The perception, management and performance of risk amongst Forest School educators.

Abstract

This paper investigates how risk perception amongst teachers within an outdoor educational initiative, Forest School, both shape and are shaped by their understandings of childhood, pedagogy and their own professional identity. Drawing on a social constructionist perspective in theorizing risk and childhood, the paper argues that contemporary, hyper-sensitised concerns regarding children's vulnerability emanate from both fears of the modern world and the proclivity towards over-protection which these fears precipitate. Rather than treating this hyper-sensitivity as irrational or paranoid, the paper draws on socio-cultural theories and qualitative methods to interrogate how risk is perceived, managed and performed by teachers within an initiative which aims to reintroduce risk into children's lives. The research found that while these teachers' motivations to participate in Forest School were derived from a desire to expose children to formative risk-taking in the outdoors, the hegemonic cultural and institutional risk aversion which they were attempting to counter, aligned with their contested occupational identity, created tensions in how they managed and performed risk which militated against the full realisation of a Forest School pedagogy.

Introduction

The early 21st century has seen an intensification of concerns within Western societies over the safety and wellbeing of children, and the perceived encroachments into what has been constructed as the sanctified and sacred spaces of childhood. This hyper-sensitised concern emanates from, and helps constitute, the perception that 'childhood is in crisis': supporters of this position include educationalist and 'parenting expert' Sue Palmer (2006, 2007); policy advisor and chief executive of Mothers' Union Reg Bailey (Bailey, 2011); left leaning pressure groups (Compass, 2006); teaching unions (NUT, 2007); and within academia Layard and Dunn (2009). Proponents of the childhood crisis thesis advocate insulating children from risks emanating from the modern world, in particular technological and commercial exposure and premature sexualisation (Bailey, 2013). There is, however, a parallel discourse of risk which permeates the childhood in crisis thesis: that children are at risk from the *absence* of risk itself- particularly risk-taking behaviours within outdoor play. This denial of formative risk exposure is the consequence of both children's technologically-mediated, indoor, sedentary lifestyle, and adults' over-protection, caused by fears of the modern world: thus parental hyper-sensitivity to risk, and the protectionary impulses this engenders, is itself limiting children's freedom and having a negative impact upon their physical and psychological wellbeing. This highly reflexive, self-reinforcing, 'concern about concern' proceeds: children are at risk and childhood is under threat, primarily from social changes wrought from technological advancement, and, thus, need to be protected from the encroachment of the adult world; adult (over)protection is itself corrupting childhood through denying children formative, risky, experience; adults' attempts at protecting children and 'preserving childhood' are part of the problem, rather than the solution; childhood is at risk, from both the encroachment and the protection of the adult world. This hyper reflexive concern is evidence for Beck's general reflexive individualization thesis (Beck, 1992), and his and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995) illustration of how such reflexive individualisation colonises even the most intimate inter-personal relationships.

As an antidote to both technological over-exposure and this perceived over-protection, there have been shifts amongst parents, campaigners and advocates (organisations such as Wild Nature, Playing Out and Project Wild Thing); policy

advisors (Gill, 2014); and within policy itself (DfES, 2006) to reintroduce risk-taking behaviours into the lives of children. In doing so, they aim to counter both the perceived cocooning of children, and the pervasive negative understanding of risk, that is seen to emasculate not only children, but parents, and those who, while acting in loco parentis, are responsible for children's welfare and wellbeing. An educational initiative which has been offered as an exemplar (DfES, 2006) in countering such ubiquitous risk aversion, is a policy borrowing from Scandinavia-Forest School education (FS). Proponents of this initiative argue that through exposing children to both nature and risk (Maynard and Waters [2007]; Knight [2013]; O'Brien and Murray [2006, 2007]), FS can mitigate some of the perceived deleterious impacts that contemporary hyper risk aversion can have on children's wellbeing.

Risk: theoretical considerations
Citing the work of Beck (1992) and Giddens (1990, 1991), researchers in the area of children and risk (Jenkins [2007], Waters and Begley [2007]) have asserted that we live in a 'risk society' where, as uncertainty proliferates, risk becomes ubiquitous**.** The risk society thesis argues that this uncertainty emanates from an increased scepticism towards modern scientific reasoning as 'the midwife to social progress' (Murdoch et al., 2003) and a doubting of expert opinion. The result of such uncertainty is the constant evaluation and management of risks within our lives: the reflexive individualization thesis.
This hyper-reflexivity and pervasive uncertainty extends to areas of life where behaviour was regarded as instinctual and 'natural'. One such area is the relationship between adults and children (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's [1995]; Furedi [2008a,b]): this can extend to what to feed children; where/how to educate them; how to discipline them; how to touch or hold them; or, more generally, how to parent them (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's [1995]; Ipsos MORI [2006]; Hardyment [2007]; Kehily [2010]).

There have been a number of studies which consider how individuals and groups experience risk in their everyday, primarily working, lives: within a medical setting Lupton (1993); Lupton and Tulloch (2003) with regards to 'risky'

pleasure seeking; Jenkins (2007) on how parents and children construct risk and the outdoors. While the lacuna in empirically grounded, culturally informed considerations of risk within people's lives has been addressed within these contexts, there has been little or no work done in this area with regards to education (Lindqvist and Nordanger, 2007).

Risk and childhood

When considering this gap in risk related research within education, Lindqvist and Nordanger (2007) implicate the hegemonic power of contemporary discourses which sacrilise children, resulting in a reluctance to question the role of risk in children's education. Such sacrilisation feeds into already intensified protective impulses, which are both rooted in, and help constitute, constructions of the innocent and vulnerable child who must be protected. Drawing on a risk society perspective Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996), Jackson and Scott (1999) and Kehily (2010) argue that the contingent processes of individualization and de-traditionalization precipitate parental anxiety and subsequent increased involvement, investment and scrutiny of their children's lives leading to the 'sacrilistion of safety' (Furedi, 2013), whereby adults obsessively risk evaluate children's activity. Drawing on a social constructionist position Cunningham (1995), Scraton (1997) and Jackson and Scott (1999) recognize the historical and cultural contingency of this vulnerability discourse, illustrating that it is only a certain social, historical and culturally contingent version of childhood that is 'at risk'.

This culturally contingent representation of the child as at risk and need of protection from both the modern world *and* from the concomitant overprotection this engenders, reflects wider paradoxical representations of children within contemporary constructions of childhood. Such assumptions derive from antinomic representations of the child as active or passive. On the one hand is the active child, whose agency is respected and capacity and rights acknowledged (a 'paradigm shift in thinking' [Williams, 2013 p.1]) - embedded in law, both within British precedent in relation to Gillick competency, and within the normative framework contained within the United Nations

Conventions for the Rights of the Child [Freeman, 2011]); on the other hand are representations of the passive child, drawing on understandings of childhood imbued with romantic ideals of children's vulnerability and concomitant need for adult protection, whose rights are protected by adults. Such passive/active paradoxes are derived from historical representations of the child as being innocent or savage. This is reflected in a number of contemporary representations, whereby the child is seen as being: sexually naïve or sexually promiscuous (see Epstein et al. [2012]) or, more generally, both *at* risk and *a* risk (Jackson and Scott [1999]; Buckingham [2000]). It is around these paradoxes and uncertainties that contemporary debates concerning children and childhood pivot and within which insecurities with regards to parenting, protecting and teaching children proliferate.

Concerns with regards to children's wellbeing have drawn a response from government and resulted in a series of reports and initiatives addressing some of the issues, particularly with regards to the sexualisation and commercialization of children. The highest profile of these was the Bailey Review (2011): its first assertion that 'nine out of 10 (sic) parents agree with the statement that '"children are under pressure to grow up too quickly"' made clear its uncritical endorsement of the childhood in crisis thesis. A much more nuanced, less politicized and, consequently, less reported assessment into the issue of commercialization of children, the Buckingham Report (2009), considered the impact of the commercial world on children's lives: its balanced conclusion reflects the eponymous author's argument that 'the figure of the child had always been the focus of adult fears, desires and fantasies' though, in recent times, this had been imbued with 'a growing sense of anxiety and panic' (Buckingham, 2000, p.3).

A key discourse relating to the putative crisis in childhood argues that children are being harmed by the denial of risk-taking experience as a consequence of parental hyper-vigilance (it is rarely recognized that this hyper-sensitivity to risk is fed and amplified by the anti-modern underpinnings of childhood in crisis thesis). The 'denial' of play - particularly outdoor play- is a key argument within

Palmer's highly influential *Toxic Childhood* (2006) and *Detoxifying Childhood* (2007). Palmer argues that, as a consequence of the pernicious influence of technological advancement and concomitant derogation of traditional forms of play, combined with exposure to pervasive consumerist messages, children's emotional, social and cognitive development is being compromised. Intimating that nature is the antidote, Palmer suggests (in a metaphor adopted by the National Trust [Moss, 2012] though identified by Kehily [2010] as less both less than glamorous and somewhat hackneyed) that children's lives should be 'free range', rather than the sedentary, technologically mediated, nature-deprived 'battery' living they now experience (interestingly, however, Palmer does not want working class children to be *too* 'free range' as she condemns them as being 'increasingly feral' [Palmer, 2006 p.19]). This anti-modern representation of an idyllic and, invariably, rural childhood, has manifested itself in the highly influential work of Richard Louv whose *Last Child in the Woods* (2010) has been celebrated by organisations such as the National Trust (Moss, 2012), who endorse Louv's 'diagnosis' that children are suffering from 'Nature Deficit Disorder': while both Moss and Louv recognize that this is not a medical condition, the use of the term *as* a condition has become commonplace, as it resonates with a more general pathologization of children characterized by the contested psychological condition, Attention Deficit Hyper-Activity Disorder.

There is no doubting that the late modern period has seen changes to how we understand childhood. However, the 'childhood in crisis' narrative is better understood within the context of what some view as the epochal social changes that have bred uncertainty and risk which extends into the arena of adult/child relationships: what it *does* illustrate, then, is evidence of 'reflexive modernisation' (Kehily, 2010), with the crisis not being within childhood as an asocial, universal, structural category, but within reconceptualisations of childhood and the adult/child relationships in late modernity: as Critcher (2003, p.161) succinctly argues, 'the change is less in the objective condition of children than in the subjective perception of adults.'

Professionalism, rebalancing risk and Forest School.

A heightened perception of risk has also had significant impact upon professionals' practice and occupational identity (Horlick-Jones, 2005b; Evetts, 2009). Risk aversion and the regulatory bureaucracies which monitor risk exposure, have become a key feature of contemporary work. Within many public sector jobs, what was once deemed to be within the purview of professional judgment, is now the subject of codified and, in some accounts, prescriptive bureaucratic procedures and regulations (Horlick-Jones, 2005b). This is, in part, a reaction to an increased scepticism towards what was once regarded as expertise- what Evetts, (2009), drawing on Beck, describes as general public reflexivity – which has contributed to the decline in public trust of professionals. While indemnifying the organization, such practices promote the 'precautionary principle' (Lindqvist and Nordanger , 2007). Consequently, the new forms of management practices which accompany the management of risk - the 'risk management of everything' (Power, 2004) -are often positioned both in opposition, and as a threat, to traditional conceptions of the professional resulting in the elevation of defendable process over professional judgment. Within these broad categorizations Evetts (2012) juxtaposes a series of conflicting understandings and approaches to professional practice which inform how risk is understood and managed: rational legal as opposed to collegial authority; standardized procedures as opposed to discretion and occupational control of work; accountability and externalized forms of regulation contrasted with professional ethics monitored by institutions and associations.

The response to risk aversion through outdoor education was first heralded in *Learning Outside the Classroom* manifesto (DfES, 2006), endorsed by OFSTED (2008). Within the manifesto Denmark and FS are cited as evidence of best practice in their use of the natural environment to stimulate pupils through formative risk exposure. With its origins in the pedagogic theories of Frobel, FS encapsulates a progressive pedagogic ideology which promotes an holistic education which encourages play and awareness of nature. The Danish interpretation of this ideology manifests itself in its representation of an ideal childhood, where the child has a strong link to nature and the environment

(OECD, 2000 cited in Maynard, 2007) realized through FS (skovbornehave), where children are encouraged to engage and actively take risks in nature (for an account of the social and cultural context that frames FS pedagogy see Williams-Siegfredsen [2012]). The FS concept was introduced to the UK from Scandinavia in the 1990s (Knight, 2013). The experiential and progressive ideology and outdoor focus of FS resonated with many of the concerns in relation to childhood and with the curriculum reforms introduced English Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007) and Foundation Phase for Wales (WAG, 2007) which emphasised the role of play in stimulating positive learning dispositions (Maynard and Waters, 2007). In addition, Forest School has been endorsed because it explicitly encourages 'risky' activities such as fire lighting, knife use and tree climbing from which children are increasingly prohibited. As a result of these attitudinal and policy changes, as well as the increased competition between schools in the UK wishing to distinguish themselves through the Forest School badge, there has been a precipitous increase in the number of both private and school based Forest Schools with a multiplicity of providers claiming to offer Forest School education. In an attempt to standardize this increasingly fragmented 'market' and to promote and 'professionalise' Forest School education the Forest School Association was formed in 2012.

Methods

The overall aim of this research was to gain an empirically grounded, socio cultural understanding of practitioners' - who were either training or newly qualified in Forest School education - conceptions of risk. From this we were interested in how this risk perception informs, and is derived from, their understandings of contemporary childhood and their own pedagogic philosophy and how this influenced their decision to participate in FS education. Although the participants were all novice Forest School practitioners they were all at different stages of their career allowing us to contrast perception of risk amongst teachers with both developing and solidified professional identities. In addition we were interested in the degree to which these teachers' a prior conceptions of risk and childhood influenced their motivation to train in FS. The data for the study were gathered over a six month period in a FS training site in south Wales.

The study involved a total of 37 participants, all of whom had trained or were training to be leaders in Forest School education: 27 of the participants were trained primary school teachers, 12 of whom were teaching within the Foundation Phase early years curriculum; 16 of these teachers had more than three years experience; 11 had less than three years experience - categorized as Experienced Teachers (ET) or Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT) in the data analysis (see table one for a full breakdown of participants by job and gender).

Job Description	Female	Male
Non Foundation Phase; Newly Qualified Teacher (NFP;NQT)	6	
Foundation Phase; Newly Qualified Teacher (FP;NQT)	5	
Non Foundation Phase; Experienced Teacher (NFP;ET)	9	
Foundation Phase; Experienced Teacher (FP;ET)	7	
Teaching Assistant Foundation Phase (FP:TA)	2	
Teaching Assistant Non Foundation Phase (NFP;TA)	2	1
Private nursery (PN)	1	1
Health care worker (HC)	1	
Play worker (PW)	2	

Because of our repudiation of individualized accounts of the 'irrational' actor, our interest was in this group's shared understandings of risk and the dynamics through which this was produced through social communication; based on this interest in feelings and beliefs within a group context we choose a qualitative approach, using focus groups to gather our data (Bryman, 2004; Morgan, 1997). We organized six focus groups with five participants and one group with seven participants with each group reflecting a balance of participants in different jobs (if teachers, within different phases) and with differing levels of experience. The focus groups were conducted near to the site where the participants were trained as FS practitioners, a 3.5 hectare strip of ancient woodland in an urban setting in South Wales.

As well as being academic researchers we (the authors) are both Level Three Forest School leaders and trainers and were involved in the subsequent training of 11 of the participants in the study. While the research with these participants took place before their training, this dual role raised a number of methodological and ethical issues (BERA, 2011). Firstly, while our experience within FS yielded insights this also called for high levels of reflexivity when analyzing the data to create distance from our own beliefs with regards to risk, nature and childhood. Secondly, we were aware that this dual role could create feelings of obligation to participate, reluctance to withdraw and ingratiating responses amongst the participants. To counter this we scheduled focus group at the beginning of their training and were explicit that our research and their participation within it had no impact upon their own training. The focus groups were conducted over a six month period which allowed us to transcribe and code the initial data creating concepts and categories which informed some the questions and analysis within the later groups (Bryman, 2004). While analyzing the data and attempting to make links to wider social, economic and cultural contexts, we were aware how our interpretation could be compromised by our own value commitments, particularly that our involvement in the practice as well as the study of FS was not value free: to mitigate this we adopted reflexivity and continually evaluated our own value judgements while analysing the data.

Findings:

All of the participants within this study claimed that they were motivated to participate in FS education because of their belief that children were being denied formative outdoor learning experiences; they attributed this to both parental hyper-vigilance and a narrowing of the focus of education (discussed below);

> (FP; ET) Parents are reluctant to let children out of their sight, I mean, I'm not judging them, you know I'm a parent myself and I suppose I keep my boy on a short enough leash too. I guess what I'm saying is that it's hard to escape that nagging fear and I am saying that as a parent and a teacher.

Within this repudiation of contemporary hyper-concern over children's welfare and exaggerated protection this precipitates, the participants categorized risk as something positive which needed to be reintroduced into children's lives. However, as the extract above illustrates the participants struggled to free themselves from pervasive insecurities which, as Kehily (2010) argues, characterize contemporary adult/child relationships.

These contradictory interpretations of childhood and risk, highlighted within Buckingham's (2009) thesis, permeated the responses of the participants in relation to their conceptions of contemporary childhood. While they were ambivalent in relation to the 'childhood in crisis' thesis, they did agree that children were being deprived of child-led, out-of-door learning, which they attributed to the deleterious impact of technology, especially in promoting an indoor, sedentary lifestyle. Unlike some articulations of the childhood in crisis thesis, the participants did not condemn technology per se and endorsed its educative potential viewing technology as competing for children's attention and time.

Extract One:

> (NFP; ET) I would say yes, yes children are spending too much time indoors on their own just on the computer playing away on computer games you know, exercising their thumbs as my husband calls it.

(FP; NQT) I agree about games and I do think kids do play inside too much but they are learning you know, I mean what about ipads, we use them all the time.

Extract Two:

(FP; TA) I'm not sure if childhood is worse than it was in my day. Sometimes I genuinely think that it is. We certainly knew how to play more than the kids today do (pause) well they know how to play video games but not with each other. Sometimes in school I feel that I need to teach some of the kids how to actually play.

(FP; ET) Yes I know I think that sometimes we see the past through rose tinted glasses. I do think though that children are definitely growing up too fast. They are aware of things that I never knew about. And some of them definitely lack respect.

The exchange in Extract One illustrates some of the tensions between the older and younger teachers' attitudes towards technology. While the older participants' accounts were infused with nostalgia and a yearning for a pre-modern world of 'pure play' that was not corrupted or mediated by technology (play being understood as a social, group and, ideally, outdoor activity), the younger teachers recognized and valued the role of technology in children's lives. However, as the experienced Foundation Phase teacher in extract two indicates, the older participants were reflexive with regards to romanticizing the past and contemporary childhood in crisis discourses. She does, however, draw upon a key element within this discourse –'children growing up too fast'- which is implicitly linked to constructions of the active and passive child, where an element of 'growing up too fast' is the active, knowledgeable and, in this account, disrespectful child. However, as both participants in extract two indicate, their responses are balanced through a reflexive awareness that their own positions may be compromised by nostalgia. This reflexivity with regards to the role of

nostalgia in their constructions of childhood also extended to their pedagogic ideology which was underpinned by the conviction that children's early years development was contingent upon exposure to and opportunities for play:

> (FP;ET) children need the space to be children, to play or explore (laughs)..I would say that I'm an Early Years teacher.

This progressive ideology underpinned all the participants' motivation to become FS leaders and those educating older children saw FS as an opportunity to challenge some of the more prescriptive elements of education: this experienced teacher working with older primary aged children explained her frustrations at what she perceived as a narrowing of the curriculum that militated against the implementation outdoor learning opportunities:

> (NFP:ET) there are mounting pressures on children.. and us really I guess to achieve…I mean to get results especially in English and Maths. Don't get me wrong I know that's an important part of education but there are other things that are important too outside the classroom. I think we need to be careful we don't lose sight of these things too.

This account was endorsed by many of the participants who saw their commitment to FS as part of wider struggle which challenges both risk aversion and a narrow view of education which decouples play from learning:

> (NFP;ET)it's not just educating parents its educating staff- culture: making sure the head wants you to do it and will be supportive throughout.

> (NFP;ET)My head really questions the value of Forest School, she says are they learning something extra compared to being inside? I run it as an after school project.

The second teacher in this extract illustrated some of the problems which emerged when their commitment to implementing FS ran counter to wider

cultural understandings of children and education. This commitment reflected an attempt to redress a perceived outdoor play deficit within children's lives which was informed by a considered account of the role of risk in children's development: within the extract below this is articulated in opposition to 'wrapping them up cotton wool' which has become the metaphor of choice to describe the hyper risk averse practices this participant is identifying:

> (FP;ET) We have to remember that children are the driving force in what we do and they learn social skills and develop personal skills, positive behaviours, confidence and resilience from pushing their own boundaries. Some children find taking risk really scary because they've been wrapped in cotton wool at home and elsewhere.

It was not only the children's fears but their own fears that the participants felt they were challenging; articulated through a worst case scenario of 'what if?' This was not an indication of the likelihood of something happening but the cost if something untoward was to happen to one of the children. There was a keen sense amongst the participants that they could be *individually* responsible:

> (PW)Deep down I know that they will be fine but I can't help worrying what if..at the end of the day I'm responsible for someone else's child.

This young playworker's response was indicative of the conflict the participants felt between by their own grounded understandings of risk and the responsibility and vulnerability they felt acting in loco parentis within wider risk-averse cultural context. The participants responded to this in ways which were anathema to the ethos of FS, with some employing what they categorized as a 'no risk' strategy:

> (NFP;TA) I need to be able to see the children at all times. I wouldn't be comfortable if they were out of sight whether that was on the field, playground or anywhere else. You can never be too careful.

(FP;NQT) I have to say I err on the side of caution. I see my main responsibility as delivering the kids back safely to the parents at the end of the day.

This differentiated response to perceived risk was evident in the participants' categorization of tree climbing in terms of risk. A minority of participants considered this as involving too much risk and banned all tree climbing from their FS (on one occasion as a result of institutional policy). The majority of participants allowed tree climbing but with controls in place: for some this was sanctioned 'risk assessed' trees with low branches only and an area below with no obstacles; for others climbing was only allowed with the teacher present and not above a height where the teacher could not reach. These mixed responses were indicative of a general tension between participants' desire to allow children to formulate their own risk evaluative frameworks and their own feelings of responsibility and vulnerability. These conflicts were part of wider battles the participants saw themselves involved in in terms of countering hyper-sensitised risk aversion. This was particularly acute with regards to parents:

(FP:ET) Getting the parents and families on board is essential to me feeling *safe* to take them outside. I'll assess and minimise risk but if they get hurt I need to know my head and the parents are on board with them going out in the first place.

This account from an experienced Foundation Phase teacher illustrates how the participants' risk averse practice was driven by their perception of parental expectation and concerns over how some parents may react causing the teachers and schools to adopt a culture of defensiveness (within this there was an implicit awareness of the wider cultural shifts with regards to reasonableness and risk). The participants tended to categorize parents into supportive and potentially non-supportive and although this latter category was seen to be in the minority the teachers acknowledged that this group can dictate their own practice and policy within the school:

(NFP;TA) It only takes one parent to cause a stink and the school gets a bit freaked...you know... well I know that most parents are fine, ar supportive but there are always a few that can make things difficult.

Of those parents that were a concern two types can be identified by the participants' accounts. One was the hyper litigious parent;

(FP;NQT)I'm worried about being sued, the parents are very aware of this litigation culture.

The second type of parent represented was the hyper-vigilant, over protective parent whose concerns manifested themselves with regards to the child's cleanliness - referred to by one participant as the 'baby wipe' parent:

(NFP;ET)Getting dirty is OK with us but mums and dads don't want them to get dirty.

The fear of parents was much stronger amongst the young or newly qualified teachers. When challenged by the representation of the non-supportive parent from a less experienced colleague, two older, more experienced teachers countered:

(NFP;ET)We don't need to fear parents' responses so much, some parents are fine, if he bangs his head and you tell them, they'll say something like ahh well he'll try another way next time.

(FP; ET) I've been in this game for well I don't want to tell you and things have and haven't changed. Yes I jump through all these hoops but at the end of the day I've been around for long enough to know what children can and can't do and what is and what's not safe.

This experienced teacher's categorization of risk assessment as 'jumping through hoops' (technical and bureaucratic) in opposition to safety (grounded, empirical, experiential) evidence her belief in a professional artistry (Fish and Coles, 2000) approach to teaching as an occupational category. Both these experienced teachers draw on grounded, empirical and tacit knowledge to resist hyper-risk aversion both in terms of constituting parents as non- supportive (and resisting to pandering to those who are) and in employing their own developed professional judgment to assess risk, rather than relying on technical rational and bureaucratic procedures and risk assessment.

However, while recognizing such paperwork as bureaucratic and laborious, the participants (particularly the younger teachers) believed that it offered them security from censure or, as in the third and fourth extract below, saw it as part of the *performance* of risk which helped insulate them from wider cultural risk aversion:

> (FP;NQT) for me they provide a safety net or a security blanket. Yes, the whole thing is a bit over the top but I know that if something goes wrong, god forbid, then I will be protected.

> (NFP;ET) ....without this then I'd feel exposed you know, in front of parents, in front of the head. By undergoing this training and learning how to do the assessment allows me to convince those who are worried that it's safe for the children.

> (FP;NQT)There's a set way to do the risk assessments, I complete the necessary forms every time I do a Forest School session. For other outdoor activities the process is done more on a termly basis on a more generic format. I follow the advised procedures and this makes me feel better, feel safer even. If I've ticked the boxes and anything goes wrong I'm covered, I've done what I have to.

(ET; FP)I guess it's like anything else now it needs to be down on paper and that gives me the confidence to go ahead and follow my instinct as a teacher or even as a parent.

The feeling that risk management needed to be seen and performed emerged from discussions around children's wearing of high visibility vests during their Forest School lessons with one teacher (ET;FP) explaining that it *'sent out the right messages'* in relation to the safety of the children. These accounts illustrate how the participants' feelings of vulnerability and individual responsibility are alleviated by the security provided by formal risk assessments. As well as offering a 'safety net' the participants viewed these as an element within their performance of risk and they used these documents as resources when attempting to counter culturally embedded risk aversion: as the newly qualified Foundation Phase teacher states, 'ticking the boxes' gives her protection and security. The tension between formal 'objective' risk evaluation and subjective responses- risk as analysis or risk as 'instinct' as extract four above categorises it- is evident in the accounts given in extracts three and four whereby the assessment and formal procedures are categorised as part of the performance of risk which, once achieved, allows the participants to draw upon their tacit, experiential understandings of risk described as 'safety', 'commonsense' or 'instinct'.

Discussion

This paper has illustrated how accounts of risk amongst a group of teachers training to be FS practitioners are drawn from a complex and contested interplay of social, cultural and institutional expectations, institutional protocols and grounded, empirical observations and experience. The study has illustrated how participants' perceptions reflect the diversity of their modes of reasoning (Horlick-Jones, 2005a). These ambivalent, competing and, at times contradictory, understandings (as outlined, by Jenkins [2007] in relation to parents) result in some tensions for the participants when accounting for risk in a FS setting. These tensions and ambivalences were apparent in their attitude towards the

'childhood in crisis' thesis: they rejected its key arguments with regards to children's unhappiness, but endorsed a key component of the thesis (Palmer, 2006; Louv, 2010) in relation to children being denied play, especially within nature from which they can access 'good' risk. Within this representation rests a fundamental contradiction within contemporary accounts of childhood: that children are being cocooned by lack of 'good' risk exposure, and, paradoxically, growing up too quickly by overexposure to 'bad' risks, primarily mediated through technology. These beliefs chimed with their progressive pedagogic ideology and a romantically-infused conception of childhood and children's education which valorized play in the outdoors; however, the participants were highly reflexive with regards to this and the role that both nostalgia and their own subjective positionality informed these beliefs. This is consistent with Kehily's (2010) study of contemporary parenting where a romantically informed perception of childhood and children's play collides with the pragmatic realities of acting in loco parentis within risk averse institutional settings.

The participants' definition of risk itself evidenced some of the tensions within contemporary conceptualisations of childhood (Jackson and Scott [1999]; Buckingham [2000; 2009]; Epstein et al. [2012]): on the one hand, their commitment to FS was derived from an understanding of the active child and the benefits of formative risk exposure; on the other hand, this was tempered and, at times compromised, by wider cultural sensitivities to children being at risk, which manifested itself in what Slovic (2000) categorises as 'what if…'. This risk averse disposition was reinforced within less experienced teachers' attitudes by their fear of the forceful parent (Gill, 2014). It is from this that the central tension in the participants' responses to risk emerge: their belief in the benefits to children from risk exposure exposed them, as professionals charged with the child's welfare, to much higher levels of risk. As Beck (1992) argues, these micro-level uncertainties are derived from feelings of being individually responsible for any accidents which might occur as the management of risk is conceived as emanating from, and being contingent upon, human action, rather than a pre-modern understanding of fate and destiny as being beyond human agency (Lupton, 1999).

These feelings of personal responsibility and vulnerability evidenced how reflexive individualization (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) manifests itself within professional contexts (Evetts, 2009). The participants' accounts of managing risk illustrated tensions within their occupational identity as categorized by Evetts (2013) as organizational as opposed to occupational professionalism. The older participants with more experience were able to draw upon discourses of occupational professionality and trust their own discretion in making judgements, while the younger participants were more likely to feel vulnerable and thus drew security from standardized procedures within a technical rationalist/organizational account of professionalism (Evetts, 2009). This orientation towards technical rationalist approaches emanated from a weak sense of collegial responsibility and a perception of lack of parental trust- evidence of a wider public reflexivity- in their professional judgement (Evetts, 2012). This resulted in participants 'performing' risk management as a means of social accounting (Horlick-Jones, 2003, 2005b) within the school, to the headteacher and, especially, to parents. The need for such accounting is particularly keen within a wider cultural context where childhood and children are sacrilised (Kehily, 2010) and concerns around children's safety incite moral judgements and foster a culture of blame (Lupton, 1999). The participants felt that part of their role within FS was to counter some of these wider cultural and institutional concerns and resist a skewed understanding of reasonableness when acting in loco parentis or in the manner of a 'reasonable' parent.

The tensions felt by the participants within this study illustrate how the understanding and management of risk not only informs contemporary conceptions of childhood, but underpins - and at times undermines -pedagogic practice and helps constitute teachers' occupational identity. While the participants did introduce elements of 'good' risk-taking to children through FS, this was compromised by wider cultural understandings of risk, childhood and what a teachers' role should be while acting in loco parentis. These compromises derived from the increased professional risk felt by teachers. To mitigate this, teachers not only altered their practice by adopting a more risk averse approach

to FS than that originally conceived within its Scandinavian origins and ingrained within its foundational philosophy, but also performed risk management as a means of social accounting in a culture where risk aversion is hegemonic. Thus this study illustrates how society's understanding and perception of risk informs our contradictory conceptions of children and childhood and how an educational initiative, which aims to redress pervasive risk aversion, is itself compromised by fear of risk. This reinforces Lindqvist and Nordanger's (2007) argument that the application of risk theory by educational researchers is imperative if we are to understand wider school and pedagogical practice derived from culturally embedded perceptions of childhood vulnerability and the concomitant, pervasive and insidious risk aversion this engenders.

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