

1. After-School Club: Extract from Playworker's Reflective Diary

Three girls aged seven, nine and ten years old involved me in their game. They were playing at families. One was the dog, one was the mother and one was her little child. I was asked to steal the dog – 'Pretend you are a thief and you steal our dog.' I did this and there ensued various versions of me being captured, thrown into prison and being given a trial. The children interchanged their roles between being dog, mother and child, judge, lawyer, jailor, second thief, puppy and narrator. They brought in props as part of the game, such as hoola-hoops as the prison, a cloth to go over the person who was the dog, tins of food as my jail food and various other artefacts (loose parts) used to denote some crucial element in the unfolding and re-unfolding drama.

In one version, one of the children was extremely cruel as the judge; she insisted upon hanging, life imprisonment without food in the next, and in the next I was directed to escape and steal the dog's puppy only to be caught and then thrown into jail without a trial.

One of the other girls was a very kind and supportive judge and even though the jury had found me guilty, she let me off as she bought my story about my extreme poverty and I begged for forgiveness.

The game went on for about forty minutes with the kind girl only being the judge once but always supporting the others in whatever was meted out to me. She sometimes went off, on her own, into a little side play as the mother, child, dog or puppy. I left when the game had petered out. Interestingly when I left, I sat in my car writing up notes from my observation, when the 'cruel judge' came out of the school with her older brother who seemed very cross and kept urging the girl to keep up with him, whilst she lagged behind.

Questions

Chapter 1

- It seems in this extract that the playworker fully entered into the spirit of the game. What difference would it have made if she had not, or if she had made a comment such as 'hanging isn't very realistic for taking a dog and it's not very nice either...'? How might this have affected the girls and their play?

Chapter 2

- Can you see any therapeutic value in this game and if so what is it?
- How might this playing exemplify the evolutionary paradigm?

Chapter 3

- What are the play frames that are holding this game? What sort of intervention does the playworker make and does this help to contain the playing or does it adulterate it?

- Can you identify different elements of the play cycle in the case study and how do the children keep the whole process of playing going?
- What play types are the children engaging in and can you see any developmental connections to these types of playing?

Chapter 4

- In what way are the children in this scenario taking control of their own lives?

Chapter 5

- Was there anything about this particular play environment or the general ambience that supported the children playing their game?

Chapter 6

- Are the children taking any risks in this game and if so what are the risks and what might the benefits be of playing like this?

Chapter 7

- Which emotions might the children be experimenting with in this scenario?

Chapter 8

- What might be the purposes of keeping a reflective diary? Might there be other practical ways to meet the same objectives and if so what are these and which would be most suited to you?