managing to balance self in relation to other pressures, their large friendship networks and the emphasis in the literature upon the tendency for boys to seek out large groups, the absence of gang activity was notable in both the boys and the girls. That other children, with different familial relationships but a similar absence of adult supervision when not at school, might choose to actively reject parental requirements that they stay at home seems plausible. The increased expectation that parents be involved in formal learning and/or the workforce (Maharey 2004) would appear to create ideal conditions to foster the development of pre-adolescent boy and girl gangs. While social policy has concerned itself significantly with the

importance of families being economically independent, this may well ultimately come at the cost of quality intra-familial relationships, and children's increased presence in public spaces, in groups, without adult supervision may grow as a consequence.

The children in this study were born in the late 1980s, a time of very significant social and economic upheaval in Aotearoa/New Zealand that has now been clearly identified as having major negative impacts upon children's life experiences (Child Poverty Action Group 2003; Blaiklock et al. 2002). The child who wished for sufficient money so her mum did not have to buy second best, like many other children, lived in a single parent household where matters such as market-related rents had had a major impact on household resources (Child Poverty Action Group 2003, p. 33). The boy who wished for a retirement home for his parents was reflecting the impact on his family of needing to grapple with funding tertiary education for older siblings and of meeting increasing costs of health care for family members at the same time as having to re-orient their long-term financial planning to ensure they could provide for their own retirement.

The children were living their childhoods during a time when nationally 30 percent of children lived in poverty (Blaiklock et al. 2002; Child Poverty Action Group 2003) and when Aotearoa/New Zealand had the dubious honour of almost topping the league table for the greatest number of non-accidental child deaths (UNICEF 2003). It is not a quirky accident that these children elected to use some of their wishes to make things easier for their parents and for their families. They lived their daily lives in a social context where the responsibility of families to provide fully for themselves with little external support was a major feature of their social worlds, and this had been so for the entirety of their lives. A significant feature of the social milieu for these children was the entrenchment of a set of values that promoted individual over collective responsibility and which believed that the market was the preferred mechanism for distributing social and economic benefits (Atwool 1999; Child Poverty Action Group 2003). Policies that promote the expansion of individual rights and economic interests will not usually serve the interests and needs of children well (Bruce, Lloyd and Leonard 1995, p. 97). That the children picked up on these macro-level matters and the impact of these significant re-orientations in the values of their country, could be clearly seen in their discussion of the things that mattered to them and also in the way in which the girls, for instance, thought about how they might be as adult women.

Reflections on the project

This final section reflects on the project and identifies the methodological learning it has contained. It also considers areas for future research focus. The first and most important reflection is that, as with researchers elsewhere (Prout, 2001b; 2002), the value of taking time to listen to children has proved to be a very worthwhile exercise. The children were keen to participate in this study and had important observations to make about their lives and the matters that had an impact upon them. They were insightful social commentators and demonstrated a passionate interest in being able to express their views and to think about the way that different dimensions of their social worlds influenced the things they were able to do (Stafford et al. 2003).

The value of using a range of data generation strategies was highlighted in this project and is something that has been noted elsewhere (Hill, Laybourn and Borland 1996; James 2001). The combination of interviews, observations and activities provided a diverse range of opportunities for the children to share and express their views and to recount their experiences, and different children used these mediums in different ways. The combination of strategies also facilitated good triangulation, because tentative conclusions drawn from one strategy could be compared with those gained from other strategies (Stafford et al. 2003, p. 371). Initially I hoped to develop a partnership with the children such that they could be involved in decisions about data generation and also actively reflect upon and participate in the analysis. I did not develop these reflexive partnerships to the extent that I had wished, partly because of ethical concerns, and also partly because I was concerned about minimising the demands I made upon these busy children and their families. However, the use of checking back strategies during the fieldwork and later during the analysis clearly highlighted the value of involving children in both the verification of data and also analytical processes. In future work this aspect of the research activity could be developed further and would, I believe, generate a greater depth of understanding and very relevant conclusions about ways of implementing findings.

The creative activities were scheduled into school time in order to reduce the demands of the project on the children. Story writing, drawing and drama constitute important data generation strategies for work with children (see, for instance, Hill, Laybourn and Borland 1996; Lancaster 2003) and represent rich possibilities that could also be developed in more

depth in future research. Time, something in short supply for these children, nonetheless proved to be of critical significance in this study. I allowed six months for preparation and a year for fieldwork. By the end of the fieldwork, the nature and quality of material the children shared with me was significantly greater than it had been at the beginning. We worked hard together on building relationships and establishing the sort of adult (Corsaro 1985, p. 28) I was. Projects involving children need to allow time for relationships to build and for children to gain confidence in researchers.

The decision to not re-sample to include Maori children was made for pragmatic methodological reasons and also in recognition of the discomfort my presence might create for Maori children, as a Pakeha adult. While this decision was appropriate for this project, which involved me as a sole researcher, there is considerable scope for similar work to be undertaken with Maori children around their everyday lives. The comparative data this would produce would be rich and valuable. This is particularly important in the current environment where many public discourses about Maori children constitute them as a problem. Positive, constructive knowledge of the everyday lives of Maori children is needed to counterbalance these images and partial understandings.

The material generated by the children about relationships and emotions was a very significant part of this project and the work reported here is really only a beginning. In particular, exploring the ways in which boys understand what happens to them in relationships, both with adults and with their friends, and how this connects to different emotional experiences is an important piece of work, relevant in both education and more generally in terms of our social understandings of boys. Similarly, the ways in which girls signified relationships in their present lives and then discounted them when thinking about their possibilities for the future suggests a need for further exploration to understand how girls are developing their identities in a changed world. While there were some parallels with other work internationally on the relational experiences of boys and girls, this project also identified areas of difference and it would be valuable for future research to explore these issues further.

Familial relationships were clearly important to the children, and this is a finding that is replicated elsewhere (Borland et al. 1996; Hill and Tisdall 1997). In this study parental relationships have been a particular focus, with some attention paid also to grandparents

and less to uncles and aunts. The findings relating to grandparents suggests potential for further work developing our understanding of different sorts of generational relations and roles. Siblings and cousins, relatives of the same generation, were not considered in this study but comprise interesting and rich avenues of investigation for the new social studies of childhood to pursue. Indeed, if this paradigm is to avoid falling prey to the same criticisms it has levelled at traditional developmental and educational theorising and research, it is critical that our understanding of the diverse range of children's peer-based relationships be advanced. The current study has addressed some dimensions of peer-relations, but considerable further work remains to be done.

Throughout this project, the sheer volume of material that has been generated from over a century of writing on children has felt overpowering. What, I often wondered, was left to be said? At the end of this project, as I look back over it, what seems most important to conclude with is the reflection that, of all the things that we could do better in our role as adults who are responsible for children, we need to listen more, and to engage in adult analysis less. In this project, understanding came to me mostly in those moments when I sat quietly and watched, listened and reflected on what was said and then went back and asked for help with my efforts at interpretation. In listening to children, and trying to suspend my judgement, I opened my mind to the real possibility that things could and should be different. I also learned some ways in which I might, with children, contribute to making this happen. In this connection, Stafford et al. (2003) are clear that children have a strong desire to be involved in decision-making processes on a wide range of fronts, that they have a very positive contribution to make in such processes and, importantly, that a combination of methods for engaging with them, provides the greatest likelihood of success in such endeavours.

The title of this thesis involved a word play, drawing the eye to both the topic of the study and also to a possible status for children. It is this subject status that has been a major focus for this work. In closing, it is relevant to consider the greater possibilities for childhood contained in the subject rather than the object position. This project has demonstrated children's capacity to be active subjects, both as research partners and as human beings rather than human becomings (Qvortrup 1994b, p. 4). It suggests that not only is it possible, but it is highly desirable that this sense of a subject-child becomes a meaningful part of

research, policy and practice agendas, and becomes an unexceptional part of everyday life for children.

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Appendix 1 – Ethics Application and materials used for recruitment of participants.

NB. The ethics application was for a larger, much broader piece of research. The study reported on here, involved a specific sub-population of this broader group of children and families. Some of the research strategies and groups of participants noted in this application were not part of the current study.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY

APPLICATION TO HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

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Status of Applicants
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Funding Source
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Supervisors for PhD (Jackie Sanders) - Associate Professor Robyn
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Title of the Research Project
Healthy Families: What Makes a Difference?

Attachments
Information Sheet
Consent Form
Procedures for dealing with potential harm

Signatures

Date

1 Description

1.1 Justification

The focus of much family research has historically been upon the negative and dysfunctional aspects of family life. Families do face many challenges in raising children and a number struggle to provide both physical and emotional safety and nurture for their children. However, it is clear that focusing upon the negative aspects of families lives, and identifying the factors that are present when families fail only provides us with half of the information we need in order to support families and communities to make create positive environments for children.

This research has grown out of the strengths-based social work literature and seeks to develop qualitative methods and modes of analysis for understanding the factors that contribute to positive family functioning. This developmental work will lead into a larger study of family wellbeing. The research is particularly interested in the ways in which children (over 7 years of age) see their worlds, view their family and their own roles within their family and of the ways that their families relate to and support them. The research has a dual focus upon the development of methods and the identification of patterns and themes relating to family wellbeing. It leads from a previous research programme: "Working Successfully with Families" which was approved by the Massey University Ethics Committee.

It should be noted that one of the researchers, Jackie Sanders, is undertaking doctoral dissertation work as part of this project.

1.2 Objectives

- (i) To test a range of methods for exploring family wellbeing, the experience of family and children's experiences. These methods include:

A questionnaire to collect general descriptive data

Observation in schools during curriculum subjects relating to the topic of family and self

Individual interviews with children, parents and practitioners who work with families

Focus groups with matched groups of mothers, fathers, children and practitioners

Community meetings and networking with key neighbourhood and community groups and social service agencies

- (ii) To identify themes and patterns which will contribute to the analysis of family wellbeing and the understandings of the different perspectives children and adults have around the notion of wellbeing.

1.3 Procedures for recruiting participants and obtaining informed consent

Different techniques will be used to recruit participants for the different research strategies, these are outlined below. For all methods used, participation will be voluntary and participants will be made aware of their rights to withdraw at any stage. Individual interviews will be conducted in places and at times that are of the participants' choosing.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire will collect very general data about family and household composition and family networks. Questionnaires will be sent home with children for completion by parents. Forms will be collected back through the schools. The questionnaire will be developed in conjunction with participants. A copy of the questionnaire will be sent to the Ethics Committee for approval prior to use.

Interviews and focus groups with children and parents, observation in schools

Using the schools' own systems for communicating with families, parents and children will be given the opportunity to indicate an interest in participating in either focus groups or individual interviews. Self selection will be used as the primary recruitment technique. Children will be asked to volunteer for interviewing, information sheets and consent forms will be sent home to parents. Parents will be informed about the involvement of children through a newsletter. Parents' consent will be required for the participation of children.

Observation in schools

Initial information will go to parents through the school newsletter. Individual information sheets and consent forms will be sent home with children for signing by both parents and children.

Interviews

The participation of parents and children is required for the individual interviews (at this stage up to 50 will be required). The aim will be to achieve range of household and family forms. If this is not achieved through self-selection, participants will be sought out through the use of snowball sampling techniques. Information sheets will be given to all potential participants and these will be followed up with individual consent forms. Consent for children's participation will be sought from parents and the children themselves. Strategies outlined in the Massey University Code Ethics relating to consent and children will be followed.

Focus groups

Several focus groups are planned these will separately involve males in parenting roles, females in parenting roles, female children and male children. Information sheets will be given to all potential participants and these will be followed up with individual consent forms. Consent for children's participation will be sought from parents and the children themselves. Strategies outlined in the Massey University Code Ethics relating to consent and children will be followed. The purpose of the focus groups is to identify the range of issues and questions that will be used in the individual interviews and to help hone the focus of analysis. After focus groups have been completed, participants will be invited to form a set of "reference groups" for the research and in this role they will be asked to comment upon the development of the methods and the analysis of the data.

Interviews and focus groups with practitioners

A range of practitioners including teachers, community and family workers as well as youth aid and associated justice workers, churches and social service agencies will be approached directly and asked to participate.

Community meetings and networking

Recruitment here will be through open invitation using the usual community networks such as media, notices in public places and so forth. The primary purpose of these meetings will be to seek input into the developing analysis of data.

1.4 Procedures in which participants will be involved

Questionnaire

Families will complete a short questionnaire. This will collect very general information relating household and family composition and family life. It will include brief questions with yes/no or tick box-type options. This

information will be anonymous –no personal identifying information will be collected at all. Assistance with completing forms will be offered. Questionnaires will be sent home with children for completion at home. The purpose of information collected here is to develop some broad descriptive themes around household and family composition and usual caregiving arrangements. This information is important because of the need to develop definitions of family that are grounded in the lived experience of families. This material will provide an overview of family forms in the area.

Observation in schools

This strategy will involve the placement of a researcher in the school setting. Both the children and their parents will be informed that there will be a researcher present and if parents object to this then the strategy will not be used. The objective of this strategy will be to learn about the way in which children understand and talk about the concept of family and the linkages between family and school. It will not collect specific information on the individual experiences of children in their particular families. The work in classrooms will be linked to relevant curriculum units within the school so that it is not disruptive or additional to classroom activities. As noted above, if parents object to the presence of the researcher, this strategy will not be used.

Interviews – families (including children)

It is anticipated that individual interviews will take approximately 1.5 - 2 hours to complete. If participants agree, these interviews will be audiotaped and transcripts of the interview will be given to participants for checking. These interviews will focus upon exploring experiences of family life, definitions of who is included in participants' families, key aspects of family and key values and strengths around family life, approach to parenting (for parents), matters which make it easier and harder to achieve goals within families, knowledge of the family "style", aspirations, challenges and hopes and dreams. The general approach used will be semi-structured questioning and specific strategies such as the critical incident technique will be used to assist participants in the exploration of specific events or issues.

Focus groups

These strategies will involve participants in discussions in general terms about the factors that support families and those that hinder families in functioning well. They will not involve the exploration of individual or personal experience per se. The objective of the focus groups is to highlight specific issues and questions for inclusion in the individual

interviews and to hone the focus of researchers when conducting observations.

Interviews – practitioners, teachers, community group members

It is intended that these interviews will explore practitioners understandings of the factors that facilitate family functioning and which also make it harder for families to function. The focus here will be upon both individual family factors and also structural factors such as the impact of government policies and changes in the macro environment in which families live.

Community meetings

The purpose of these meetings will be to assist with the development of the project, provide a mechanism feedback on the research and to seek input into the analysis of this material. The feedback received here will feed into the development of the final research documents.

1.5 Procedures for handling information and material produced in the course of the research including raw data and final research report(s)

The types of information collected will include:

- (ii) A Questionnaire.
- (iii) Audiotapes of individual interviews.
- (iv) Transcripts and summaries of individual interviews – the content of these will be negotiated with participants.
- (v) Summary information from focus groups and community meetings (summaries will be agreed upon with participants during the groups and meetings).
- (vi) Observations from school participation and field and research notes.

While the research is in progress all data and related material will be stored in a locked office. Audiotapes and summaries of individual interviews will be stored separately in secure cabinets as will back-up computer disks with this information.

When the full study has been completed raw data will be destroyed.

Feedback of material will be negotiated with participants – past experience has indicated very clearly to the researchers that the desire for follow-up information is a very personal and individual matter and that a uniform strategy very rarely meets the needs of all participants.

Where formal research results are produced from the project these will be written up and made publicly available. The researchers have an ongoing strategy for the dissemination of research findings that involves both the academic and the popular media as well as targeted feedback to participants. These systems will continue to be used.

2 Ethical Concerns

2.1 Access to participants

The questionnaire, interviews and focus groups with children and parents will require access through local schools. Preliminary work has begun on gaining access. This process has involved discussions with principals and applications to the Boards of Trustees for approval for access. Once this has been secured school newsletters will be used to provide initial information to parents and children. This will be followed up by specific requests to parents and children for consent. The nature of the research as well as the fact that one of the researchers is undertaking a personal course of study will be made clear in this information.

As noted previously, the selection of practitioners will be achieved by a direct request and will seek to achieve a balanced representation of the different groups who work with families.

As noted above, participation in community meetings will be sought through public invitation.

2.2 Informed consent

Participation in the research will be voluntary and information given to participants prior to any data collection will reinforce this plus the fact that they can withdraw at any stage. Participants will also be made aware that they have the right to ask questions at any stage. Participants will be asked to give consent to the researchers to use the material collected to evaluate the research strategies and to produce analytical material. As part of the consent process, they will also be made aware of the possibility that some of this analysis may be made public. They will be made aware that consent will be gained for the use of direct quotations in any publications.

Questionnaire

Information will be attached to the front of the questionnaire that outlines the purposes of the study, and the potential uses to which information will be put. Return of the forms will be voluntary and receipt of these will be interpreted as family consent. This system will mean that it is possible to

provide a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity because no identifying material will be collected from participants. The forms will be purpose designed and printed so that the possibility for individuals to complete multiple copies of the questionnaire will be limited.

Observations

The procedure for gaining informed consent for the observations will involve the following:

An information sheet will be given to teachers, parents and children. Consent forms will be attached to these. Prior to observations taking place in the classroom, consents from all parents and children will need to be secured by the researchers. If consents from all participants are not achieved, then observations will not take place in the classrooms concerned. The purpose of the observations is to identify the ways in which children talk about the concept of family, meanings and metaphors used when talking about family when they are in naturalistic settings. This information will be used to compare and augment that gained during interviews.

Interviews

As noted above consent to participate will be sought from children and parents. This will be done prior to any interviews taking place. Individual consent forms will be collected for each individual interviewed.

Focus groups and community meetings

Individuals will be invited to consider participation and will be made aware that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw completely or partially (for example by not participating in part of the discussions) at any point (for procedures relating to anonymity and confidentiality, see below). Information sheets will be given to them which outline the purpose of the study and their role within it.

2.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Questionnaire

No identifying information will be collected on this form (see above). Material will be used in grouped form only in published materials. Participants can therefore be guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

Observations in schools

Field observation notes will be taken after completion of the teaching sessions, the researcher may also take brief notes during the session. No identifying material will be collected, anonymous descriptors for children will be used where it is necessary for the sense of the field notes.

Individual interviews

Anonymity will be assured for all participants who agree to individual interviews. No information will be shared from these interviews with anyone outside the research team. Identifying information will be removed from interview summaries. Names and other identifying information may be collected on the audiotapes, participants will be invited to use "nom-de-plumes" for themselves and others to enhance anonymity. Participants will be made aware of their right to have the tape turned off or material deleted from audiotapes. They will be reminded of this during the interview. Tapes will be stored in a secured cabinet. Transcripts will not record any identifying information such as names. Interview material may be used when writing up the research and separate consent will be obtained for the use of any direct quotations from interviews.

Group discussions

Anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed for participants in these meetings. The following steps will be taken to protect the individuals who participate;

- (i) All individuals participating in focus groups will be made aware of whom the other participants are prior to attending the meeting and will be able to choose to withdraw and participate in another way if they feel compromised by the membership of the group.
- (ii) Ground rules will be established at the beginning of all group meetings which establish that material discussed during the meeting will not be discussed or used without participants' consent outside of the meeting
- (iii) Research material taken from the meeting will be in summary form and negotiated with participants so that it reflects their views and understandings of what took place.

2.4 Potential harm to participants

There are two areas of potential harm for participants. The first relates to the possibility that information given in confidence is used in a way that can disadvantage or do harm to participants or their families. The strategies outlined in this application are designed to remove the

possibility that this can happen and have been successfully used in past research by the applicants to achieve this end.

The second area of potential harm relates to the possibility that a participant may disclose abuse or threat to their safety during the course of the data collection. In these situations, the researchers believe that the duty of care outweighs the guarantee of confidentiality and would take steps to ensure the safety of those involved. Procedures for dealing with this unlikely situation are attached.

It is the researchers' responsibility to be aware of both the effects of the research process on participants and to inform participants of matters relating to the research which may affect them. Three members of the research team are experienced family researchers and all have networks within the local community which will enable them to ensure that when issues arise they are able to be dealt with both sensitively and in such a way as to avoid harm to participants. The research has been grounded within schools and connected to the community of practitioners who work with and support families partially to ensure that knowledgeable individuals other than the researchers will be able to watch over the research process and to provide both support and advice to the research team.

The research team recognises the need to be alert to the potential for harm of research participants and accept that it is their responsibility to terminate all or part of the research project if situations arise where participants are placed at risk. The team has developed a procedure which will be used to guide decision making and any action in the event that researchers become aware of either the threat of or actual abuse of a child or adult participant in the research. A copy of this procedure is attached.

2.5 Potential harm to researcher(s)

It is the researchers' responsibility to be clear about copyright laws and ownership of the data generated through the research process. It is also their responsibility to be aware of power relations and other areas of potential risk during interviews and other data collection activities. The researchers are aware of the need to make a clear separation between research activities and other activities such as the delivery of social and support services. They are also required to be aware of the need to manage the generation of knowledge which does not exploit participants and which at the same time meets the standards of good science.

2.6 Potential harm to University

As noted above under 2.5. It is the responsibility of the researchers to ensure that their work conforms to the standards of safe ethical practice and to the standards of good research. They are required to be aware of the need to act at all times in a manner that will reflect well upon the University.

2.7 Participants right to decline to take part

Participants will be informed of their right to decline to participate or to withdraw from the research at any stage. It is the responsibility of the researchers to ensure that participants are reminded of these rights at appropriate stages during the research and to respect absolutely these rights.

2.8 Uses of the information

Participants will be made aware of the uses to which the data may be put in the information sheet given to them at the beginning of the research. They will be given the opportunity to receive copies of published information and will also be made aware of the existence of any unpublished material. Participants will be asked to give specific consent to the use of any direct quotations made by them during the course of the data collection.

2.9 Conflict of interest/conflict of roles

The research is based in the qualitative tradition in which participants are seen as experts and researchers as students. In such situations, conflict of interest is considered unlikely to arise.

There is potential of conflict to arise over the collection of information separately from children and parents where these are members of the same family or household. For this reason, it has been decided that each member of the household will be interviewed separately, and at different times (that is, a set of interviews with a family will not be conducted sequentially). Where this is not acceptable to the family, they will not be able to participate. Separate interviewers will also be used to interview children and parents in each family. As is standard research practice, information gained from interviews will not be shared with other participants. The researchers are aware of the need for special vigilance in situations where children may be placed in a vulnerable situation because of participation in interviews and will not continue with interviews in such situations. The researchers have read the Ethics Committee's publication "Consent and Children" and this document will be used as a guide for all dealings with children. The procedures contained in that document will be used in this research.

This research is exploratory in part and the ethical and safety issues inherent in this type of research are a particular focus for the researchers. The ability to withdraw and consider new avenues for collecting information has been built into the overall research strategy.

3. Other ethical concerns.

The research involves the use of qualitative research strategies. Because these methods involve participants in discussion and reflection there exists the possibility that participants may wish to use the research process as a springboard for change. It is difficult to predict the direction and nature of such processes in advance. The identification of any ethical issues which could arise from such situations will be carefully watched for by the research team and attended to as and when they occur.

3. Legal Concerns

3.1 Legislation

3.1.1 Intellectual property legislation

(a) Copyright

Copyright of materials will rest with the research team.

(b) Ownership of data or materials produced

Material produced through the course of the research is the property of the research team.

3.1.2 Human Rights Act 1993

The researchers are responsible understanding the requirements in this Act that may affect the conduct of the research project.

3.1.3 Privacy Act 1993

Privacy issues are covered in the body of this application and will be clarified for research participants by the researchers in discussion and also in the information sheets given at the commencement of the research.

3.1.4 Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992

3.1.5 **Accident Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 1992**

3.1.6. **Employment Contracts Act 1991**

3.2 **Other Legal Issues**

No other legal issues are expected to impact upon the research.

4. **Cultural Concerns**

The research is intended to include participants from a range of ethnic groupings and does not explicitly set out to focus upon any single ethnic grouping. The focus of the research is upon families with children in the 7-12 year age grouping and this will be the primary factor which will determine selection of participants. However, the researchers are aware of the need for sensitivity to cultural matters, particularly when undertaking family research. To this end, they have established connections with local organisations and individuals who will provide support, guidance and assistance with the management of material which particularly relates to families of Maori or Pacific Island descent.

5. **Other Ethical Bodies Relevant to this Research**

5.1 **Ethics Committees**

5.2 **Professional Codes**

6. **Other Relevant Issues**

Procedures for dealing with potential harm

The purpose of this research is to explore the positive dimensions of family life and there is no intention to either seek out situations where abuse may be occurring within families nor to engage in any therapeutic or other intervention with families. However, it is acknowledged that there may be circumstances where the researchers become aware of situations where there is the potential for harm or actual harm of a research participant.

In such situations the team shall follow the following procedures. It should be noted that these are general procedures and it is recognised that the particulars of individual situations may warrant additional decisions being made. This procedure statement is intended to provide a framework within which such decisions can be made. The research team has experience in the conduct of community-based family research. This experience will be used as a guide for managing interactions with children and families.

Principle

The principle of duty of care is recognised as a fundamental principle, which must guide the work of researchers in this research project. This requires that if the researcher becomes aware of abusive or potentially abusive situations they have a responsibility to act to ensure the safety of vulnerable individuals.

Procedures

If a member of the researcher team, in carrying out the duties of their positions, come upon a situation where an individual is being abused they will act to protect the abused individual and will report such abuse to the proper authorities such as the police or Children Young Persons' and their Families Agency (CYPFA). They will do this in consultation with at least one other member of the research team.

If a member of the research team in carrying out the duties of their positions become concerned about the safety of any individual they will first discuss this with one other member of the research team.

Depending upon the circumstances they may do one or more of the following:

Discuss the issue with the parent or child concerned.

Seek the assistance of the school (if this is a child) in deciding the appropriate response.

Make the individual concerned aware of the appropriate agencies or support providers which could assist them to resolve their situation, such as the Women's Refuge, counselling or social service agency and offer assistance to make initial contact in the first instance.

Make contact directly with either the Police or the Children Young Persons and their Families Agency. In this instance they will inform the individuals concerned that they are taking this action.

[School letterhead]

Dear Parents

The year 6 students currently in Rooms 6 and 7 have been selected as possible participants in this research project. Mrs Sanders requires approximately a year to complete her project so she is interested in her sample group consisting of most children yet to turn 11. She hopes to have a group of around 16 children across the two rooms. She will make contact with you and your child this year and continue to work with your child during next year (whatever class they end up in). I wish to reassure you that the research is not looking to expose 'problems or issues' but to examine in depth 'life through the eyes of ten and eleven year old children'. Ethics committee guidelines will be strictly adhered to.

I personally am delighted that our school will be involved in an area of research that has been overlooked in the past with so much focus being given to toddlers, 5 year olds and teenagers.

Feel free to make further inquiries if you wish by phoning Jackie Sanders [telephone numbers here]

Yours sincerely

Principal.

Dear Parent,

My name is Jackie Sanders and I am 40 years old. I live in with my partner, Craig, and my two sons; Matthew and William. I have lived in for almost 10 years, and before that spent time in Wellington, Dannevirke and at Massey University.

For the past 9 years I have worked for Barnardos New Zealand, and it is through this work that I have become very interested in the worlds of children. Since 1995 I have worked as a researcher for Barnardos and my work has explored family and whanau wellbeing. In doing this work, my focus has been upon the things that make it easier for families and whanau to be strong and healthy.

The research I would like to do at [.....] school is part of my studies for a PhD qualification. It will produce word pictures that capture the experience of being 10 and 11 in ways that reflect the children's experience and which also make sense to the adults around them. It will focus on describing what daily life is like for these children, what and who is important to them and what the future seems to hold.

As a mother, I am very aware of how precious our children are and the research I would like to do with the children at [.....] school will be based around respect for the children, you as parents and the school. I am very happy to talk with you about my research and to ensure that the work I do is not disruptive in any way.

You could contact me to talk about the research at home (.....) or at work (.....).

Yours sincerely

Jackie Sanders.

Massey Letterhead

Information Sheet - parents

I am doing research as part of my PhD at Massey University. I am interested in studying the life experiences of ten and eleven year old children and have chosen [.....] school as the place where I would like to undertake this study. I have the approval of the [.....] Board of Trustees and the Massey University Ethics Committee for my study. I am contacting some of the families in two classes to invite them to participate in this study. I am interested in working with a small group of ten and eleven year old children for the coming 12 months to identify issues that are important to them, the things they do on a daily basis and the way they see the future including their hopes and dreams. As part of this study I would also like to meet with the children's parents to explain the study and to undertake an interview in order to learn more about the lives of the children.

If you and your child agree to participate you could be involved in one or more of the following:

1. An interview – this involves you meeting face to face with me for an interview which would take about an hour. This would be at a place and time that suited you. If you agree, this interview would be taped and you would agree to the text of this interview. This interview would be totally confidential and will only be shared with me. I will ask for your permission if I need to use material from the interview in my thesis or other places.
2. I would also like to participate during the day in your child's class. This would enable me to understand more fully some of the experiences your child has on a day to day basis.
3. A small group meeting where your child would brainstorm with other children of the same age the things that are important for children today.

At all times participation in this research would be voluntary – no pressure would be put on you or your child to participate and you could both stop at any time if you no longer wished to be part of the research. At the end of this research I will produce a thesis – I will give you a summary of the key things that I found from doing the research. I would ask your permission to use things like quotations or other material gathered while working with you. I would not use anything you or your child shared with me in a report without your consent.

Consent for participation of child

Yes, I agree to my child _____ (child's name) being contacted to give consent to participating in the study.

Date of birth of child ___/___/___

I can be contacted at _____

My telephone number is

If you had any general questions, concerns or complaints to make about the research you should contact Associate Professor Robyn Munford at Massey University (06) 3505224 and she will help you to resolve these problems.

Massey University letterhead.

Information sheet – children

I am studying the experiences of ten and eleven year old children for a PhD qualification at Massey University. I am interested in studying the life experiences of children because I think that being ten or eleven is a really interesting age. I have chosen [.....] school to try to find a group of children who can help me with my research. I am contacting some of the children in your class to invite them to participate in this study. I want to work with a small group of children during next year to talk about the things that are important to them, the way they see the future and their hopes and dreams. As part of this study I also want to meet with parents to explain the study and to undertake an interview in order to learn more about the lives of children.

If you agree to participate you could be involved in the following:

1. An interview – this involves you meeting face to face with me for an interview which could take about an hour. This would be at a place and time that suited you. If you agreed we would tape this – I would give you a copy of the interview once I had typed it up and you could make changes to it if you wanted to. Only you and I would know what was in this interview.
2. I am interested in school experiences you and other children in your class have and so I would like to sit in your classroom during the day
3. I would also like to have a brainstorm group with you and some other children, this could take place during school time.

You would always be able to change your mind and leave my study. I would not put pressure on you to stay involved. At the end of this research I will write a thesis – I will give you a summary of the key things that I found from doing the research. I will ask your permission to use things like quotes or other material that you shared with me.

Consent form

I have read the information sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular question.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

If I have any worries about the research I can contact Associate Professor Robyn Munford at Massey University 3505224 and she will help me with them.

Signed _____

Name (participant) _____

Signed _____

Name (researcher) _____

Date _____

Appendix 2 – examples of materials used for data generation

List of Activities and materials completed by the children:

1. Me and my feelings
2. People who are important to me
3. My family
4. Sentence completion – good, bad and great days at school
5. Creative writing/drawing activities

What I like doing best

The future

People and animals

A kid's guide to changing classes

Playing sport and being in the outdoors

Writing for TV and books

Make up your own story

6. Monday to Friday diaries
7. After school/weekend activity chart
8. Illustration of an eco-map

8. I would be disappointed if

.....
.....
because



9. Before I go to bed at night I like to

.....
.....
.....



10. I find it hard to get to sleep at night if

.....

because

.....
.....



11. The joke I think is really funny at the moment is

.....
.....
.....

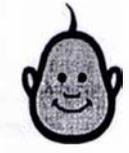
12. A good surprise for me would be

.....
.....

because.....

.....

ME and



my feelings

My Name

I am tall

I weigh

My eyes are coloured

.....

My hair is coloured

.....

Adults who spend time with me:

People I talk to when I want to plan something:

people who are important to me

People I talk to when I am worried:

Adults who are interested in what I have to say:

People I talk to when I am really excited:

My Name _____

There are
people in my family

On Sundays we all like to:

One thing we like to do is:

We have a favourite game, it is:

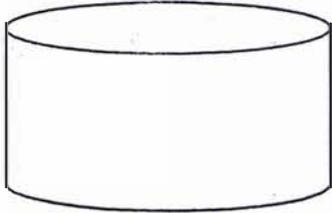


My Family



We like going to:

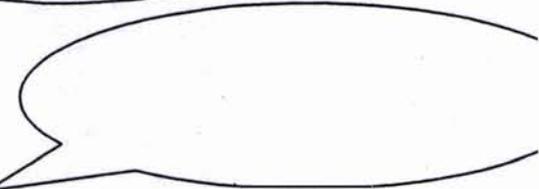
We like to eat:



The jobs we do together include:

Empty rounded rectangular box for writing jobs.

We celebrate:



I am proud of my family because:

Large empty rectangular box for writing reasons for pride.

We always share:

Empty rectangular box for writing what is shared.

I look forward to doing (with my family):

Empty rectangular box for writing activities to look forward to.

My Name

Complete the sentences:

A good day at school for me is when

.....
.....
.....

A bad day at school for me is when

.....
.....
.....

A great day at school for me is when

.....
.....
.....

A good day at home for me is when

.....
.....
.....

A bad day at home for me is when

.....
.....
.....

A great day at home for me is when

.....
.....
.....

What I like doing best:

Draw a picture or write a story, poem, song or rap about something you really like doing. If you draw a picture make some notes for me about this:

- Where are you?
- What are you doing?
- Why do you enjoy it?
- Is there anyone else there?
- What are they doing?
- When do you get to do this?
- Are you allowed to choose to do this by yourself or do you need to ask an adult for permission?

The future:

Draw a picture, write a poem, song, rap or short story that tells me about what you think the future will be like.

People and animals:

Make up a short story, poem, song or rap about people and animals. If you like you can use one of these sentences to start your story with.

- I was going home from school one day, when I saw a cardboard box on the footpath. It was moving around like an animal was inside. I went over to the box and
- I had loved animals since I was a really small child, so ...

If you want to, you can illustrate your work.

"A kids guide to changing classes"

Make up a story, poem, song or rap about a child who moves schools or is in a class with none of his/her friends. If you like, you can use one of these sentences to start your story with:

- I couldn't believe it. We were moving to a new place where I wouldn't know anyone. I would have to start all over again to make new friends.....
- We all went into the hall on the first day back at school to find out what class we were in. There was no-one in my class that I knew

If you want to, you can illustrate your work.

Playing sport and being in the outdoors:

Make up a story, poem, song or rap about sport or being in the outdoors. You can use one of these sentences to start with:

- It was the day of the cross country....
- At last the (choose your own favourite sport or activity) season had arrived. I had been waiting since last year, now I would finally get a chance to
- For our holidays that year we planned to go on an outdoor adventure, little did we know how much of an adventure this would be

If you want to, you can illustrate your work.

Writing for TV and for Books:

Pretend you are the writer for your favourite TV programme.

Make some notes about an episode you are writing for it.

- Where does the episode take place (tell me the different places)?
- Which characters are in the episode?
- What happens?
- How does it start and end?

OR:

You have been asked by your favourite author to write a short story for his or her new book of short stories. Make a plan of the story:

- Where does the story take place (tell me the different places)?
- Who are the characters are in the story?
- What happens?
- How does it start and end?

If you want to, you can illustrate your work.

And, if none of these appeal:

Make up a short story on a topic of your own choosing.

My Name

Today's date

Monday

Was it a good weekend?



yes

not

no

sure

Why?

At the weekend, I enjoyed:

I didn't enjoy:

I played with:



This week the biggest challenge for me will be:

It will be a good week for me if:

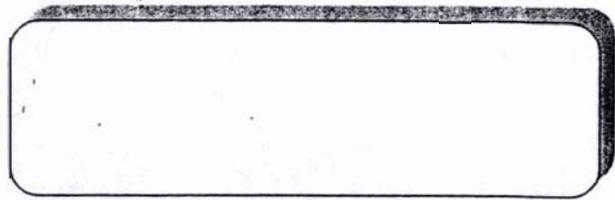
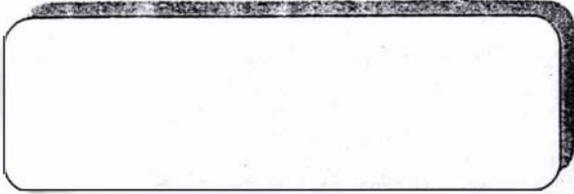
My Name

Today's date

Friday

This week I really enjoyed:

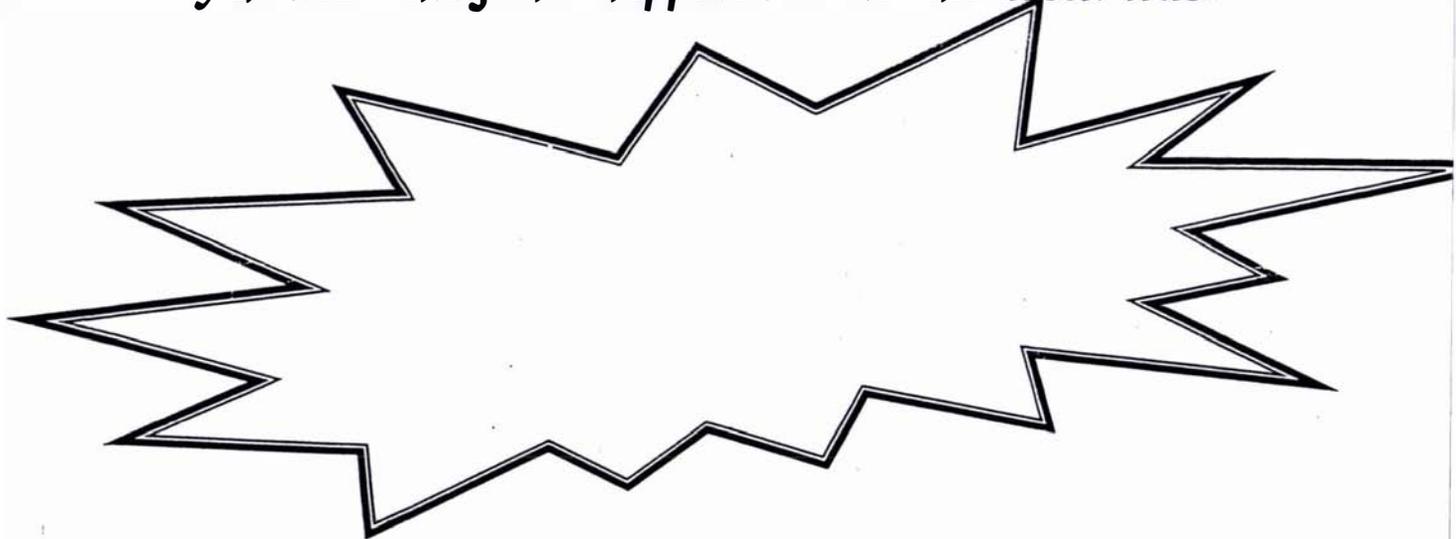
This week I didn't enjoy:



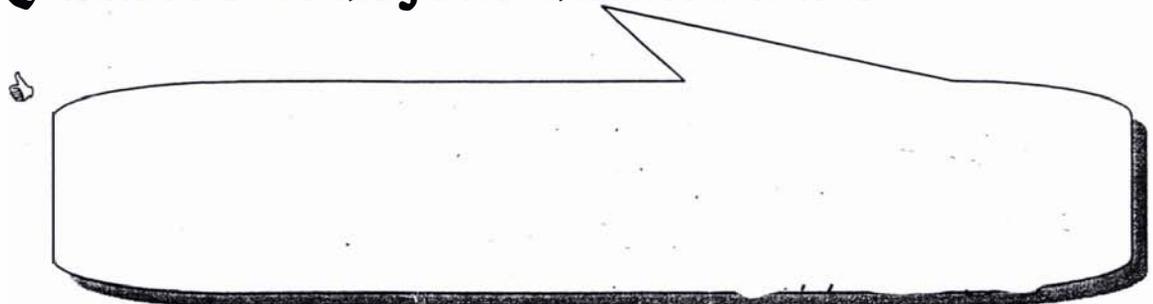
The thing I found hard this week was:



The best thing that happened to me this week was:



I learned something new this week, it was:



I think I had a good week:

yes

not

no

sure

Could you please let me know the things that you are doing after school this term.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
After school and before tea					
After tea					

	Saturday	Sunday
Morning		
Afternoon		

Illustration of the Eco-map

