

5. Primary School Playground: Reflection by Playworker Mentoring Midday Supervisors

At a primary school, I was working with colleagues in the school playground at lunchtime; mentoring midday supervisors to use the playwork (rather than a policing) approach. We had provided masses of loose parts for the children to use in their play which were stored in several bays. On this particular day, H, a boy aged about six years old and of Pakistani origin, came towards me brandishing a bin lid and a long piece of foam that he was clearly using as a sword. As he got close to me he announced he was arresting me, saying I had stolen cars and that I needed to go to jail. I protested my innocence but went along with it and got put inside one of the storage bays and he instructed another boy to guard me. A few other children came to see and I told them I was unjustly imprisoned and a couple of them helped me 'escape'. It wasn't long before H reappeared and this time I got escorted back to 'jail' – this time for 100 years. I escaped again, and when he found me I gently explained I couldn't go to jail right now as I was working and I had to speak to some teachers. He looked forlorn and I felt both guilty but relieved that I could get on.

A few days later I was again in the playground and H suddenly appeared – this time I said I'd come quietly but it would have to be a different jail as there was no room in the storage bays (children were creating dens in there). He marched me to a bench on the edge of the playground and instructed me to sit down. 'Don't speak', he said seriously to me and put imaginary tape over my mouth and round the back of my head. He then pretended to handcuff me and tie my legs together round the ankles, so that this time I couldn't escape. 'You stay there', he said seriously. As I could still observe all that was going on in the playground, I stayed put. He recruited two guards to watch over me – a job they carried out with great glee. A few minutes later, H returned to check on me and the guards said I had tried to escape again (which I hadn't!) and so he came close and said he was going to cut my neck and kill me because I had been so bad. He then touched my neck with his foam sword and I dutifully 'died' and lay down on the bench with my eyes shut. H was quiet for a couple of moments and then announced that I had served my sentence and could get up now. He released my 'bonds', I thanked him – he smiled widely and then I instigated a game of chase all round the playground with H and others joining in with much laughter.

Questions

Chapter 1

- What reflective questions might the playworker have been silently asking him/herself before, during and after play?

Chapter 2

- Which of our seventeen spheres of thought about the reasons that children play do you think are relevant to this case study? Could it fit into all three paradigms of play that form the backbone of playwork thinking?

Chapter 3

- How and when did the playworker adulterate and why? Was this necessary or inevitable?

Chapter 4

- H obviously needed to play this game out. After having played at being 'brutal and unpleasant', he brought his dead prisoner back to life and released her. He then engaged happily in a game of chase. How do you feel about this child?

Chapter 5

- H obviously felt comfortable with the playworker, otherwise he would not have involved her in this sort of playing. How did the playworker behave in order to provide the sort of ambience where this could happen?
- How does the theory of loose parts support H's playing?

Chapter 6

- Do you think there are any safeguarding issues in this story? If so what are they and how would you respond?

Chapter 7

- Which feelings and emotions do you think H was trying to conjure up, express and deal with in this game? As a playworker, how could you show value for this?

Chapter 8

- If you were supervising this playworker, what prompts might you have from this reflection to explore further with them in your next supervision session