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**Pedagogic Imaginings:
Negotiating Pedagogies of Care/Protection in a Risk Society**

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... the pendulum [in relation to child protection] now needs to swing towards
community education, rather than large-scale reliance on the criminal justice system
(Paul Wilson, Criminologist cited in Wenham, 2004: 35)

Introduction

Teachers' professional relationships with children are at the core or heart of the educational process. Children learn not only knowledge and skills via these pedagogic relations, but also how to conduct themselves as socially responsible, moral agents. In other words, the social identities of children are at least partially shaped by the pedagogic relations of schooling. Moreover, teacher professional identities are formed and re-formed by the rules and regulations, that is, the official discourses of state education authorities. Consequently, regulations requiring teachers to change their professional conduct, and thus relationships with students, should be of central concern to all those who work in the educational field.

In this paper, we report on a focus group study into teacher professional identity conducted in Queensland, Australia. Two of the key objectives of the study, funded by the Australian Research Council (McWilliam, Singh, and Sachs, 2002-2004) were as follows:

- (1) Investigate the notions of 'caring' that are emerging out of the risk management and safe practices being required of teachers of primary-age children;
- (2) Identify how primary teachers understand the difference between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' risk in relation to the care of children.

In the following discussion, we examine the images of teachers and children, the imagined worlds of schools and classrooms, and some possibilities for imagining new professional identities that arose in the focus group talk of teachers. We suggest that the emergence of new pedagogic practices, namely 'no touch' pedagogies inculcate new cultural dispositions in teachers: heightened anxiety about touching children (Jones, 2001); professional collegiality via safety in numbers (McWilliam & Singh, 2003), and 'awareness' of inherent paradoxes between safe, non-risky and productive pedagogies (Jones, under review). These refractions of state policy and legislation aimed to protect young children are the subject of concern for us as educators. On the one hand, we welcome new legislation and policies which aim to protect children

from potential harm and abuse (Commission for Children and Young People, 2000; Department of Families Queensland, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Education Queensland, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001). On the other hand, we suggest that such policies may be interpreted at the level of the school and/or classroom to mean ‘no touch’ pedagogies. Such refractions of policies may not be educationally beneficial to the children that they aim to protect. It is thus timely to think about child protection issues in terms of ‘community education, rather than large-scale reliance on the criminal justice system’ (Wilson, 2004: 35).

Thus, our objective in this paper is to focus on the images, imaginary worlds and imagined professional identities constructed by teachers as they talk about the implications for pedagogic practice of new policies and regulations concerning child protection. We believe that this analytic work is necessary to understanding how teachers negotiate and navigate the plethora of new child protection legislation and policies. Moreover, such analytic work is necessary to designing general community, and specific teacher education programs aimed at informing the work of those responsible for the care of children. Through such analytic work we hope to tilt the pendulum in relation to issues of child care and protection – from a ‘large-scale reliance’ on the repressive measures of the ‘criminal justice system’ to productive measures of teacher and community education programs (Wilson, 2004: 35).

We have organized the paper in three parts. In the first section, we develop our theoretical framework building on Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) notions of image, imaginary worlds, and imagined collective identities; as well as theorisations of the risk society (Giddens, 1990; Beck, 1994) and parental/community anxieties about child care/protection (Edgar, 1999, Jenks, 1996). We then move to an analysis of the focus group data collected for the study. The data analyses are organized under three themes: images of the child, teacher and risky pedagogies; imaginary worlds or spaces of risk; and the imagined collective or professional identities for teachers in these new times. In the final section of the paper, we examine how images of the ‘vulnerable’ child and ‘no-touch’ pedagogies have constructed imaginary ‘un-safe’ or ‘risky’ spaces within schools.

Re-Theorizing Pedagogies: Images, Imagined Worlds, Imagining New Identities

A number of key social theorists (see for example Appadurai, 1996; Tomlinson, 1999) have suggested that late global modernity is characterised by the rapid multi-directional flow of symbolic goods (knowledge, images, ideologies, fashion signs and so forth) across increasingly permeable territorial borders. Moreover, these theorists propose that the appropriation and consumption of symbolic goods by people in local contexts increasingly produces phenomenological experiences of ‘dis-placement’, ‘de-territorialization’, heightened anxieties, and feelings of uncertainty (Tomlinson, 1999: 9). In other words, late modernity is characterised by complex global connectivity or networks, and in turn these networks or connections ‘weaken the ties of culture to place’ and tradition (Tomlinson, 1999: 9). Experiences of dis-placement or de-territorialization are not merely the preserve of people on the move, the global travellers (knowledge workers, refugees, and migrants); they are also experienced by people who are likely to stay in the one place or locale (eg., teachers who have taught in the same school for many years). This is because local contexts or places are increasingly connected to distant places by the compression of space-time (Giddens,

1990). In other words, messages, images, fashion signs, and knowledge can be instantly relayed to anyone anywhere across the globe, thus effectively annihilating the distance between places. Moreover, the traditional holds of local geographic places and resources are weakened, as global flows and networks of resources offer new potentials and new risks for re-imagining personal identities, trajectories and relationships. On this point, Tulloch and Lupton (2003: 4) suggest that: In the absence of fixed norms and expectations such as those which had structured modern societies ... individuals are forced to produce their own biographies and invent new certainties, to make their way in life without the guidance of such norms and expectations. This process of individualization is the other, private side of globalization.

Thus, when images of 'sexualized child models', 'over-scheduled children', 'child obesity', 'child celebrities', 'high-achieving children', and 'child abduction', for example, are broadcast across the globe, new collective and professional identities may be imagined in local places far removed geographically from the places where the images originated. Moreover, these imaginings in local places become the starting point for launching individual and collective actions and ways of engaging with others (Appadurai, 1996; Tomlinson, 1999). Tulloch and Lupton (2003: 4) suggest that these cultural flows of globalization imply:

... both freedom to choose, but also crushing responsibility to make the right life choices, a proliferation of new demands upon people facing a growing number and complex range of choices in relation to such issues as education, gender roles, marriage, family formation and employment. These demands themselves create new risks, such as loss of employment, marital and family breakdown, as people seek to juggle the desire for self-directed and autonomous life with the need for stable relationships and steady employment.

At the same time, risk-taking may be viewed as 'contributing to self-development, self-actualization, self-authenticity and self-control ... part of a wider discourse that privileges the self as a continuing project that requires constant work and attention' (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003: 38). From this perspective, risk-taking 'becomes a particular "practice of the self", a means by which subjectivity is expressed and developed according to prevailing moral and ethical values'. (Tulloch and Lupton, 2003: 38). However, such work on the self necessitates access to and evaluation of risk knowledges, that is, knowledge of various cultural resources, as well as potential risks associated with the take up of these resources. Such knowledge and resources continue to be unequally distributed (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Our interest in this paper is with the processes of individual and collective imagining in relation to the construction and take-up of knowledge and resources about child care - imagining which appears to have produced heightened states of anxiety and concerns about potential risks in relation to the protection of children.

New Times: Heightened Anxiety about Children

Social concerns about 'children's safety' appear to have intensified during the last decades of the 20th century (Jenks, 1996; Jones, 2003). Some researchers have argued that this heightened social concern about child protection is a manifestation of the end of the millennium/new millennium social anxieties (see Mestrovic, 1991). In other words, widespread concern or anxieties in the West about children's lost innocence, particularly sexual innocence and vulnerability is a manifestation of wider

concerns about the rapid cultural, social, political and economic changes that are now taking place, in what some researchers have described as ‘new times’ (Hall, 1996). Jones (2003: 4) suggests that ‘the “discovery” of child sexual abuse during the 1960s and 1970s ... marked the beginnings of the latest “child-panics”, this one exceeding other historical anxieties such as those about “delinquent” children in the 1950s, and “neglected” children in the 1930s.’

Why such intensified concern about the ‘safety’ and ‘protection’ of young children during this historical juncture? A number of researchers suggest that ‘young children and idealized childhood have come to symbolize those elements of innocence, safety and certainty experienced as lost’ during an historical period of great upheaval, change and uncertainty (Jenks, 1996; Jones 2003). Symbolically, children come to represent the lost innocence and security of the past, as well as the potential for a new hopeful, certain future. In addition, some theorists argue that children have become ‘highly valued’ (Edgar, 1999) or ‘highly prized’ in Western countries in recent decades (Giddens, 2000). This ‘prized’ categorisation of children is ‘partly because they have become so much rarer and partly because the decision to have a child is very different from previous generations’ (Giddens, 2000: 78). In Australia, for example, the ‘fertility rate fell during the 1960s and was below replacement by 1976’, so that by the ‘year 2020, children will be a smaller group than those over age sixty’ (Edgar, 1999: 32). Increasingly, the decision to have a child is ‘guided by psychological and emotional needs’, and parents invest heavily in their ‘prized’ child(ren) (Giddens, 2000: 78). Edgar (1999: 28) suggests that:

[T]oday's children are born to older parents who are both likely to be in paid work. They have fewer siblings and family size is smaller. Those two facts help explain the apparent change in children. They are highly valued, invested in heavily by parents who have themselves come from small families in which the individual child was paid more attention than in the larger families of previous generations. The investment is more in financial terms than in parental time, though that time is less widely spread across a large number of siblings than before.

Thus, heightened anxieties about children have to be understood against this ‘background of much higher expectations about how children should be cared for and protected’ (Giddens, 2000: 78). At the same time, notions of caring for children, as well as who takes responsibility for child care/protection, how, when and where have changed substantially over the last forty years. This in turn, has constituted, a new ‘ecology of childhood’ in Western countries (see Edgar, 1999). On this point, Edgar (1999: 28) argues that working parents often do not spend enough time with children, and thus are ‘less often present to serve as role models for acceptable behaviour’. While other adult carers can and do serve as role models, caring by a range of ‘adult specialists’ (e.g., child psychologists, after-school carers, tutors, sports coaches, medical specialists and so forth) may be fragmentary, contradictory and inconsistent (see Edgar, 1999). Consequently, the responsibility for care and guidance may at times fall on children themselves. In other words, some children may be ‘raising themselves and their siblings’ by ‘spending organised time, not guided and mentored time, with other adults in formal child-minding settings’ (Edgar, 1999: 28).

In the preceding section of the paper we considered some plausible explanations for heightened anxieties about child care and protection in Western nations. In what follows, we consider those theories which deal specifically with the topics of risk, risk

society and risk cultures in order to understand new pedagogic imaginings relating to the care and protection of children.

Dealing with Heightened Anxiety About Child Care: Technologies of Risk Management

Heightened feelings of anxiety about child care and protection are considered by some theorists to be part and parcel of living in an era of increasing uncertainty and risk (see Beck, 1994). For example, Bauman (1997: 50) argues that we are now all living in an 'atmosphere of ambient fear'. This fear has been produced by several factors such as: universal deregulation and the priority awarded to market competition; (2) the weakening of social welfare (public services such as health, education, welfare) and family safety networks which in the past provided some measure of protection against the harsh excesses of market competition; (3) less reliance on tradition in establishing what to do in a given range of contexts; and (4) the projection of ephemeral material and social worlds through the new global consumer industries (Bauman, 1997; Giddens & Pierson, 1998). These four factors - increased market competition, fewer safety nets, lessening holds of tradition, and the projection of fleeting, and rapidly changing consumer images – produce feelings and perceptions of uncertainty, anxiety and ambient fear. In turn, these factors or conditions of late modernity produce what Lash (cited in Tulloch & Lupton, 2003) calls 'risk cultures'. Tulloch and Lupton (2003: 5) suggest that risk cultures 'offer fluid and interchanging ways of viewing risk, drawing on habitual, embodied and affective judgements which are subjective rather than objective'.

In particular, people's everyday anxieties about child care and protection are constituted in and through these risk cultures, that is, language and symbolic forms, as well as social and institutional relations and practices of everyday life (Skinner, 2000). Moreover, perceptions about risky practices and dangerous behaviours are constructed through narrative – the stories we hear or read about, as well as the stories we tell others. Narrative is the 'telling (in whatever medium, though especially language) of a series of temporal events so that a meaningful sequence is portrayed' (Barthes cited in Skinner, 2000: 156). Central to these narratives are the categories of perceived dangers to children – who and what (people, places, objects, activities) are constructed as dangerous or risky. These categories change over time and place, so that what may have been considered harmless only a decade ago may now be perceived as potentially harmful. In addition, the narratives or stories told about risk minimisation become part of our everyday ways of being and interacting with children. For example, the narratives that teachers tell each other and new staff about ways of responding to child protection legislation may become part of enacted or lived schooling practices. Put simply, strategies of risk-aversion as well as risk-taking may be talked into being through the processes of storying or narrative.

In what follows we examine the narratives told by teachers about risk and uncertainty in relation to the care and protection of children in primary classrooms. To probe this issue more fully, we draw on Appadurai's work on the role of the imagination in globalized modernity to examine how teachers' professional experiences in the local or specific contexts of primary schools may be constituted by 'de-territorialized' images and knowledges (see Singh, 2004). Appadurai (1996 : 31) argues that the imagination can be theorized as a field of social practices, comprised of social groups and individual agents engaged in struggles over meaning production and

consumption. This field of social practices, however, is not local but globally interconnected through new forms of work (i.e., the new consumer driven culture industries). Individuals do not passively and mindlessly consume cultural products (images, knowledge, fashion signs) produced elsewhere, but actively engage in the appropriation and indigenization of these symbolic goods. In developing a theory of imagination as a globally organized field of social practices, Appadurai (1996: 3-6) distinguished between the (1) multiple and diverse 'images' produced and disseminated multi-directionally across the globe, (2) the 'imagined worlds' constituted by social groups as they appropriate and make sense of these images across different local places, and (3) the possibilities for collective and individual 'imagining' made possible by dis-embedding the imagination from local geographic anchors (see Singh, 2004).

To understand more fully the cultural flows, productions and articulations of images about the 'vulnerable child', the imagined worlds of 'risky' and 'safe' places and practices, and imaginings about individual and collective professional identities, we report on data collected from two public or government primary schools in Queensland, Australia. School One was situated in a middle socio-economic urban area, while School Two was located in a lower socio-economic urban area. At each school, the teaching population was predominantly female, with only one male teacher from School One, and two males from School Two, participating in the focus group discussions. The teachers had varying years of professional experience, and ranged in age from 21 to 51+ years. On average, the teachers in the group had taught for eleven years (minimum years of teaching = one; maximum years of teaching = 34).

At each school, teachers participated in a round-table focus group discussion with two researchers. Members of each focus group were asked to think about and discuss pedagogic responses to six scenario topics. A member of the focus group was asked to read aloud the scenario topic, and then participants were encouraged to discuss how they might respond if they were placed in a similar situation. The focus group discussions were audio-taped and transcribed.

Teachers' responses to the scenarios concerning teacher-student touch, and teacher-student interaction ranged from classroom-based pedagogical moments to matters well beyond the classroom. Transcribed data collected from focus group discussions were coded for dominant themes. In addition, the data were coded to collate responses to the following analytic question: How do teachers attempt to negotiate potential contradictions between enacting effective and safe pedagogies?

Images of the Teacher, Child and Parent

School One

Some of the teachers in the focus group discussion described the children who attended the school as 'fairly protected', 'cosseted' and suggested that they were unlikely to experience abuse or harassment. Other teachers, however, were quick to point out that children from all social groups and communities may be 'sexually vulnerable', and children attending School One may be 'more susceptible'. The heightened susceptibility of children in School One was attributed to the fact that both parents worked. Thus children were more likely to spend time being supervised either

in child-care centres or by electronic means (eg., the television). In addition, children were constructed as the victims of the breakdown of the traditional nuclear family. New family arrangements were constructed as devoid of love for young children who then sought this love elsewhere.

Extract One: (School 1)

Researcher: What do you mean your clientele is different Teacher C?

(F)Teacher C: I always think probably that we have a-----

(F)Teacher D: Cosseted children.

(F)Teacher C: Yeah, I would say that we've got children who are often in after-school hours care and fairly nurturing environments for the main part

(F)Teacher E: I think they're more susceptible because Mum and Dad are at work. Longer and longer hours and then they race home, and then they're shoved in front of the telly and who knows what they're watching, and I think children from affluent families are equally susceptible to looking for – for nurturing – looking for attention of any sort of description.

(F)Teacher C: Well, that's precisely what I'm saying though. We can't just assume that – does it happen within – within any particular environment? Because it does. (a number of lines omitted)

(F)Teacher D: Well there's a lot of kids in the school even though we're high socio – there's still a lot of children that have split families and separated families, divorced families and they are so desperate for love that they will take it from wherever they can get it ...

Teachers in School One also talked about the 'unwritten rule' in the state or public school system which encouraged 'no-touch' pedagogies. The 'no-touch' pedagogic approach in the public school system was contrasted with that in the private education system and seen as inadequate by some parents. The concept of perception, or how different categories of teachers may be perceived or imagined to be 'risky' or 'safe' adults in relation to children, was also raised by the focus group. Teachers suggested that the attributes of age and gender made a significant difference in terms of perceptions or images about the 'risky' or 'safe' professional adult caring for children. Thus older adults were constructed as 'safer' than younger adults, and older adults who were parents were constructed as 'safer' than older adults who were not parents. Finally, teachers who happened to be older, female, mothers were constructed as the safest category. The teachers did not speak about race issues. This may largely be due to the fact that the teaching population in Australia remains predominantly white.

Extract Two (School 1)

(F)TeacherB: My – being in the state school – when I came from the state school system – that you don't [touch children]... One of my parents asked me actually last year, "Do you touch the children?" Because in the last state pre-school that she had the child in– the teacher said, "We do not touch the children." So the mother pulled the kid out of that state pre-school.. And that is one story that I've heard – one of these unwritten rules in the state system is that you don't hug, cuddle, touch, the children.

(F)Teacher A: Do you think there might – do you think there might be another unwritten rule, too, that you and I as older parents it might be perfectly reasonable to touch young children-----

(F)TeacherB: May be.

(F)Teacher A: But you as a young single, unmarried woman or you as a male might not have that same comfortable relation in terms of touching children?

(F) Teacher D: Well – but then he’s a father figure. But you’re a father – you have children of your own.

(F)Teacher A: It’s to do with perception, isn’t it?

Finally, the teachers at School One talked about the age at which they changed their pedagogic relations or proximity to young children. For teachers at School One, pedagogic relations with young children became more distant in the middle years of schooling.

Extract Three: (School 1)

(F) Teacher A: And where’s the – the point at which you would – is there an age at which it flips over so you say, “At this point-----“

(F)Teacher C: ... because I’m a middle primary person I wouldn’t think about not going into the girl’s toilets but I would be very cautious about going into the boys. But as an infant teacher I find I go into both.

(F)Teacher D: Yeah, I would have too.

(F)Teacher C: So if there is something-----

(F)Teacher A: So somewhere around year 3 to 4 – something changes over.

For teachers in School One, three main images of the child and teacher were constructed in the focus group discussions. First, children in middle class socio-economic urban communities, such as the one where School One was located, were constructed as ‘susceptible’ to ‘neglect’ and ‘abuse’ because both parents were likely to be working, and the children were placed in the care of others. Second, the focus group discussion centred on the perceived risk levels of different categories of teachers, with gender, age, and parental status, considered key attributes in risk assessments. Third, ‘no-touch’ pedagogies appeared to be considered appropriate in the middle years of schooling, rather than the infant years.

School Two

It will be recalled that School Two, a government or publicly funded state school, was located in a lower socio-economic urban area. The issue of both parents working and leaving children in the care of others was not raised during the focus group discussion held at this school. However, the teachers repeatedly spoke of the strong disciplinary authority exercised by the parents, as well as the need to seek permission from parents, for all matter of things, including watching programmes that were rated as ‘parental guidance recommended’. The need for education courses on ‘right touch, wrong touch’ in adult-child relations, as well as child-child relations was also raised by the focus group. Specifically, the teachers suggested that these education courses should not only be provided for all teachers, but also for children to increase ‘awareness’ of ‘boundaries’ pertaining to touching others.

Extract One: (School Two)

(F) Teacher B: ... I think that it's not just telling the teachers that they're not to do it [touch children], you have to start with the kids as well. You know those friendship circles – what's appropriate – who are you meant to be touching, who are you meant to be hugging – who are you holding hands with and who are you [indistinct]. I make sure that I teach the children about boundaries of personal space and appropriate touch.

Researcher: Right.

(a few lines omitted)

(F) Teacher B: I'd do it as a whole class activity –... as part of human relationships educational topic.

(a few lines omitted)

(F) Teacher D: ----right touch, wrong touch.

Researcher: Mmm.

(F) Teacher D: And things so that they're aware of it and then they can [indistinct]

(F) Teacher B: And they know the boundaries – they know the boundaries as well.

In the focus group discussion held at School Two, the teachers suggested that 'no-touch' pedagogies were probably the safest approach, but they still engaged in some forms of touch. However, if teachers were placed in a situation where they might have to touch children, for example assisting a child after an accident, they always ensured that another adult was present. Teachers never allowed themselves to be placed in the vulnerable position of 'one- on- one' with children.

Extract Two: (School Two)

Researcher: What about hugging as a general thing? And that sort of thing – what do you think are the professional things to do? Is it professional to touch for any reason at all or is it – you know – would you still think there are times?

Focus Group discussion – indistinct

(F) Teacher C: There probably isn't. But you do it.

(F) Teacher D: When they [students] do it (hug or touch you) and it's just a – it's just purely instinct (to touch or hug in return)

(a few lines omitted)

(F) Teacher C: But I'll always make sure that if the kid is cuddling – is hugging me or whatever that it's always – it's never just me and them. There's never...one- on- one. There's always got to be another adult there somewhere.

In summary, teachers at School Two indicated that 'no-touch' pedagogies were probably the safest approach in regard to relating to school children. In addition, they suggested that adults (teachers, paraprofessionals, parents) and children needed to be taught about 'right touch, wrong touch' – to enhance everyone's knowledge and awareness of acceptable and unacceptable forms of physical contact. Finally, teachers suggested that if they were placed in a situation which required touching a child, they always ensured that another adult was present to witness the event.

Imagined Worlds or Spaces of Risky and Safe Pedagogic Practices

School One

For the teachers at School One, all spaces, even ‘classrooms’ were considered to be potentially risky places. Classrooms were transformed into potentially risky places when: (1) the door and/or windows were closed and (2) one teacher was alone with one child.

Extract Four: (School One)

(F) Teacher C: I’m, we’ve – even – even in classrooms it’s always at the back of your mind so you’re not in a classroom on your own with the student.

(F) Teacher B: With one of the students, yeah.

(F) Teacher D: Well, this happens to me all the time and I always – I always have to be sure that I have open doors. I always – you never ever see me with a closed door. You always make sure – see me with windows open and I always make sure that I am visible, that is, as visible as it best possible to be.

(F) Teacher A: Mmm. Okay.

(F) Teacher D: Because I am always in that situation where I am working one- to- one with kids testing or doing other things, talking to kids and it is really scary. It is an issue that really concerns me.

Generally, the teachers at School One agreed that the only way to ensure that spaces did not become risky was to maintain high visibility. The rule of maintaining high visibility however, the teachers suggested, was often unwritten, but a generally accepted form of professional conduct in schools.

Extract Five : (School One)

(F) Teacher C: I think – you know – in truth, schools have a very complex set of rules and regulations which are often implicit and for new people coming in, no matter what age they are, you have to learn what they are, and then so you would only get them orally in a lot of cases. There’s no sign on the wall in the toilet saying, “Male teachers will not come in here.”

(F) Teacher D: No.

(F) Teacher C: Or whatever – there’s nothing that’s been public – even in our behaviour management policy there’s no little – “Thou shalt not’s”-----

(F) Teacher D: What teachers shan’t do. So instead of a-----

(F) Teacher A: So they’re saying you have to be very visible and so on, but the rules actually aren’t so visible

School Two

Similarly, at School Two teachers' risk minimisation strategies were associated with 'high visibility' and ensuring 'no isolation' when interacting with children. Moreover, it was suggested that these general principles applied to all teachers, male and female.

Extract Three: (School Two)

(M) Teacher B: You don't want to isolate yourself.

Researcher: Right. And this is, again, is that [indistinct] and no isolation-----

(F) Teacher C: Oh, no.

Researcher: And high visibility always?

(M)Teacher A: Yes.

Researcher: Right. For both of you?

(M)Teacher B,(F)Teacher C: Yes.

At School Two, the focus group discussion also turned to male and female high-risk situations for teachers. For example, a female teacher entering a boys' change room, or trying to break-up a school-yard fight amongst a group of boys, might be considered to have placed herself in a high risk situation. It was therefore important for her to get assistance from a male colleague. By contrast, male teachers should never enter a girls' change room, talk to girls' about sexual matters, or be in an isolated situation one-on-one with a female student. Where male teachers might be placed in such 'risky situations', they needed to immediately call upon the support of female colleagues.

Extract Four: (School Two)

(M) Teacher A: There have been cases in the years past where I've asked some of the female teachers to help me with a female situation. I find it more comfortable to deal with the situation in this way.

(M) Teacher B: Definitely.

Researcher: Okay. Talking about female situations – is there such a thing as a male situation?

(M)Teacher A: Yeah.

(M) Teacher B: Definitely.

Researcher: There are some things that the women would ask the men to assist with.

(M) Teacher A: Yes. Yeah.

In summary, teachers at School Two like their colleagues at School One avoided situations that placed them in 'isolated', 'one-on-one' relations with children in order to minimise perceived or potential risks. In addition, teachers at School Two differentiated between male and female risky situations. Gender-specific risky situations were minimised by ensuring that a colleague of the opposite sex was present.

Imagining New Collective Professional Identities for Teachers

School One

Teachers at School One suggested that their professional relations with students had changed markedly in the last five years. Moreover, they suggested that teachers who were not aware of the changed requirements of professional conduct must be 'just plain ignorant', or spent the last few years with their 'head in the sand'. The changed requirements for professional conduct were not seen simply in negative or positive terms, as 'neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplinary' (Appadurai, 1996: 4). Rather, school or professional educational places were constructed as spaces in which teachers were required to: (1) 'think more objectively' rather than 'act instinctively'; (2) 'be more aware of the risks' or make themselves 'more aware' of the risks; and (3) be 'more conscious of sussing out risk management' or potential, 'perceived risks'.

Extract Six: (School One)

(F)Teacher B: I think I find myself now-a-days trying to think more objectively about situations before I react, rather than in years gone by you might have acted instinctively with things.

(F)Teacher A: I tend to be more aware of the risks – or I try to make myself more aware.

(lines omitted)

(F)Teacher C: I think that I'm more conscious of sussing out risk management – especially if we leave and go places and do things like that – we have to be now- due to the nature of our work.

(F) Teacher A: Yeah.

(F) Teacher C: If we go on excursions there's got to be contingency plans and all kinds of things. So when you're looking at workplace health and safety issues – that's increased our workloads.

(F) Teacher B: In terms of the perceived risk?

(F) Teacher A: More sussing out means more work does it?

(F) Teacher C: I think yes, definitely. We're required to do that to actually do the paperwork to cover various aspects relating to workplace health and safety issues..

(F) Teacher D: Things that might happen.

(F)Teacher A: And contingency plans.

(F) Teacher E: And you can't wing it. You can't – you have to plan. You take this, you carry the first aid pack. You will do this and you've got ... to cover all these bases.

In addition, the teachers talked about the changing role of the school as a social institution, as well as the increased duties and responsibilities placed on teachers when other institutions or agencies were either 'closing down', or 'breaking down'. Moreover, the teachers talked about the lack of professional development or training that they received for these changing work requirements and responsibilities.

Extract Seven: (School One)

(F) Teacher B: We have to actually provide a lot more social stuff and support for the parents in the school system than we have ever had to do before because all the external agencies now are closing down and saying, "Okay, we have to have referrals from the school."

(F) Teacher A: yeah.

(F) Teacher B: And so it's been reversed. Instead of going – being out there and saying, "Okay, now you've got to go back to the school. It's been totally reversed and the school has to send out."

(F) Teacher A: I don't think we have enough training still.

(F) Teacher C: I don't either.

(F) Teacher A: There's no training very often in schools for us to handle up-----

(F) Teacher C: If you go to a school where you have got a lot of social issues there, and often they aren't a background that we're familiar with, so even if you understand or can relate or know what's happening in the background, it still doesn't help you deal with the behaviour and I think that we have-----

(F) Teacher B: No. And you take a risk if you're not – if you don't know what you're doing. I mean that's another set of responsibilities.

These two factors, the increased pressures placed on schooling institutions to take up the work of other agencies, and the lack of professional training and support provided for teachers to do their work, placed enormous pressures on the profession. While increased responsibilities and pressures were not necessarily forcing teachers to leave the profession, many teachers were at times feeling 'inadequate' in terms of meeting these new challenges. Moreover, teachers were increasingly expected to play a counselling role for parents and children, despite the fact that many/most are not trained as professional counsellors. In addition, many teachers spoke of being traumatised by incidents such as cases of child abduction, but received little in the way of professional counselling support themselves: '... no one came to me and said, "How do you feel about this? How do you feel?"'

School Two

Teachers in School Two raised similar concerns to those raised by the teachers in School One. In particular, they talked about the lack of professional training received to deal with changing public perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of the teaching profession. At the same time, however, teachers in School Two suggested that some of these changed public perceptions or imagined responsibilities of teachers were unreasonable. It was simply not possible to live up to the imagined new responsibilities being placed on teachers, without extra resources, training and support.

Extract Five: (School Two)

(F) Teacher B: It's like a dual thing – you think of the child and what's best for them, and then you think of it – you could be sued – don't you? So you're torn – you know – and sometimes you make a decision just for the child and sometimes you make one just for you don't you?

Researcher: Yes.

(F) Teacher B: And then it's – you know – how you feel at the time.

Researcher: yes.

(M)Teacher A: But – geez – we throw ourselves open – you know – and not purposely.

(F)Teacher D: Oh, yes. No.

(M) Teacher A: But we have our meal, the bell rings, we're supposed to be there in a second. Because the kids are lining up.

(F) Teacher D: And we're not.

Researcher: yes. Yes.

(M) Teacher A: And you know – practically that can't be done.

Teacher A (male) provided two examples of how teachers unintentionally leave themselves open to accusations of not safeguarding children's interests. He recalled an incident where he thought that the first swimming lesson of the year involved organising the students in groups, rather than actually requiring the students to get in the water. On this occasion, he forgot to bring his swimming gear to work, and therefore would not have been able to rescue a child if he/she were in danger. He also suggested that it was unreasonable to expect one teacher to be able to monitor the safety of all children in a large playground area during lunch time.

In general, teachers at School Two mourned the loss of pedagogic innocence, which they argued had enabled them to interact with children and ensure the maximisation of educational outcomes. They now assessed every situation in terms of potential short-term and long-term litigation possibilities. Every situation, could potentially, be a risk-situation and, in turn, threaten job security.

Extract Six: (School Two)

Researcher: ... do you think it's true that there's a sort of timidity now about risk-taking, which is now tending to turn into risk-minimising?

(F) Teacher B: Oh, yes.

Researcher: What's been lost then if that's happening?

(M) Teacher B: Some educational experiences that may be really beneficial to children.

(M) Teacher A: Yes.

(a couple of lines omitted) Teachers talk about the possibility of just one parent complaint leading to potential litigation, which in turn could result in job losses.

(M) Teacher A: ... and the danger now is we have to look beyond the years – we don't know what year this thing will pick itself up again, you know? You've got all these cases – 40 years later on down the track.

(F) Teacher D: Yes. The student was traumatised forever for an incident at school.

(M) Teacher A: Yeah. So do you sit with this knot in your stomach and think, "Oh, my gosh!"

(F) Teacher D: When's it going to happen?

(a few lines omitted)

Researcher: So you protect yourselves, that's what you do if you're professional.

(M) Teacher A: Yeah, but then you take something out of your profession – you're losing something.

Concluding Comments

We began this paper by suggesting that teacher-children relations are at the heart of the educational experience. Any perceived or imaginary changes to these relations, we argued, should be the subject of concern for all educators. Moreover, we suggested that teachers' imagined identities of their profession, of the 'vulnerable child', and of safe and risky pedagogies are constructed in the context of profound wider social, economic and cultural changes. Images of the 'vulnerable child' and 'unsafe adult-child relations' produced in one local context, we argued, are rapidly circulated across the globe, and are used to project or launch personal, social and collective identities. Thus, heightened anxiety about children in the new millennium is constituted by the rapid production, circulation and consumption of images, ideas, and knowledge about the loss of child innocence, and the potential dangers to children who may increasingly be placed in expert care systems.

In order to explore the images of the child, the teacher, and imagined worlds or space of risky and safe practices, we analysed data collected from two public primary schools in the state of Queensland, Australia. Six main points were raised in the focus groups about changing codes of professional conduct, and thus identities for teachers in public schools. First, the teachers could date changes to professional conduct which required them to be 'more aware' or 'more conscious' of 'perceived or potential risks' to the last five years. Second, teachers suggested that the schooling institution was expected to take on more responsibilities as other institutions either closed down, with cuts to public funding, or broke down, as a consequence of rapid social, cultural, economic and technological changes. Third, teachers suggested that at times they felt 'inadequate' in terms of coping with these increased responsibilities and demands, despite the fact that many teachers probably did perform their jobs very well. Fourth, many teachers complained about the lack of professional development/training and support provided to the profession to assist in coping or dealing with these changed responsibilities and professional demands. Fifth, teachers identified categories of perceived risky personnel within the teaching profession drawing on the attributes of gender (males more risky than females), age (younger teachers more risky than older), and parental status (non-parents more risky than parents). Sixth, teachers mourned the loss of pedagogic innocence while coming to see all situations and spaces in and out of schools as potentially risky. A key aspect of teachers' work now entailed designing and implementing 'contingency plans' or risk minimisation strategies to safeguard children against potential dangers and risks. In summary, we found teachers' professional self-imagining to be more risk-conscious, more inadequate and thus more needy of professional support, more differentiated in terms of their individual vulnerabilities, and all this at a time perceived as less pedagogically innocent, with greater 'more for less' work demands.

We do not advocate returning to an imaginary past of pedagogic innocence. Rather, we end this paper by asking whether the new imagined collective identities for teachers as 'no-touch' pedagogues are in the best educational interests of children. We would want to ask questions about the extent to which the risk aversion teacher imaginings produced, at least in part, by heightened anxieties relating to the care and protection of children, might be at odds with the sort of risk-taking that is so important to robust learning. What does the 'risk averse' teacher offer to dynamic learning environments? How might risk-taking become part of contemporary teacher imagining? However we might seek to respond to these questions, it is imperative for

educators to critically engage with and contest the images, imaginary worlds, and imagined collective professional identities of teachers and children constructed, circulated and consumed often uncritically in these new times.

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