Cultivating childhood's space: a study of a schoolyard naturalization project

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a phenomenological-hermeneutic inquiry into the meaning of an outdoor space as it is transformed from a traditional schoolyard into a naturalized area—a park. The thesis documents the meaning of the experiences of children, teachers and parents as they imagine and actualize the park as an outdoor pedagogic space. The thesis explores the meaning and significance of the park by highlighting some of the ways in which children and adults perceive space and the world differently. The thesis also addresses issues of world making and identity formation, the building of authentic community, and the importance of outdoor spaces in the creation of memory. It also examines different conceptions of nature and of the natural world; and finally, it outlines several socio-ecological factors that influence the relationship between children and their outdoor environments.
PREFACE

Dear Reader.

In preparation for my MA oral examination, I had time to reflect upon my thesis and its phenomenological hermeneutic approach to human science research. I would like to take this opportunity to offer the reader my reflections about this philosophical approach. This writing is an invitation to the reader to begin thinking about this MA thesis as an example of phenomenological hermeneutic work. I have chosen a letter format to address the reader and to open up my reflections because one of the governing characteristics of a phenomenological hermeneutic approach is that it seeks to be conversational.

Phenomenology, the study of lived-experience (Van Manen, 1990), combined with hermeneutics, the inquiry into the meaning of that lived-experience (Gadamer, 1989), asks to be taken up more as an interpretive philosophical approach than a traditional (quantitative) research methodology. What an inquirer gains from using a phenomenological hermeneutic approach is understanding—understanding of the topic being investigated—in this case, the creation of a schoolyard park and its meaning as understood by this study's participants—children, parents, and teachers. Understanding, perhaps best understood as the hermeneutic notion of truth, does not come from a method, but rather is in the method. As scholar David Smith (1991), author of "The Hermeneutic Imagination and the Pedagogic Text" explains:

Constantly engaged in the practice of interpretation, the hermeneutic imagination is not limited in its conceptual resources to the texts of the hermeneutic tradition itself but is liberated by them to bring to bear any conceptualities that can assist in deepening our understanding of what it is we are investigating. This means that the mark of good interpretive research is not in the degree to which it follows a specified methodological
agenda, but in the degree to which it can show understanding of what it is that is being investigated (Smith, p. 125).

What this means, essentially, is that although phenomenology and hermeneutics belong to a rich historical-textual tradition, the reader of this thesis will not find a conventional literature review or methods chapter at the beginning of this text. Instead, this thesis begins with a phenomenological account of being in the park on the morning it was being constructed. Hermeneutic texts often begin with an image or a story because this gives a sensory, experiential face to the topic being investigated. As such, the purpose of beginning narratively is to invite the reader to engage with the text and to begin participating in the meaning making process for him or herself. I re-iterate. I do not follow a set method in this inquiry. Rather, the procedures I use in this inquiry and the literature I use to support and foster my understanding of meanings encountered grow out of the work itself. For instance, at the beginning of this inquiry, I knew that I was, along with my participants, in search of meaning and understanding about an imagined and actualized park space. Not being an elementary school teacher, I did not know what form that meaning or understanding would take. But I knew I needed to attend to my participants and their meaning making. This turned out to be a hermeneutic advantage for me as a researcher—I did not know what to look for—I had to let the topic arrive and address me. In other words, I did not begin this inquiry with a prepared plan knowing in advance that I would be examining different conceptions of nature or childhood. These topics first came forward as questions and then I had to make a case for understanding them in terms of my participants' understandings.
It is interesting and somewhat ironic then that it was the images and conversations about walls and arched doorways that first addressed me. As I look back, I realize that in studying the traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics I was introduced to the hermeneutic notion "Aletheia" which means that understanding begins where and when there is an opening and something is revealed—like in the opening of a door, or a lid, or a wound. As a researcher it became my task, figuratively speaking, to keep the doors and the space created in the park open to interpretation. Actually, the term 'hermeneutics', is derived from the Greek God 'Hermes'. Hermes was a messenger, a "go-between", explains David Jardine (1998). “Hermes is identified with borders, with boundaries and with keeping open the gates between one realm and another, to hear the messages in whatever is said. This is the hermeneutic ear that listens-through, a consciousness of the borders, as Hermes was worshipped at the borders. Every wall and every weave presents its opening. Everything is porous” (Jardine, p. 51).

Understanding, at the beginning of every journey, takes the form of questions. In Chapter Two: Germination. I am trying to read conversations and images as questions. What do the participants’ desires for walls and doors, caves, and wildlife mean? I work these questions out into the open and then begin to explore and illuminate the many different meaning possibilities. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989), father of contemporary hermeneutics, writes, “interpretation always involves a relation to the question that is asked of the interpreter. To understand a text means to understand this question...Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said.” (p. 388). This means that the interpreter must "meaningfully deconstruct what is going on and
propose alternative, more creative ways of thinking and acting” (Smith, 1991, p. 122).

The fact that I interpret these questions as pointing to the development of a child’s inner-self is part of me forming my own understanding. Indeed, one of the characteristics of doing a hermeneutic work is that it often feels like one is having an ‘epiphany’. I remember telling one of the teachers early on in this inquiry about my ‘revelation’ that perhaps this park might be a place for the students to experience growth of an inner-self. Her response was such that it suggested she already knew this. And, of course, she would because she is an elementary school teacher. So, it is important to note that perhaps the teachers would not have talked to me about all the things they did if I had been one of their peers. But more importantly we may not have talked about these topics if I had been an elementary school teacher. I felt a little like a child learning something new—but something that is obviously already out there in the world and known by others. But through my conversations with children and teachers we were able to renew these topics and generate new meaning and new understanding about the park. Perhaps I can explain it like this. This park, Riverstone Park, is an instance, an individual case of what parks are. By talking about and generating understanding about this park I was able to renew several understandings of what parks are (Jardine, 1998). David Jardine (1998) describes this as the “fecundity of the individual case.” He writes, "It is in this sense that the instance is fecund: it keeps the story...[of parks]... going, a keeping which adds to the story and which thereby changes what we will come to already understand the past chapters to have meant” (Jardine, 1998, p. 42). It is for this reason hermeneutic interpretation is considered to be inherently creative.
Thus, although phenomenological hermeneutics is not a method per se, it does have some striking characteristics. For example, it is worth noting that Hermes was also a trickster. He was always disrupting things on behalf of what he was disrupting. Doing hermeneutic interpretation involves allowing this disruption to occur. In other words, letting the trick happen to you. Only by allowing this kind of disruption to occur can one see how meaning is contradictory and ambiguous. Jardine (1998) describes what the experience of such disruptions is like:

It is not as if I could, in the inquiry I pursued, say anything I wanted and do anything I wished. I, too, was “subject” to Hermes seeming whims, having things collapse without any warning, gaining insights at the worst times and losing them before I could catch them. Muttering quite often while writing or rereading what I thought was so clear “this is not what I meant at all, not at all. But too late...”

Pursuing interpretive inquiry is a potentially painful process because it is not produced of a method which (ideally) will keep everything under control by severing all the tendrils of sense that can pull you in so many different often incompatible ways. There is a risk involved in such work, a risk of “self-loss” and a recovery of a sense of self that is different than the one with which we begin such inquiries (p. 49).

There are numerous examples where Hermes made his appearance in the course of my inquiry. These disruptions occurred while I was writing the text. For example, I attempt to make a case that one of the reasons the children want walls around the park is because they feel controlled and bound by fear in their every day lives. Then I read Heidegger (1977) and discover that space only exists within boundaries and as human beings we exist to mark and protect these spaces. The disruption might also occur during a conversation as it did when I was talking with my husband about nature. In the course of our conversation I discover that my husband and I have quite different understandings of
what constitutes nature. I remember the look of awe and disbelief I gave my husband
while he spoke, and I wondered, “How can this be?” In hermeneutics, these kinds of
contradictions or the kinds of difficulties one finds oneself in when doing this kind of
research, whether they be textual or conversational difficulties, must not be viewed as
problems—they just are—meaning is indeterminate and ambiguous. As Jardine (1998)
puts it, the “need for renewal is not an accident that we can fix, but a situation that we
must learn to live with well” (p. 50).

Hermeneutic interpretation is also about exaggeration. It involves breaking the
common proportion of things. In interpretation, one is trying to break open the being of
the thing under investigation (Jardine, 1998). There were a number of occasions as I was
writing this thesis where I felt uneasy. For instance, when I was writing about Jay
Teitel’s (1999) article, “The Kidnapping of Play”. or Hannah Arendt’s (1968) views on
the crisis in modern education, or Neil Postman’s (1982) commentary on “The
Disappearance of Childhood”. At the time, these views seemed, if not extreme or
exaggerated, certainly bold. Nonetheless, it still seemed imperative that I take these
writers and their works up. I now realize that these writers and their views helped me to
see what was not readily visible, that what is a stake in this inquiry is not only the park
space, but childhood’s space.

The works of Edith Cobb (1959, 1977), The Ecology of Imagination, and the
findings in this inquiry have helped me to understand experientially the
phenomenological hermeneutic notions of being—time—space. Phenomenology involves
describing one’s experience of the world in its immediacy—as it is given to us.
Heidegger advanced this philosophy by explaining that one cannot describe experience in its immediacy because there is no given—the given is always yet to come. Heidegger introduces the term ‘horizon’ to describe the experience of being in the now always already includes the past and the future (Smith, 1991).

My findings put a face (children’s and teacher’s), so to speak, to these philosophical concepts. I discovered that the children could not describe the park as they were experiencing it and they even had some difficulty describing what it looked like once it was there. The children’s understanding of the park involved futurity while the teachers’ understanding, I discover, involved recollection and a sense of the past. Edith Cobb’s (1959, 1977) main supposition is that the desire to create forms in childhood is the source of adult memory and creativity. She even goes so far as to write that, in terms of evolution, the childhood drive to create forms is what separates human beings from other animal species. The point I would like to stress is that not only does Cobb show that “every” child desires to structure a world in order to discover self, but it is in this creative process that the self, thought, is formed. I believe this is the hermeneutic notion Heidegger (1977) expresses in his essay, “Building Dwelling Thinking”, when he writes, “The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, thought essentially” (p. 359). I learn, too, that the grounds for subjectivity for yet another important figure in hermeneutic philosophy, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964), is ‘giving form to what is not yet formed’ and meaning to meaningless. This means that there is no self before there is a world, the subject or the self arrives while engaging in the process of formation and is therefore always in a constant state of arrival or becoming. These are
rather abstract philosophical notions but Cobb (1977) writes a wonderful passage about Helen Keller that really helped me to understand these ideas more clearly:

Despite the previous benign effects of the process of learning to identify objects within an ethos in which love and discipline were blended, the unmanageable disorder and frustration of being enclosed within her body continued to rise, driving Helen’s destructive impulses to dangerous extremes of behavior. But when Anne Sullivan introduced her to the motion of the well water flowing over her “linguistic” hand, the linking of images with the words being spelled to her created awareness of the continuity of knowledge in language systems. The backlog of latent learning awaiting formulation joined the sudden sense of power to create form. Information from the environment flowed in and began the nourishment of her hungry spirit. “Upon that day,” she wrote later. “my soul was born.” The power to organize and to create continuities in speech opened up the evolutionary sense of a future in time. Her sense of identity as an ego-world unity, in which she could play role of creator, set in motion that richness of response to man and nature which makes a fully human being (p. 60).

Human beings need places; they need the world in order to create meaning of it—in order to be(come). One cannot create forms from nothing; one must create forms from something and that something is there before us and will be there long after us—the earth and the cultures we are born into. It is one thing to be told or to read about these philosophical concepts such as time and space and subjectivity. It is another thing altogether to gain an understanding of these concepts through the experience of interviewing children and adults, building a park, and creating this text. My understanding comes from my experience of doing this inquiry. I, too, have been formed and transformed. Although, in my thesis, I write about the experience of building a park, I learn that making meaning and generating shared understanding proves to be the event—the experience.
Finally, I am reminded by David Smith (1991) that “Hermes was a young god always” which means that the “hermeneutic imagination works from a commitment to generativity and rejuvenation and to the question of how we can go on together in the midst of constraints and difficulties that constantly threaten to foreclose on the future” (p.102). Thus, not only is this thesis a hermeneutic text in that it attempts to generate meaning and understanding, but the findings in this inquiry are themselves thematically hermeneutic in the sense that the park is realized and understood by my participants and myself as a generative space—a space for creating new memories and rejuvenating old. Even Gadamer (1989) writes. “Youth demand images for its imagination and for forming memory” (p.21). This is much of what hermeneutics is about and this is what my inquiry is about.

I fear I have already written too much. I do not want to be a ‘spoil-sport’ in the hermeneutic sense. as the reader should be given the opportunity to engage in the text and to let the story unfold for him or herself. This letter is only a foreshadow of what is to come. After reading this thesis, I hope the reader will return to this letter as it will assuredly take on new meaning. And it is my sincere hope the insight the reader will gain by reading this text is that, in a way, we are all students of phenomenological hermeneutics in that we all live in the world with each other and are continuously trying to make sense of our experiences conversationally!

Susan Moore
September 7, 2000
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¹ "Community School" is the pseudonym for the study’s participant school.
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CHAPTER ONE

SOWING THE SEEDS

The world is our home, our habitat, the materialization of our subjectivity. Whoever wants to become acquainted with the world of teachers, mothers, fathers, and children should listen to the language spoken by the things in their lifeworlds, to what things mean in this world.

Max van Manen, Researching Lived Experience.

The morning air was crisp and I hugged my arms as I glanced around for my jacket. It was sitting on a chair next to Diane. A piece of pancake clung to her fork as she waved it with the precision of a conductor’s baton laughing as she spoke to Carol. The smell of bacon still lingered in the air as Jen poured the last of the batter onto the grill. I grabbed my jacket and wandered over to the building site. Mounds of dirt lay bare held in place by the enormous rocks that had been carefully placed the day before. Sandy was barely noticeable in her khaki attire as she moved from side to side behind the Trees Canada truck directing the crane into position. The arm of the crane lifted slowly ascending into the clear blue sky. A tree hung from its taut wire, some sort of evergreen with long needles its roots wrapped in brown sackcloth. The tree swung through the air and Sandy ran after it leaping onto the berm. The other teachers were now standing a few steps in front of me looking on with the gleeful expressions of children. I heard Carol

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2 Diane is a pseudonym for one of the teachers who participated in this inquiry. Also, please note that the names of all teachers and children who participated in this inquiry have been changed throughout this thesis to pseudonyms.
3 Carol is a pseudonym for one of the teachers at Community School.
4 Jen is a pseudonym for the Librarian at Community School.
5 Sandy is a pseudonym for a representative from the Calgary Zoo.
6 Trees Canada is one of the sponsors who donated trees to the schoolyard naturalization project.
remark how it felt just like Christmas morning. Sandy wrapped her arms around the
sackcloth as the crane gently lowered the tree onto the mound. The tree which had
seemed so enormous just seconds before flying through the air lay motionless. It occurred
to me, overhearing Carol, that the tree wasn’t much bigger than a Christmas tree.

We began tagging the plants sitting in the shade on the pavement next to the site.
Water had just burst out of the sprinklers and was glistening in the sun as little droplets
fell over the mounds moistening the rich earth. Across the field the first children were
arriving with their parents carrying shovels and rakes. My husband’s vehicle had just
pulled up outside the fence of the schoolyard. He began unloading a wheelbarrow.
Sarah\(^7\) came running across the field towards me carrying her little pink watering tin.
Ava\(^8\) arrived outfitted in a pair of bright red gumboots and a drooping sun hat dangling
over her long braided hair. Parents and children, I noticed, were lining up over at the
table where they were to receive job tags, a waterer, a planter, a digger and so on. The
banner I had helped create within the past few days hung tenuously in the breeze behind
the table. The mood of anticipation was growing ever stronger as more and more people
arrived. The bustle of children’s voices and laughter now filled the air.

All of a sudden out of the corner of my eye, I noticed the flitter of movement in the
air just beyond me. There was a little bird, no there were two! Robins. They dove in
and out of the tree that had been placed by the crane, darting back and forth in the air as if
they were playing tag. One settled for a moment on a branch of the tree and began
preening itself with the droplets of water on the needles. Soon the bird resumed its dance

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\(^7\) Sarah is a pseudonym for my daughter who is in kindergarten at the time of this inquiry.
\(^8\) Ava is a Grade One student who participated in this inquiry.
in and out of the branches. All the months of planning and hard work seemed to culminate in this moment. The unfolding scene aroused in me exaggerated emotions. This ordinary tree and these ordinary birds seemed so bigger than life, and the moment felt as if everything the teachers and children had dreamed of would be possible. And then, the spell was broken, when someone remarked candidly. "Look! Wildlife in our park."

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 1998, I volunteered to help with a schoolyard naturalization project that was being planned at my children’s school. The purpose of the project was to create a space that would be environmentally and culturally educational as well as aesthetically interesting for the children to learn and play in. The project was a dream of several dedicated teachers. It was about to be realized. These teachers, along with their students, had researched, designed, organized resources, and collected materials, for what would later become known as “Riverstone Park”. There was great enthusiasm and eagerness in ‘Community School’ to begin construction of the park which was scheduled for June 1998. However, due to the unusually wet Spring that year, the project had to be regretfully postponed.

In the Fall of 1998, the school board facilities department, after reviewing the park design, became concerned with the safety of some of the structures planned for the park and, with the arrival of a new principal and several new staff, the project planners decided to take another look at their naturalization objectives and the physical space in

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9 Riverstone Park is not a pseudonym. It is necessary for me to use the actual name of the park because it is relevant to my participants and this thesis.
the schoolyard. The school had, at this time, the great fortune of teaming up with educators and naturalists from a local city zoo whose experience with naturalization would provide expertise, guidance, and support in the months to come.

It was also at this time. I began graduate studies in the Graduate Division of Educational Research at the University of Calgary. I was not very far into my MA program when I realized Community School’s park project would be an interesting site to research. Although my professional educational background had been restricted to teaching adults, as a mother of three young children I was becoming increasingly interested in childhood language, expression, and meaning. Furthermore, as an English major undergraduate who had specialized in the structure of metaphor, I was particularly interested in children’s use of literal and metaphorical speech. With this background and interest, I approached the principal of Community School and several teachers in order to explain that I would be interested in conducting a language study associated with the movement of children from an indoor classroom to an outdoor classroom. They were enthused with the idea and expressed their willingness to work with me.

All of a sudden. I found myself in a unique position to conduct research, as I would be involved at all stages in this naturalization project from conception and construction to the establishment and implementation of an outdoor classroom. As Spring approached. I began attending planning meetings for the park. After the first meeting, the park planning group, which included teachers, administrators, support staff, zoo staff and myself, came to realize that we were lacking a “vision” for the park. To put it more succinctly, each member of the planning group assumed to know what parks were, but what would this park mean to Community School. The teachers who had made plans
with their students the previous year, along with the new teachers, would have to go back to their students to begin re-conceptualization and the design process anew.

I believe it was this series of events that prompted me to re-evaluate my objectives as a researcher on this project. It seemed that my question should not simply focus on what children would say outdoors, but rather on what they would say as it pertains to the meaning of this new space being created. Thus, my question turned from a focus on language to one on space.

Therefore, I began my inquiry with the assumption that the creation of this park would be a huge literal and metaphorical event in the lives of the children, teachers, parents, and members of the school community. And I asked, for the first time, out loud, “What will this park mean to the participants as it is conceptualized and realized?” From this point forward, I became interested in the significance and importance of the participants’ experiences of imagining and actualizing an outdoor pedagogic space.

Having arrived at what I felt was an interesting question, I spent the months between January and April 1999 fine tuning my thesis proposal and awaiting its ethics approval. During this time, I began to focus attention on my new role as researcher. Coming to understand my role involved a lot of uncertainty at first. I was anxious about how to begin interviewing, what questions to ask, and I was feeling particularly uneasy about my lack of experience in matters concerning the ‘natural’ world. I was afraid that I was going to ‘miss’ something as the children had already begun designing clay models of the park and I was still awaiting my research proposal approval. I felt as if the teachers were waiting patiently for me to begin “researching”. In retrospect, of course, I had already begun the research by attending to my question and wondering how to
proceed. But what I hadn’t recognized was that I was waiting for a moment or an event that would initiate me into the role of researcher. And then, that moment came—as a conversation with my daughter.

One particular event marks the beginning of my ‘self’ as researcher on this project—a conversation I had with my daughter one morning about what the new park at her school would look like. That morning, in February 1999, my daughter attended an assembly where the children made presentations concerning the design and construction of Riverstone Park. In short, all the children at Community School, from kindergarten to grade six, presented their ideas about what they felt the park should look like. The children worked in multi-aged groups of five or six students showing and talking about pictures they had drawn and models they had made of the park. After discussing and sharing ideas about what the park should look like, the children from each multi-aged group presented their ideas. After the assembly, while my daughter and I were driving home from kindergarten, she excitedly described the plans for “Riverstone Park” to me. I was surprised and delighted by her description. I pulled the car over to take down a few notes, but I couldn’t find a pen. When we got home a few minutes later, I pulled out a pen and did my best to re-create the conversation:

*Assembly Day, February 4, 1999*

Me: What happened at the assembly?
Sarah: Oh you know, we talked about the park.
Me: Yeah, so what’s the park going to look like?
Sarah: Um, well, um there’s gonna be rooms and rocks, and the rocks are walls.
Me: Really! What else?

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10 There were approximately fifteen models. The models had been made during class time prior to the assembly.
Sarah: A rock-man. He’s going to guard the doors to the rooms.
Me: A rock-man. What’s he going to look like?
Sarah: He’s made out of rocks and he’s a man.
Me: Oh, wow! What are you going to do in these rooms?
Sarah: Well, uh if you have an allergy, you can lie on the beds and look up at the clouds and see what shapes they are.
Me: Can you tell me about the beds?
Sarah: Yah. the beds are like if you need to take a rest, and you have an allergy.
Me: What are they made of (the beds)?
Sarah: Um. I don’t know.
Me: So this is a place you can go if you have an allergy.
Sarah: Yeah, if you need a rest in the rest area. You can’t work and climb if you have an allergy because you can get hurt.

As I listened to Sarah describe the park with dreamlike fervor, my fears began to allay. I realized that I did not need to be a naturalist or a curriculum theorist in order to conduct this inquiry. Her description like many others to follow which included rock walls, rock doors, rock men, and so on, drew me into an imaginary realm, a realm where children are free to play. I realized that she was inviting me into this magical world—a child’s world. Thus, a journey began that would help me to understand the relevance of these special realms children create as they undertake their own journeys towards becoming part of a larger community. Second, this conversation was not about leaves or twigs or insects or things that I would consider to be a part of nature; it alerted me to the possibility that as adults we might perceive ‘nature’ or the ‘natural environment’ as something quite different than children. Thus, I began to question the traditions and assumptions associated with this common ‘adult’ notion of nature.

This dialogue is also significant because I recognized for the first time an understanding of hermeneutics at work. Hermeneutics, along with phenomenology,
provide the philosophical background for this research. Phenomenology is the study of lived experience, while hermeneutics is the inquiry into the meaning and understanding of that lived-experience. So, phenomenologically, I became interested in the experiences of the participants as they began to conceptualize and realize the park, while hermeneutically, I became interested in how the participants, myself included, began to generate shared understandings and create meaning about the park as a contested space. Core to my project was having conversations with participants about their experiences and what those experiences meant to them.

Each of us is born into a socio-economic, political, and cultural tradition. This tradition is overwhelmingly constituted by language. When two people engage in a conversation, they bring with them their pre-understandings, or traditions, with them, and it is in the fusion of these traditions, that a new common understanding emerges. David Smith (1991) explains that, “One word never just means one thing nor is one way of doing things the only way” (p. 118). Meaning is always interpreted meaning and arrives by dialogical agreement. In this way, meaning is never absolute and can never be exhausted.

For instance, in my daughter’s description of the park, she mentions rooms and guards and beds. I realize one reason she might have imagined and described this space in this way is because one of the teachers referred to the outdoor classroom as a ‘rest’ area during the assembly. I believe my daughter appropriated the word ‘rest’, re-conceptualized it and turned it, and consequently the space, into something familiar to her. We cannot turn back and rescue what the teacher may or may not have meant by the word ‘rest’. My daughter and I had a new shared understanding of what the space in
question now meant at that particular moment in time. Indeed, as she described the scene, I envisioned something between an infirmary and an outdoor hotel—doorman and all.

I will cite another brief example of how meaning is always interpreted meaning. When I told my daughter’s teacher about our conversation in the car, she commented on how the children had talked about allergies during the presentation and that Sarah’s experience of allergies, specifically her younger brother’s peanut allergy, is important to her and has, therefore, become part of her description:

Jackie: Someone would have talked about that. yep. that they wanted to make that. And then the allergies because someone was talking about that. She’s picked up on specific comments and they’ve become important to her.

Me: Right.

Jackie: When you have an allergy. She’s so sensitive to allergies cause you’re so sensitive to them. and, of course, you are. But that’s part of her life where it’s not part of most young children’s lives.

Me: No.

Jackie: Thinking about it. Yeah, it’s absolutely safe there (Jackie, Interview One, May 1999).

Thus, meaning about the park does not come from the park itself as an isolatable univocal entity. rather it comes from our conversations about the park. Smith (1991) comments. “The final authority of concepts. constructs. or categories does not reside in the concepts themselves but within the dialogically arrived at agreement of people to consent to them” (p. 119). When engaging in conversation, a researcher needs to be open to new possibilities of meaning and prepared to deepen his or her own sense of understanding. Smith (1991) calls this the “Deepening of one’s sense of the basic interpretability of life itself” (p. 122). And how does the researcher accomplish this?
She needs to be attentive to the multiple voices encountered in her inquiry, and in this case, to take up things up in the world of children. When this conversation between my daughter and myself occurred many months ago, I could not have known that the notions, 'rest' and 'safe', which emerge from this conversation would now be central themes in this work. Note what Gadamer (1989) has to say on the subject:

...every word breaks forth as if from a center and is related to a whole, through which alone it is a word. Every word causes the whole of language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole-world view that underlies it to appear. Thus, every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and summoning...all human speaking is finite in such a way that there is laid up within it an infinity of meaning to be laid out and explicated (p. 458).

This conversation with my daughter is simply where I wish to begin my story. Initially, it serves as a guide in my 'quest'ioning about the meaning of a schoolyard naturalization park project. But as this journey unfolds and new meaning about the park emerges, I find myself returning to this conversation to re-read it anew. We are constantly making and remaking ourselves as we research a particular phenomena. It is for this reason that this kind of inquiry is profoundly pedagogic. I learned a great deal when I was open to the possibility of being taught by my participants.

PERSPECTIVES FOR READING

This thesis is a detailed exploration into the creation and use of an outdoor pedagogic space by an elementary school community. The most basic purpose for conducting this inquiry and writing this thesis is to illuminate the meaning and potential significance of the park as it was experienced by those who imagined, constructed, and continue to utilize it. In the course of my graduate studies, I have learned that students of
phenomenology and hermeneutics need to inquire into subjects that not only reflect their interests, but are a reflection of where they are themselves in their own lives. Right now, with the exception of my graduate work, I am devoted full-time to the upbringing of my three young children. And like most parents, I am interested in and sometimes concerned about my children’s learning and play environments. This project afforded me the possibility to inquire into a subject that even I couldn’t have predicted has such relevance to my life. Also, a purpose for this inquiry is to provide a written history of the ideas and events surrounding the creation of Riverstone Park. This history will hopefully be of interest to and benefit to the school community my participants belong to and other educators and parents who are interested in conducting schoolyard naturalization projects of their own. Finally, this thesis seeks to lay bare some of the attitudes and assumptions that come into play when undertaking a project of this kind, as I believe an increased understanding and awareness of what outdoor spaces represent to us might inform the teaching and learning of others.

I wish to offer the reader a road map for the chapters ahead. Although I’ve been involved with the Riverstone Park Project for several years now, this thesis inquiry was conducted between April 1999 and December 1999. This research is based upon data collected from conversations conducted in taped interview sessions with students and teachers at Community School. I conducted two interviews with the students, the first in April 1999 and the second one week after the construction of Phase One of the park\(^{11}\) in May 1999. I conducted three interviews with the teachers, the first the week before the park was built in May 1999, the second in June 1999, the third in late November 1999.

\(^{11}\) Riverstone Park was constructed on May 8, 1999.
six months after the construction of Phase One of the park. My participants included twenty-three children from kindergarten and two multi-aged Grade 1-2 classes, and these children's four teachers. These numbers represent approximately one-quarter of the entire student body of the school and one-half of the teaching and administrative staff. In addition, I had a number of informal conversations with parents, two of whom consented to participate in this project.

In keeping with the phenomenological-hermeneutic intent of this writing, this thesis presents a multitude of voices as I attempt to understand what the park means experientially to its builders and users. The procedure I followed was first to interview the children and examine what they said about the park space. Then I discussed meaning that emerged from the children's interviews with their teachers. At the same time, I examined various theoretical views to support and foster my understanding of the questions and meaning encountered. Thus, this thesis interweaves the texts of children, teachers, philosophers (Heidegger, 1964; Arendt, 1961; Cobb, 1977; Aries, 1962), psychologists (Bettelheim, 1977; Hillman 1985), poets (Chukovsky, 1968; Bachelard, 1964), educators (Langeveld, 1983; Piaget 1960), and naturalists (Nabhan & Trimble, 1994; Moore, 1986b; Fine, 1992). There are fictional voices from children's literature and, of course, there are my own inquiry stories and my voice. At times, these voices may appear contradictory as there is no single voice or perspective that constitutes the entire meaning of the park. As a researcher, I have woven these voices together in an attempt to tell a story—a story that is, inevitably, incomplete at best, because like the new shoots that are bursting from the earth at this very moment in the little park, the arrival of
Spring has brought with it the promise of new obstacles, new possibilities and new questions.

The following chapters in this thesis are arranged both chronologically and thematically. I use horticultural terms and expressions such as ‘sowing the seeds’, ‘germination’ and ‘sprouting’ to name each chapter. These titles grew out of conversations and readings and did not come until I had written myself into each chapter. The titles reflect both the stages in the development of the park and the stages in the process of coming to understand what the park space means to the participants and this researcher. Chapter Two, *Germination*, examines my participants’ experiences of the park as an imagined space prior to its actual construction. Fittingly then, much of this discussion centers on the relevance of creative learning and play spaces as well as the development of a child’s sense of identity—an inner self. Chapter Three, *Sprouting*, contains the bulk of the field material and focuses on the event of building the park as well as the meaning of the park as it is actually experienced by my participants. Chapter Three carries on with themes introduced in Chapter Two, but also turns to the child’s experience of community and increasing awareness of an outer world. Chapter Four, *Tending*, seeks to uncover some of the underlying attitudes and assumptions associated with schoolyard naturalization projects and examines the socio-ecological factors that influence my participants’ experiences of the outdoors. Lastly, in Chapter Five, *Gathering*, I will offer some concluding remarks about discoveries made, themes explored and meanings encountered in this inquiry. I also offer several suggestions and recommendations for future directions associated with Riverstone Park that, given the
findings outlined in this thesis, might be of benefit to my participants. Finally, I need to emphasize that in the short time I spent with the children and teachers conducting this inquiry and writing this thesis, I acquired only an introductory knowledge of the subjects discussed here. However, I do hope the reader will reflect upon issues encountered in this thesis and perhaps will be inspired, like I was, to dig deeper into some of these subjects at a future time. I now invite the reader to accompany me on my journey to discover, or indeed re-discover, a child's experience of the outdoors as a world of possibility.
CHAPTER TWO
GERMINATION

We have from the beginning, a kind of freedom, not to do what we like, but to work on the materials—stones, plants, secretions, languages, cultures—which come our way. This freedom is sometimes recognizable as play.

R.A. Hodgkin, Childhood’s Domain.

WALLS AND DOORS

Shortly after my conversation with Sarah, the inquiry began full swing. Earlier in the year (January 1999), the children, in all grades, had made sketches and were asked by their teachers to make models of the park. The children were given clay, paint, pebbles, and flora to use in their park designs. The purpose of these activities was to generate ideas for the design of Phase One of Riverstone Park—a projected outdoor classroom. The models were presented at the assembly referred to in the introduction of this thesis on February 4, 1999. I did not attend the assembly, but several days later I attended a parent information meeting on Riverstone Park. The teachers had prepared tri-folds with photographs and information about the project. A representative from the Calgary Zoo was there to explain her role and the Calgary Zoo’s “Grounds for Change Program.”¹² I was at the meeting also to explain my research project to the school’s parents. Only a handful of parents attended this meeting. There had been at least thirty parents at the planning meeting the year before, May 1998. Like the staff who had worked on the

¹² The Calgary Zoo’s, “Grounds For Change Program” offers expertise and assistance to schools involved in schoolyard naturalization projects.
project the previous year. I felt frustrated by the delays and obstacles. I can only surmise that this was the source of many parents seeming indifference to the project.

It was at this meeting, I first got a close look at the children’s models. There was a little girl there that evening who eagerly volunteered to be my guide showing me first her model and then several of her classmates. “This is a cave, and this is a pond and this is a clibmy thing. And these are flowers I painted. And this is, oops, a flag. It’s fallen over” (Anna, Grade Two, March 1999). What she failed to mention was that in her own park model, as well as in all the other children’s models, there was a sort of fence or wall surrounding the park with one or two arched doorways as entrances. In addition, in some of the models there were designated areas marked off with little pebbles of clay that gave the appearance of rooms. I was fascinated by the models because they were, more or less, a visual account of the description Sarah had given me.

I learned that evening that the children had been asked to make a list of the three most important structures they would like to be in the park. The teachers and zoo staff then used ideas from these lists to generate a park design. The most important items listed by the children were caves, tunnels, ponds and rocks to climb on. The children did not list the archways even though they figured so prominently in the models. and they were in every model. The children had not written down archways or the doors on their lists. consequently they were not, I noticed, figured in the drawings of the park presented that evening. This particular observation, along with my conversation with Sarah, alerted
me to further comments the children made about walls, doors, and flags as I began interviewing\textsuperscript{13} them about their models:

These are rocks to surround the park. I painted them (Hillary, Grade Two, Interview One).

That’s an entrance…They’re called ‘headstone’ entrances (Stephen, Grade Two, Interview One).

Um, they’re doorways. They are made out of stones. Long stones that could be drove into other stones (Christina, Grade One, Interview One).

…so there’s an entry, a way to get in and out (Christina, Grade One, Interview One).

Like you should make sure lock everything on the school. so no one can break in. Um the big gates—you should lock them. And to take care of the park some more. you should put some guards around so they can like guard the park forever in case someone tries to steal (Heather, Kindergarten, Interview One).

I was thinking of rocks around the garden, our garden…it would be kind of a nice fence (Claire, Grade Two, Interview One).

It’s gonna have walls and it’s gonna have a few doors. It’s gonna have grass on the bottom. It’s gonna have big playgrounds in it (Lauren, Grade One, Interview One).

I was particularly interested in what the students would say about the archways in the interviews. And, interestingly enough, like the girl who had shown me her model at the meeting, they said very little. So I prompted them, and they just looked at me incredulously as if I were asking a stupid question:

Me: Can you tell me what these are?
Hillary: These are an entrance.
Stephen: Headstone. Headstone, one here and one here.
Me: I notice that these are in quite a few of your park models. Can you tell me about them?

\textsuperscript{13} I interviewed the children about their models in April 1999.
Stephen: (Incredulously) They’re entrances! (Stephen and Hillary, Grade Two, Interview One).

All of a sudden I started to think, do children take doors or entrances for granted? Why would they use walls and doors to bind space when that space is outside? What are they trying to keep in, or keep out? Would the space actually exist without walls to define it?

I thought of the many images of walls and doors in my children’s book collection. and I began to wonder if walls and doors are necessary for children to create imaginary play worlds. Would the park be a location for such a world? Upon entering its gates, the children would cross a boundary into an imaginary realm, full of possibility, risk, and adventure? Just consider the wardrobe in C. S. Lewis’. The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe,14 or the rabbit hole Alice15 stumbles down. Or, the ‘hidden door’ in The Secret Garden (Burnett, 1951), a story which I have had the pleasure of reading with my children the past few months:

Mary’s heart began to thump and her hands to shake a little in her delight and excitement. The robin kept singing and twittering away and tilting his head on one side, as if he were as excited as she was. What was this under her hands which was square and made of iron and which her fingers found a hole in?

It was the lock of the door which had been closed ten years, and she put her hand in her pocket, drew out the key, and found it fitted the keyhole. She put the key in and turned it. It took two hands to do it, but it did turn.

And then she took a long breath and looked behind her up the long walk to see if anyone was coming. No one was coming. No one ever did come. it seemed, and she took another long breath, because she could not help it, and

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she held back the swinging curtain of ivy and pushed back
the door which opened slowly—slowly.

Then she slipped through it, and shut it behind her,
and stood with her back against it, looking about her and
breathing quite fast with excitement, and wonder, and
delight.

She was standing inside the secret garden (Burnett,
*The Secret Garden*, pp. 76-77).

There are often guards at the gates to these fictional worlds. The fact that a number
of children mentioned guards suggested to me that their world might be such an
imaginary place. For example, in one of my son’s favorite tales, *The Enchanted Wood*,
the knights must heed the warning of the gatekeeper before entering a magical forest.
There are, of course, numerous images of guards in Western culture. There are the Royal
Guards who protect Buckingham Palace in England. There are also guards at
international borders to determine who comes in and who goes out. Not to mention
walls—the Great Wall of China was erected to prevent invasions. The Berlin Wall was
built for a similar reason, although it is debatable whether its function was to keep
intruders out or keep the population in. After all, guards are also placed around the walls
of prisons. Incidentally, when I lived in Dallas¹⁷ there were guards patrolling the
entranceways of schools. What are we to infer from one child’s suggestion that the school
“should put some guards around so they can ‘like’ guard the park forever in case
someone tries to steal?” (Heather, Kindergarten, Interview One). Are the children afraid
of intruders or thieves? Or, perhaps, as one child suggests, “insects”?

Me: Why do we have walls to our park—and doors?

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¹⁷ I lived in Dallas for one year in 1995. The local residents told me that there were armed guards
patrolling the entranceways and halls to the high schools. I also observed this on a televised newscast
during my stay there.
Lauren: So we can get in and the walls are for—so the little, no. big bugs, so they can't get in.
Me: To keep the little or big bugs out?
Lauren: The big ones, like scorpions (Lauren, Grade One, Interview One).

Lauren's reference to scorpions suggests there might be dangerous things outside those walls. Are walls and guards necessary to protect the park—to keep it safe—to keep the children safe? If so, safe from what? With these questions in mind I approached the teachers.

I began the interviews\textsuperscript{18} by asking the teachers what surprised them most about the children's designs and models. I spoke to Diane first:

What struck me was the fact they all thought an outdoor classroom had to have walls...It couldn't just be a random arrangement of rocks: it actually had to have a confined space. It had to have actual doorways in and out of it. and if they could have put a roof on it. they would have put a roof on it. So it wouldn't have been an outdoor classroom at all...Like a portable, only made of rocks (Diane, Interview One, May, 1999).

Diane explains that the children may have initially "misconstrued" the word 'classroom' and, therefore, literally thought there would be an inside classroom outdoors:

They didn't have a clear picture of how an outdoor classroom would work. They also thought we should have tables with flat tops that they could sit on at desks. They had to have desks to work at, as well. So, that was the thing that I thought was interesting—was that it couldn't just be a random arrangement for them (Diane, Interview One, May 1999).

Interestingly, Diane's description contradicts a description given by Michelle in another interview:

For the most part, there were different areas, so I found that the children wanted—really understood that for quiet time and for reading and reflecting it would be nice to have people spread out in different areas, so

\textsuperscript{18}I conducted my first set of interviews with the teachers in the first week of May 1999.
they incorporated that into their design. They didn’t expect, not any of them expected that there would be rows. Rows to sit in or clusters of desks—that there’d be places all over the plan that they could sit in so they would have privacy as well (Michelle, Interview One. May 1999).

The first description clearly illustrates that the choice of words adults use to describe things to children influences meaning and ultimately (mis)understanding. As I already mentioned, the same thing occurred when Sarah heard the term ‘rest area’. This kind of word appropriation or meaning making process occurred constantly during the interviews with the children.

I am reminded of an incident that occurred one morning in the kindergarten class in October 1999, several months before I began the inquiry. The teacher was talking to the children about ‘change’. She asked the children to look out the window to see if anything had changed since the beginning of the school year. One of the boys threw up his arm enthusiastically. “I know. I know.” he exclaimed. “The trees have changed. The leaves are taking a rest for the winter!” Some of the other children blurted out. “No. no. they’re dead!” But the image of a tree at slumber had already taken hold of me and I found myself thinking of the lines from a Shakespeare sonnet I had learned years ago:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang (Shakespeare, Sonnet No. 73).

I was amazed that this child’s utterance had evoked such a powerful image in my mind. Indeed, it was in this moment the seeds for this inquiry began to germinate. I began to realize that it would be interesting to conduct a study associated with how children use language to describe the outdoors. I had researched the topic of metaphor as
an undergraduate and was curious about children's use of metaphorical speech. For one of the things I love most about young children is how, through the use of language, they seem to bring the world to life and make it new. In Kornei Chukovsky's (1968) seminal work, *From Two to Five*, he notes how children are "geniuses" as creators of language and meaning. This work interested me because in it he confirmed one of my suspicions—that children lose this incredible ability to create language as they get older:

> It seems to me that, beginning with the age of two, every child becomes for a short period of time a linguistic genius. Later, beginning with the age of five to six, this talent begins to fade. There is no trace of it left in the eight year old... (p. 7).

Now, I don't want to enter a debate about at what ages the different stages of language acquisition actually occur. What I am concerned with here is what Chukovsky writes about how children perceive the world. When I heard Evan say, "The leaves are taking a rest," this seemed poetic and I interpreted it metaphorically. But, I knew that Evan must actually believe the tree and by extension its leaves are sleeping, that they are animate. Chukovsky (1968) explains:

> To be sure, in order to learn the language, the child imitates adults in his word creativity. Without suspecting it himself, he directs all his efforts, by means of analogies, toward assimilating the linguistic riches gradually developed by many generations of adults. But the young child adapts these analogies with such skill, with such sensitivity to the meaning and significance of the elements from which words are formed, that it is impossible not to be enthralled by the power of his understanding, awareness, and memory, so apparent in the arduous effort he makes every time he speaks (p. 7).

Thus, one of the ways in which children give meaning to things in their world is association through resemblance and contrast of objects. Chukovsky (1968) explains that

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19 Jean Piaget's *The Child's Conception of the World* (Routledge & Kegan, 1929) outlines the stages of child development as it pertains to animalistic thinking. His section on "Animism" pp. 169-251 is a good starting point for understanding children's perceptions of their surroundings.
a child will apply one bit of knowledge “randomly” to another object, and although this may be his “error”. “his very- attempt to classify objects of the material world according to visible and generic traits. and compare them with other objects, is a hopeful foundation for all his future mental activities” (p. 25). This is what I see occurring in the examples I mentioned where the children have so innocently yet skillfully adapted the analogies of a classroom and a rest area in the creation of that space.30

Another interesting point Chukovsky makes is that such analogical thinking in a young child is not metaphorical as it would be if an adult uttered such statements, but rather literal:

The fact is that adults think in terms of allegories and metaphors, whereas children think in terms of objects perceived in their world of objects. Their thinking is limited during the first years to images of things; this is why they object so strongly to our symbolism...The child reacts with such innocence to idioms because he takes them literally (pp. 12-14).

One obvious example comes to mind. When I asked the children why they were calling the new area ‘Riverstone Park’, their responses were both immediate and literal. I got the sense that they were making up their reasons as they spoke, playing with the words:

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30 I am not entirely clear on Chukovsky’s use of the term “random”. I take it to mean that children do not seek out pre-existing similarities or resemblances (traditional Comparison and Substitution theories of metaphor), but rather in uttering such statements they create similarities and create meaning (Interaction theories which hold that metaphor has an irreducible cognitive content). Samuel Taylor Coleridge expressed the connection between language and thought for contemporary theories of metaphor. For Coleridge, language was a medium for the imagination. The imagination is, said Coleridge, “The power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others and by a sort of fusion to force many into one...combining many circumstances into one moment of thought to produce that ultimate end of human thought and human feeling, unity.” Thus, metaphor, shaped through the imagination, does not record pre-existing similarity in things; rather it is the linguistic means by which we bring together and fuse into a unity diverse thought and thereby [re]form our perceptions of the world. See Eva Kittay’s Metaphor p. 6. (Oxford: Carendon Press, 1987).
Because there is going to be a river? A little river beside it. And because it is going to be a walk-in park and there are going to be lots of stones (Christina. Grade One, Interview One).

Because there’s lots of rivers and some stones so you can climb on in the climbing area, the fun area. And there’s a river under the bridge in a little climbing area in the hide-n-seek area where the river is. you can swim (Heather. Kindergarten, Interview One).

Chukovsky (1968) notes that the young child has no need for “certain truths either on the sociological or on the biological plane; for this reason he plays lightly with concepts, creating for himself, with ease, various fictions and making use of them this way or that, according to his whim” (p. 26). “In truth,” Chukovsky (1968) continues. “the child does not so much adapt himself to the truth as he adapts the truth to himself, for the sake of the imaginary play situation” (p. 27). This is certainly the sense I got from listening to these children. and I would probably say the same thing about the conversation I had with Sarah about the rock-man. And it is significant that these children are young. Just compare the above responses to these below made by children in Grade Two:

Me: Why do you think we are calling it Riverstone Park?
Hillary: There are rivers and stones and it’s a park.
Me: Do you think that’s a good name?
Hillary: No, because there are no rivers.
Stephen: Yes there are. Our school is near the Bow River. 21
Hillary: People could fall in and drown—that’s why there’s no rivers.
Stephen: The Bow River. Our school is near the Bow River—that’s why it’s Riverstone.
Hillary: Okay, so why don’t we call it ‘Bowstone Park’? Why are you calling it Riverstone Park if there is no river in the park? (Stephen and Hillary. Grade Two, Interview One).

21 The Bow River runs through the city. It is near the participant school.
Indeed, the mere fact that the children and teachers are calling this space in the schoolyard a ‘park’ might shed some light as to why the children want to enclose this space with walls. The word *park*\(^{22}\) comes from Middle English *parr-en* meaning to enclose, confine. Also, the word is traceable to the Anglo-Saxon *sparrian* meaning to shut, fasten, as in ‘thy door being shut’. As we can see here, the way the children describe the park is fairly consistent with the earliest definitions of the term:

1260 *An enclosed tract of land held by Royal grant for keeping beast of the chase* (distinguished from a forest or chase by being enclosed). 1617 *Woodstocke Towne is famous for the Kings House and large parke, compassed with a stone wall, which is said to have been the first Parke in England*. 1818 *To a park three things are necessary: 1. A grant from the King. 2. Inclosures by pale, wall, or hedge. Beasts of park, such as a buck, doe, &c. And where all the deer are destroyed, it shall no more be accounted a park* (It’s noteworthy that this entry also supports the children’s insistence for wildlife in their park. As one child put it. “...there will be deer in the park and rabbits and birds and lots of other animals”). (Oxford English Dictionary. 1961, p. 481).

It is not until 1841 the first suggestion of a national park is introduced to the lexicon:

*An extensive area of land of defined limits set apart as national property to be kept in its natural state for the public benefit and enjoyment, as the Yellowstone Park in the United States. What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of future ages! A nation’s Park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature’s beauty.* (Oxford English Dictionary. 1961, p. 481).

**“A Land of One’s Own”\(^{23}\)**

Another reason the teachers gave for the children including walls in their models is that they need to confine the space in order to *call it their own:*

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\(^{22}\) This entry was found in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Vol. 7). (1961). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

\(^{23}\) This heading, "A Land of One’s Own," is borrowed from an essay in Nabhan and Trimble’s *The Geography of Childhood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994). It is a play on words from Virginia Woolf’s classic *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Grafton Books, 1977).
Me: So why do you think they need to bind this park space?
Diane: Um, maybe to claim it as their own. Uh, the world is so big, I think that, and their perception of space isn’t really evolved to the point where they can understand. (She explains that her class has been learning about Japan and that they don’t really have a developed sense of distance and space)...So I think in order to identify that space as their own, they want to put something around it that says this is ours (Diane, Interview One. May 1999).

Several of the teachers commented on this. They explained that it isn’t unusual for children to draw boundaries around space and that they have seen children doing this in the schoolyard and remember doing this themselves as children:

I’ve seen children playing out in the field when there’s been a lot of snow and they are playing house or whatever and they often will take their feet and press the snow between their feet and it creates walls...Yeah, they do that all the time and I’m not sure where that comes from. I’m not sure if it’s because they associate walls with being the house—or if that’s just something that shows that that’s their territory where they are playing. It might be a territorial thing (Michelle, Interview One. May 1999).

My parents were really free for us to do creative things and one of the things that we did was my Dad would mow the lawn and we had a huge big lawn, and then we would rake the grass into lines that we would use to delineate rooms in a house that we were building. And these are what like 3 inches high at most. Those were boundaries. And we made rooms and we would walk around in them as if they were—and only go through the doorway. So, I can see how they would do that because for us we would play all kinds of games in our building that we had built out of this grass that was piled up to about a depth of three inches (Jackie, Interview Two. May 1999).

Two important ideas emerge from these comments. One is that as children, as human beings, there is this need to live within boundaries. Two. it seems true that most boundaries need to be clearly marked. It is also noteworthy that the children’s models
had flags in them. Flags are also used to identify or mark territory. When I interviewed the children, many of them mentioned the flags:

Me: What do you think the park is going to look like?
Sarah: A big city.
Me: A big city? Can you tell me about it?
Sarah: Well, we're gonna put flags on it.
Me: Flags?

Hillary: That was a flag, but the thing broke off. That's a flag, another one, and it says...
Stephen: It says “Community School.” (Stephen and Hillary. Grade Two Interview One).

And maybe a flag that says. “Riverstone Park”. Maybe there could be two flags, one that say “Riverstone Park” and one—one that is the color blue and there could be another flag that represents our country (Christina. Grade One. Interview One).

Diane explains that the children came up with idea of flags while they were working on the models:

And, the interesting thing about our class, too, is they thought there should be a flag. They thought there should be a flag to identify this is Riverstone Park. And that, I thought, was really interesting because we never came up, never brainstormed flags. When they were actually building the models they came up with the flags (Diane, Interview One. May 1999).

I envision the children working away diligently at their clay models and upon completion with a deep sigh of satisfaction plunking a flag down marking it as their own. Not unlike

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24 There were as many as four flags on most of the models. They were made of toothpicks and paper and were blue, red, and white. None of the flags had any writing on them. The flags were often positioned in the four corners of a park model, and combined with the rock walls, gave the model the appearance of a fortress. I think it is interesting to note that the children I spoke to were quite young and yet they already understand the importance of visual indicators in marking territory.
the great mountaineers, or crusaders, or explorers, or moon visitors who upon reaching their destinations pull out a flag to mark the spot—and to mark their victory.

What is this need the children feel to enclose and mark this space? And what about this need to protect this space with the use of guards or markers (flags)? As Jackie suggests, it is very animalistic to have marked space and that, perhaps, human beings, like animals, need boundaries in order to feel safe and secure:

But I really think that we’ve become, we’ve got absolutely out of control. That our world is too big, that it’s too fast, that our boundaries in this city are too big...What’s happening to us in our big cities is our big cities have gotten too big. The boundaries aren’t clear enough. You can’t find the edge of the city. You go to Vancouver, you can never get away from Vancouver. it never stops...And for our children, who live here in the core of Calgary, all they really know is a citified environment. but it. no. there is no boundary. there is no end to it. It isn’t safe, and maybe that’s what’s not safe for us is that maybe we need those boundaries. Animals live within boundaries. Birds sing in order to keep other birds out of their space. Wolves urinate in order to keep other wolves from their space. So it is very animal to have space (Jackie, Interview One. May 1999).

**On Building and Dwelling**

In Martin Heidegger’s (1977) essay, “Building Dwelling Thinking”, he explicates what it means for human beings to ‘build’ and to ‘dwell’ within a space. Not only do I believe Heidegger’s ideas are very important because they offer us some insight into the nature of these two concepts—building and dwelling and how on earth we mortals exist within our spaces—I think his ideas help us to understand the significance of boundaries and what the teachers in this study mean when they say the children ‘own’ or have ‘taken ownership of the park’.
Heidegger begins by explaining that building and dwelling are two separate activities when we think of them in terms of a means-end. In other words, we build a house in order to dwell in it. However, he explains, to think of them this way is to 'block our view of the essential relations'. "For building," Heidegger (1977) states, "is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling—to build is in itself already to dwell" (p. 348). He explains that the relationship between these two ideas finds its source in the meaning of *bauet*. to build when he writes. "The Old High German words for building, *bauet*, means to dwell" (p. 348).

Now what I take this to mean, in its simplest sense, and using the park as an example, is that our talking and planning about the park, which is what even I am doing here right now, is our dwelling, and that in our dwelling we have opened up a space which makes building a possibility. It is difficult for me to talk about this idea here because it is not until the park is actually constructed that the full implications of what Heidegger is writing become clearer to me. Thus, I will ask that the reader bear with me until the time comes for a concrete example of my understanding of Heidegger's 'building' and 'dwelling'. Why I bring this all up now is because Heidegger not only tells us that to build means to dwell, he tells us the essential nature of this dwelling. Heidegger (1977) argues that the manner in which we exist as humans is dwelling, and to dwell is to *protect* and *safe-guard*:

That is, *bauet*, *buan*, *bhu*, *beo* are our word bin in the versions: ich bin, I am, du bist, you are, the imperative form bis, be. What does ich bin mean? The old word bauen, to which the bin belongs, answers: ich bin, du bist mean I dwell, you dwell. The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is buan, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on earth as a mortal. It means to dwell. The old word bauen, which says that man is insofar as he dwells, this word bauen.
however, also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for. specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine (p. 349).

So, what Heidegger is expressing in this passage is that we do, indeed, exist to protect and preserve. Thus, perhaps it is natural for young children who read the world so literally/metaphorically to want to protect the park because as humans this is the essential nature of our being. Heidegger (1977) tells us more about how it is we dwell by explicating further how this dwelling is experienced:

The Old Saxon *wuon*, the gothic *wunian*, like the old word *bauen*, mean to remain, to stay in a place. But the gothic *wunian* says more distinctly how this remaining is to be experienced. *Wunian* means to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace. The word for peace, *Freide*, means the free, das *Frye*; and *fry* means preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded. To free actually means to spare. The sparing itself consists not only in the fact that we do not harm the one we spare. Real sparing is positive and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own essence, when we return it specifically to its essential being, when we “free” it in the proper sense of the word into a preserve of peace. To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its essence. *The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing* (p. 351).

Heidegger (1977) also defines space as something enclosed within a boundary:

A space is something that has been made room for, something that has been freed, namely, within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding (p. 356).

Obviously, there are many words here that resonate: safeguarded, preserve, free, peace, and spare. Walls and doors create a boundary, “a boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding” (Heidegger, p. 356).

In the following sections, I will uncover that which is being safeguarded and that which is being freed in the new park space. However, before I continue, it is interesting to note that the word ‘ownership’ is defined as *to occupy-reside* or *be in place* or
position.25 In other words, ownership means to remain, or to stay in a place. So, when Diane talks about the children owning that space, one interpretation is that the children are dwelling in that space in the Heideggerian sense:

Diane: ...they could hardly wait to get outside and play on it. You know they had their own little spots picked out already—their own special spots. And they knew where they were going to put their own piece of mulch when we had that mulch drop—there was a special spot where they were going to put their piece of mulch. So they have taken ownership of that park, and when I’ve been out on playground supervision, there are far more children playing in that natural space than there are anywhere else on the playground...you know, jumping up and down rocks and running over berms and playing hide-n-seek or follow the leader games. I mean they own it! It’s part of who they are and what school is for them!

Me: This is interesting this idea of ownership that you bring up. How important do you think it is that this space park is owned by the children—this sense of ownership?

Diane: I think it’s really important because if they don’t feel that sense of ownership, then whether it survives or not is a moot point for them—I mean, who cares, big deal! If there is some sense that they are invested in it, then they have the desire to see it succeed and they have the desire to see it grow and flourish and not become a garbage heap (Diane. Interview Two. June 1999).

Diane continues with this line of conversation in our third interview:

And we talked about Riverstone and how it helps to add to the environment, so it kind of pervades things. It’s like one of those things that comes up all the time without you even being conscious that you’re doing it—it’s just part of our thinking and our existence here at Community School. Like you say, they don’t even want to talk about it anymore cause it’s just there. It’s part of who we are (Diane. Interview Three. November 1999).

Thus, to own is also to dwell. The children dwell in Riverstone Park as a conceptual event. Imagining the space has become and is who they are.

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A Culture Bound by Fear

The week after Riverstone Park was erected, I had the opportunity to interview the children again. The following conversation between the children illustrates the lengths they would go to protect this new space. There are three students and myself involved in this conversation. These children are all very excitedly describing what it was like to be there construction day. There had been televised media coverage of the event on May 8, 1999, so the children are pretending that they are news reporters and that this conversation is a television news broadcast:

Me: Shannon, do you have a comment to make?
Shannon: Yeah. I just wanted to ask the people in Calgary—I hope they get to come sometimes to our school to the park and play. And uh...
Mark: (He cuts her off.) What if a bad boy came and like cha cha cha (Makes a chopping motion with his hands.)
Both: That would be really bad.
Mark: He’ll have to pay for those plants (Both are talking in worried manner, and I can’t make out what they are saying.)
Ava: There’s no such thing as a bad girl. There’s such thing as a bad boy though.
Shannon: You guys! I just wanted to tell you, but maybe we can put a um little signal so like if they want to if they like slice the tree or something like it’d go beep beep beep beep and then we’d know who did it. And there should be a camera maybe and then we could see it on tape and then we can find the person and then we can um he’ll pay.
Me: Do you think someone is going to come and damage the park?
Mark: I think maybe.
Shannon: People we’ll be right back. (They make humming sounds.)

26 I only conducted two interviews with the children. The second interviews were conducted the weeks of May 10th and May 17th, 1999.
Mark’s concluding remarks:

Mark: I’d really like it if they’d make it bigger, and I’d like it if they’d take some more mulch and bring it up with like something, but don’t ever ask somebody that can only wreck it or anything like that...I’ll really not like it if it’s broken because I love that park. (Shannon, Grade Two. Mark and Ava, Grade One. Interview Two).

Clearly, these children are concerned about protecting or “safe-guarding” their new park. And as Heidegger tells us “safeguarding” is the manner in which humans dwell and exist on earth. The difficulty I had is that when I listened to these children I detected an element of fear in their voices and in their words. And it suggested to me and to the teachers that we are teaching a culture that is bound by fear. A number of the children are concerned about ‘intruders’ and, in this case, a ‘bad boy’. ruining the park and damaging their property. As one teacher points out:

That’s a reality today. Yeah, they’re aware of that. I mean how many homes have security systems? How many times have they been told to lock up their bikes, uh to lock up their things at swim lessons. or you know? So. maybe that’s their way of showing that they care for the park—that they don’t want it to be ruined by other people (Michelle. Interview One. May 1999).

Notice how Michelle associates the notion of to ‘care for’ with to safeguard and to protect. Jackie is also quite concerned about the children’s comments. She feels that raising children in fear is not an “okay” way to be raising children:

This actually concerns me because some of our children have had such an urban life that their concept of how the world functions is very, it’s only informed by that (Jackie. Interview One. May 1999).

Jackie goes on to relate an interesting anecdote about one of her kindergarten students who is a participant in this study. Not long before this interview took place, the class
went on a field trip to the Bird Sanctuary. I went along that day as a chaperone. Each adult had a group of students, and we had to take notes for the children about the changes they had observed since the last field trip in winter. This is the conversation Jackie had with the student:

**Inglewood Bird Sanctuary: “Daycare for the Birds” (Jackie’s Title)**

Tara: Sometimes they break it down. The workers fix it (fence?).
Jackie: What do the birds do at the daycare?
Jackie: Do the birds stay at the daycare all the time?
Tara: Yah.
Jackie: Do the birds look after themselves or does someone else look after them?
Tara: Someone else. Because they don’t want them to run away.
Jackie: What will happen if they run away?
Tara: Mamma and Papa (bird) will get sad and lonely (Jackie and Tara, April 1999).

Jackie continues:

...So, I’m realizing our children are raised with such tight boundaries and they’re raised in such a fabricated environment and they are raised with so much fear. And we do that when we go on the walks. Like we tell them very clearly, see those cars we don’t want you running down the hill near those cars...And consequently we are doing that with them all the time with them, so that they are really bounded and we are teaching them a culture that is really bounded...So here’s what, perhaps it’s natural to us to want these spaces, but what we’re doing to our children is we are making them spaces that are so fear bound (Jackie, Interview One, May 1999).

Earlier on in the same interview, Jackie relates an interesting story about an aboriginal community on Vancouver Island. The significance of this story is that this group of people did the same thing—they kept their children bounded by fear.

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27 The Inglewood Bird Sanctuary.
... My husband taught at an aboriginal community in the north part of
Vancouver Island. And the people had built a playground for the children
and they built it on the outer edge of the school-ground, which meant it
was close to the woods—and that none of the children would play in it.
And they finally figured out because they didn’t understand the culture of
the native people, that those people are systematically trained by their
adults in their community to be afraid of the forest. Because probably,
I’m guessing, because they don’t want to lose their children in the forest.
They teach their children from a very young age that there are evil spirits
in the forest that will get you. And because the playground was in the
proximity of the forest, the children wouldn’t play in it. Because the evil
spirits would get them. This was like 15 years ago. And this wasn’t
European influence because the Europeans who had come and built the
playground had no concept of this. No concept whatsoever...So in some
ways we think very much of native people being close to nature. but I’m
not so sure that’s true (Jackie, Interview One, May 1999).

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Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation
brings: but precisely because we can base our hope only on
this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that
we, the old, can dictate how it will look.

Hannah Arendt. The Crisis in Education.

Are people today living in and teaching their children a culture that is bound by
fear? If so, what are the consequences for our children? In Jay Teitel’s (1999)
compelling article. “The Kidnapping of Play”, which appears in Saturday Night
Magazine, he explores these two questions in depth. He explains that play used to be the
‘exclusive domain of children’ but now adults play and children do not. He writes about
how when he was a child in the 1960s, activities such as golf and tennis were restricted to
adults and that pick-up hockey, baseball, and bike riding belonged to children. And now,
not only have hockey and cycling become almost solely adult recreational activities, the
list has expanded to include in-line skating, laser tag, Frisbee-golf and so on. Teitel
(1999) writes:
All around me adults, younger and older, graced by varying degrees of fitness and decrepitude, are playing the games children alone used to play. This would be strange enough, but what’s stranger still is the corollary. As play in our waning century has become more the province of adults, it’s becoming increasingly terra incognita to kids. This may be the ultimate inverted baby-boom insult to the natural order, one that’s twice as insidious as a terminal addiction to blue jeans: today we play, and our kids do not. We have stolen play from them (p. 56).

Teitel (1999) also cites some shocking statistics. For example, the adult to child split in ice time rental at the Ice Gardens in Toronto, is 80 to 20 percent. And, he goes on to explain that the city of Toronto had to legislate a 70 to 30 percent split of its recreational facilities—children to adult—“to make sure the kids would have somewhere to play” (p. 56).

One of the reasons Teitel (1999) cites for this current phenomenon is that children of today are being denied the “freedom” to play due to the increasing number of highly publicized child kidnapping and murder cases in the past twenty years. Such cases have convinced today’s parents that we are living in a “different world”, a world bound by fear.

Teitel (1999) describes how he spends one afternoon in a neighborhood park and observes that not only are there very few children playing there, the children who are there are under adult supervision:

In the space of two hours I saw half a dozen little kids with their parents, and a couple of sets of eight and nine-year olds, also supervised. Two teenagers, probably fifteen, rode through on bikes, did some desultory dangerous things on swings, then left. No one used the baseball field, except a woman with a dog and a Frisbee. Dogs, in fact, were as numerous as children. And adults were as numerous as children. More important, the youngest kid I saw without an adult was fourteen, possibly thirteen, no less (p. 57).
Anyone who has children or has frequented a local park recently is familiar with this scene. As a parent of young children, this scene is all too familiar. Gone are the days when kids got up in the morning and were out the door only to return for a short time at the dinner hour. All play is ‘pre-arranged’ these days. Yesterday, for example, my daughter came in after school and asked if she could play with the child across the street. This was our conversation:

“Sure, go knock on her door.” I said.
“But Mom, she whined. “I want you to phone.”
“She just lives across the street go knock on the door.” I said exasperated.
“I don’t want to.” And she didn’t. (Informal conversation with Sarah. February. 1999).

When we go to the park we have to arrange to meet the children’s friends and their parents there. Not only does this mean my children rarely get to go to the park with friends of their choice, because after all how often is it that both parties involved can just drop what they’re doing to take the kids to the park, but is also means that they are going to have two or more adults breathing down their necks while they play. Michelle also remarks about how children’s play has changed since she was young and how children’s play environments are more controlled:

Well, I think that all children are born with curiosity and um and just that innate need to learn about the world through play. So I think that the need is there and that hasn’t changed, but I think that the way children are able to explore those needs is being a little more controlled perhaps, not as available to children as they once were. I was talking to a teacher and she told me that, you know, we were reminiscing about our childhood. About how you might have had the valley down below. You know, some wild space and how we imagined things and we built forts there and we had this time to unwind where our parents just let us go for an hour and did not worry about us and she said that it’s really unfortunate that a lot of children are coming home and their way of unwinding is getting all
stressed out about a Nintendo game or, you know. (Michelle, Interview One, May 1999).

Teitel, citing Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga, author of Man at Play, explains that one of the characteristics of "true play" is the stipulation that real play is "free, is in fact freedom" (p. 57). "By free," says Teitel (1999), "Huizinga means without compulsion, but he also means without constraints, with the spur of the moment spontaneity that most of us can remember. Supervised, organized play, for Huizinga, is 'play to order, lesser play at best; at worst, not really play at all'" (p. 57).

My son just turned nine years old. Last summer I made the decision to let him ride his bike to the neighborhood park. After all, I remember walking a mile by myself to and from school at his age on dark rainy Vancouver mornings. Not long after my son had been enjoying his new found freedom, we were walking our dog past his friend's house. He asked the friend if he wanted to go bike riding to the park. His mother simply shot me a glance which said, "You're letting him ride his bike to the park by himself?" I felt the pang of negligence.

The mean age of kids allowed outside alone, even with friends, has risen to the point where, in many cases, it excludes the traditional definition of kids. The chances of seeing a kid ride his bike on the street without adult supervision (F. Scott Fitzgerald's definition of freedom) are even smaller; indeed, the absolute number of kids riding on bikes on many streets these days is a fraction of the number of adult riders (Teitel, 1999, p. 57).

The restrictions and constraints adults place on children's lives may, indeed, provide one explanation for the walls surrounding the park. I have been trying to show that we do live in a culture that is fear bound, and concern about safety has just become a way of life for most of us. And as Jackie despairingly points out such hyper-vigilance over safety results in "closed confined little beings" (Interview One, May 1999). So, it
could very well be that one possibility for the walls and guards is that the children feel protected and safe within those walls, like in a daycare. However, there is another possibility and another way to look at this, it could be that they recognize their loss of freedom, and they are attempting to claim it back. Perhaps, figuratively speaking, the 'intruders' they are trying to keep out of the park are us, the adults.

_Freeing The Imagination_

Diane, a teacher at the school, argues that the reason the children need to bind the space with walls and doors is because their horizons are limited, their imaginations bound. She explains that her class is reading _The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe._ and how they are having difficulty grasping the concept of the imaginary world that lies beyond the wardrobe:

Doing Narnia\(^2\) is really interesting because they’re having—I can see how they are grappling with the idea that the back of the cupboard of the wardrobe can just open and there’s some place else, another world. And I’m really concerned, too, that a lot of them have seen so much television that their own imagination has been limited by that. That rather than television being a jumping off spot for them, it kind of narrows their focus, so that they can only go just this far. And I’m hoping that when we do get a creative space for them, that that will kind of open their horizons a bit. Right now, I think their horizons are limited. And while their horizons are limited, they need to—they have a need to limit that space (Diane. Interview One, May 1999).

And Michelle makes a similar comment referring to the flat schoolyard:

But when you do look at them [the children] and they’re outside and there’s nothing out there in the playground right now—you should have seen them at the beginning of the year. They just walk around like they don’t know what to do with themselves. And it’s interesting how you

\(^{28}\) C. S. Lewis (1950).

\(^{29}\) "Narnia" is the name of the world the children enter through the wardrobe in C. S. Lewis' (1950) _The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe._
think they have all this land and all this space to do whatever they want with their imaginations, but they are not so inclined to use them (Michelle, Interview One. May 1999).

And:

...and this is why I say I’m hoping one of the things it’ll do [the Park] is, it’ll really improve their scope for imagination, as Anne Shirley used to say, and because I think that they need to have those boundaries on their imaginations removed. Right now, I’m so sick of Pokemon and Beanie Babies, I could scream! (Diane, Interview One. May 1999).

As Diane continues, she refers to a feeling she hopes the children will experience once they are in the park—a feeling, she believes, they cannot get from watching the television program, ‘Pokemon’:

...I saw the girls from Carole’s class sitting in the far end of the field in a circle under the shade of a tree. And I thought this is what it is going to be like for them only better, you know. They won’t have to hide themselves in a far corner. They can find another place where they can still be in easy access if they want to be and still have that same sort of feeling. Until they have experienced it and felt it. I think it has a lot to do with the emotion. The kind of emotion that being in that kind of situation evokes for them. Because I don’t think that Pokemon is an emotional thing or Beanie Babies are an emotional thing. I think they have been imposed on them (Diane, Interview One. May 1999).

Diane does not describe what this “emotion” is. Perhaps because, such an emotion is felt at a deeply personal level and, therefore, is unique to each human being. What is this “emotion”? Is it happiness, fear, awe? Does it even have a name? Indeed, there is a wonderful passage in The Secret Garden that responds to these questions. One of the central characters in the story, Colin, the young invalid who has been locked up in his

30 Anne Shirley is the name of the central protagonist in Elizabeth Montgomery’s Anne of Green Gables.
31 Pokemon is the name of a popular animated children’s television program. Pokemon stands for ‘Pocket Monster’. Merchandise associated with the program such as trading cards and video games is also very popular amongst school age children.
32 Beanie Babies are also a current craze. It is popular for young girls to collect and trade these little bean bag animal toys.
bedroom for ten years. not only recognizes this *feeling*, he wants to try and bottle it up as part of a scientific experiment:

‘When Mary found this garden it looked quite dead,’ the orator proceeded. ‘Then something began pushing things up out of the soil and making things out of nothing. One day things weren’t there and another they were. I had never watched things before, and it made me feel curious, and I’m going to be scientific. I keep saying to myself:

“What is it? What is it?” It’s something. It can’t be nothing! I don’t know its name, so I call it Magic. I have never seen the sun rise, but Mary and Dicken have, and from what they tell me I am sure that is magic, too. Something pushes it up and draws it. Sometimes since I’ve been in the garden I’ve looked up through the trees at the sky and I have had a strange feeling of being happy as if something were pushing and drawing and making things out of nothing. Everything is made out of Magic, leaves and trees, flowers and birds, badgers and foxes and squirrels and people. So it must be all around us. In this garden—in all the places. The magic in this garden has made me stand up and know I am going to live to be a man (Burnett, pp. 240-241).

I believe this is the emotion. the Magic. Diane is referring to that ‘Pokemon’ cannot offer. And as Colin says, it does not matter that this ‘strange feeling’ does not have a name. what is important, and the park will hopefully provide the opportunity, is that the children experience it.

Just to return to the teacher’s comments. what is at issue is a question of what constitutes imagination or imaginative play. Diane’s remarks, for instance, suggest that the park will encourage more ‘imaginative’ play—something different than the children simply pretending that they are characters from popular television programs. This suggestion forced me to consider imaginary play and creative play space and their roles in the development of children. I began researching this topic so that when I went back
to the teachers the next time, we would be able to continue our conversation on the
importance of a creative play space.

...When I think back on my own past, it brings back memories of being able to have a place that is private—that kind of lets you escape the real world. For example, when children are able to have a fort, there might be perhaps in the background, there might be a house—you know how subdivisions are built now where there aren’t even alleys between the houses. So then it’s like you can see your neighbor through their bay window—where their kitchen is, exactly—where your kitchen is. So, I think that when children are in a playhouse or a tunnel or something like that, they know what does really exist around them whether it’s a concrete jungle whether it’s another person’s house right there. But for that space, that they are in, it allows them to just escape what they really know is around them to make it their own world and their own private world...their own little imaginary world (Michelle. Interview One. May 1999).

Again Kornei Chukovsky (1968), along with Bruno Bettelheim (1977), *The Uses of Enchantment*, offered me many insights on the topic of imaginary play. Both Chukovsky and Bettelheim outline how imaginary play and fantasy strengthen a child’s perception of what is real. Now, if we return to my daughter Sarah’s description of the park with rock walls, rock-men, and rock beds. Chukovsky and Bettelheim would argue that she doesn’t actually believe the rock men are real, they just complete the illusion of her make-belief world. Chukovsky (1968) would say that Sarah had, like all children, “a purely playful attitude to fantasy and she believed in her illusions only to the extent that she needed them in her perceptive games” (p. 28). He explains that this kind of make-belief, and he cites examples using nonsense verse, helps children to become better oriented to reality.

In the following passage Chukovsky (1968) responds to a critic who accuses him of confusing children by corrupting them with fantasy and nonsense:

Had he any other resources than “common sense,” he would have realized that the nonsense that seemed to him so harmful not only does not interfere with the child’s orientation to the world that surrounds him, but, on the contrary, strengthens in his mind a sense of the real; and that it is
precisely in order to further the education of children in reality that such
nonsense verse should be offered to them. For the child is so constituted
that in the first years of his existence we can plant realism in his mind not
only directly, by acquainting him with the realities in his surroundings, but
also by means of fantasy (p. 90).

Similarly, Bettelheim (1977), in his discussion of fairytales, emphasizes that after a
certain age children know their fantasies are exactly that, and do not confuse them with
reality:

After the age of approximately five—the age when fairy tales become
truly meaningful—no normal child takes these stories as true to external
reality. The girl wishes to imagine she is a princess living in a castle and
spins elaborate fantasies that she is, but when her mother calls her to
dinner, she knows she is not. And while a grove in a park may be
experienced at times as a deep, dark forest full of hidden secrets, the child
knows what it really is, just as a little girl knows her doll is not really her
baby, much as she calls it that and treats it as such (p. 64).

Interestingly, I found that quite a few of the children gave what I would consider
rather 'fantastic' accounts in their descriptions of the park, particularly when they were
talking about the kind of wildlife that would dwell there. What I found interesting,
however, is that the children in grade two were not as serious in their descriptions and
giggled a lot more while they were making up these descriptions. In this next
conversation, Stephen and Hillary are describing what the park is going to look like. They
start joking about the kind of wildlife that will be in the park:

Stephen: And um it’ll (park) attract birds and mammals.
Hillary: Mammals! What kind of mammals?
Stephen: I don’t know.
Hillary: You’re a mammal.
Stephen: I already know I’m a mammal—and reptiles, like creepy lizards
(ooh giggles and makes sound like a werewolf) and poisonous
crocodiles...And vampire bats and spiders (he says in a creepy
voice and wiggles his fingers towards her face). (Stephen and
Hillary. Grade Two, Interview One).
At first, I did not take these comments all that seriously because the children seemed to be just fooling around. But, after several more interviews I noticed that other children behaved similarly during the interviews, especially the older ones. And it wasn't that they were not taking my questions or me seriously, they were just, quite simply, playing! Chukovsky (1968) explains that when children laugh at this kind of humor and more importantly, when they make it up, they are showing, in fact, how keenly aware they are of their external reality. The children do not believe for a moment that there will actually be poisonous crocodiles or vampire bats in the schoolyard, and it is because they know this for certain, that they incorporate it as part of their illusion. Thus, by engaging in this "self-deception", as Chukovsky (1968) calls it, the child demonstrates that he has mastered certain concepts in the world around him:

Play as it is experienced in any other type of game is accepted by the child voluntarily as self-deception, and the more self-deception is involved, the more attractive is the game... In other words, the pleasure is the greater the less he believes in the illusion created by his imagination... The recognition of play as play, of course, increases the humor of it, but I must reiterate, it is not humor that the child seeks when he plays this kind of game: his main purpose, as in all play, is to exercise his newly acquired skill of verifying the knowledge of things (p. 101).

Thus, one could argue, as Chukovsky and Bettelheim do so eloquently, that the children need fantasy in order to strengthen their sense of the real. And then subsequently, it could be argued that a space like a park should provide a creative opportunity for the children to engage in imaginative play.

But perhaps more important than contributing to the child’s sense of what’s real, fantasy also plays a very important role in the development of self-identity. Bettelheim (1977) explains how fantasy, and particularly traditional fairy tales, not only assist
children in sorting out their identities, but they also help to instill in them a sense of security. He explains that in the traditional fairy tale good and evil are clearly defined, as is figured in characters such as Snow White and her wicked step mother. And certainly one sees a similar definition in more contemporary fairy tales such as James and his wicked aunts in *James and the Giant Peach*.^3^ Bettelheim notes that children always identify with the hero and in this way learn morality. "It is not the fact that virtue wins out at the end which promotes morality," explains Bettelheim (1977), "but the hero is most attractive to the child, who identifies with the hero in all his struggles" (p. 9). And again one only has to conjure the image of James' aunts to illustrate this point. What appeals to the child in a fairy tale of this sort is that although the hero is meek, he nevertheless succeeds. These stories thereby give the child confidence that he too, like the hero, in what might seem to be impossible circumstances, can succeed. Bettelheim (1977) stresses the importance of the figure of the 'isolated hero' in our times:

Today children no longer grow up within the security of an extended family, or of a well integrated community. Therefore, even more than at the times fairy tales were invented, it is important to provide the modern child with images of heroes who have to go out into the world all by themselves and who, although originally ignorant of the ultimate things, find secure places in the world by following their right way with deep inner confidence.

The fairy-tale hero proceeds for a time in isolation, as the modern child often feels isolated. The hero is helped by being in touch with primitive things—a tree, an animal, nature—as the child feels more in touch with those things than adults do. The fate of these heroes convinces the child that, like them, he may feel outcast and abandoned in the world, groping in the dark, but, like them, in the course of his life he will be guided step by step, and given help when it is needed. Today, even more than in past times, the child needs the reassurance offered by the image of the isolated man who nevertheless is capable of achieving meaningful and rewarding relations with the world around him (p. 11).

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Fantasy, continues Bettelheim, also helps children to recognize and cope with inner conflict and by this he means that the evil figures in fairy tales give form to the child’s inner monsters. He explains that children both love their parents and at other times hate them. The fantasy stories provide an outlet for this hate. Without them the child would feel that he is alone in his anger and hate. Bettelheim (1977) comments on the shortsightedness of those who have banned such stories:

Those who outlawed traditional folk fairy tales decided that if there were monsters in a story told to children, these must all be friendly—but they missed the monster a child knows best and is most concerned with: the monster he feels or fears himself to be, and which also sometimes persecutes him... Without such fantasies, the child fails to get to know his monsters better, nor is he given suggestions as to how he may gain mastery over it. As a result, the child remains helpless with his worst anxieties—much more so than if he had been told fairy tales which give these anxieties form and body and also show ways to overcome these monsters. If our fear of being devoured takes the tangible form of a witch, it can be gotten rid of by burning her in an oven! But these considerations did not occur to those who outlawed fairy tales (p. 120).

What Bettelheim is trying to get at is that fantasy and the imaginative process aids children in gaining mastery over themselves which ultimately allows them to achieve true independence and maturity. More than anything else the image of the kingdom represents this new found independence. In these traditional tales, the hero must undergo a struggle or overcome obstacles before the tale ends. In the end, the hero has overcome these trials while remaining true to himself and has, therefore, successfully achieved true selfhood. This victory over the self is usually represented by a king and a queen who rule wisely over the kingdom ever after. This image of a king and queen who rule wisely can be understood as the child who having gained control and mastery over his own monsters can now rule himself wisely and, therefore, has reached maturity:
In fairytales, unlike myths, victory is not over others but only over oneself and over villainy (mainly one's own, which is projected as the hero's antagonist). If we are told anything about the rule of these kings and queens, it is that they ruled wisely and peacefully, and that they lived happily. This is what maturity ought to consist of: that one rules oneself wisely, and as a consequence lives happily.

The child understands this very well. No child believes that one day he will become ruler over a kingdom other than the realm of his own life. The fairy story assures him that someday this kingdom can be his, but not without a struggle. How the child specifically imagines the "kingdom" depends on his age and state of development, but he never takes it literally. To the younger child, it may simply mean that nobody will order him around, and that all his wishes will be fulfilled (italics mine). To the older child it will also include the obligation to rule—that is, to live and act wisely. But at any age a child interprets becoming king or queen as having gained mature adulthood (Bettelheim, 1977, p. 128).

I should just like to pause for a moment and summarize what Bettelheim has written about fantasy in relation to my topic. Fantasy provides the child an opportunity to identify with an isolated hero who, as I have written, must overcome a number of obstacles in order to reach maturity and adulthood in the figure of a king or queen. The idea of achieving selfhood or mastery over oneself becomes very significant as this project proceeds. As the children continue with their descriptions, they invite me into a world where there are caves, tunnels, wildlife and danger. As they describe these things, and I look more closely at what they mean to them, I begin to understand that these things, too, are important for the children developing a strong sense of self-identity. And I suppose the critic might argue, 'How do you know that the children aren't just looking for a place removed from adult authority where they can run wild in total chaos', as is the case in The Lord of the Flies? I would have to respond, at this point, that there is nothing in the interviews that would remotely suggest any such chaos, and on the

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contrary. everything and particularly the children’s comments on the caves suggest that
they are seeking, not necessarily an ordered, but certainly a peaceful place.

But she was inside the wonderful garden, and she could come through the door under the ivy any time, and she felt as if she had found a world all her own.
The sun was shining inside the four walls and the high arch of blue sky over this particular piece of Misselthwaite seemed even more brilliant and soft than it was over the moor. The robin flew down from his tree-top and hopped about or flew after her from one bush to another. He chirped a good deal and had a very busy air, as if he were showing her things. Everything was strange and silent, and she seemed to be hundreds of miles away from anyone, but somehow she did not feel lonely at all (Burnett, 1951. *The Secret Garden*. pp. 79-80).

CAVES

Certainly, the most prominent objects inside the children’s models of the park were the many cave-like structures which included actual caves, tunnels—some with trap doors—forts, and one or two tree-houses. The caves struck me because the image of the ‘cave’ has been a reoccurring theme in course-work I have done over the years. Thus, I believe my previous experience of exploring caves has opened up the possibility of a new understanding of caves encountered here in this project.

When I attended the parent information meeting teachers marveled over how they had not expected the children’s models to contain so many caves and tunnels. In my interview with Jackie, she talks about how she was surprised by the children’s keen interest in cave-like structures:

I was surprised they were as interested in, in what I would call tranquil spaces as they were. That surprised me. I wouldn’t have anticipated that. In my mind, I would have imagined that running and climbing and looking for places to be physical, like big muscle physical. So, I was surprised
that the children were as interested as they were in places that were secret and tranquil. And then I paid more attention to that in here and in the teepees (the kindergarten class has two teepees, one is enclosed and the other is just more or less the frame of a teepee). They really like those teepee spaces. They like to go in there and be private and be by themselves or with a group of maybe three. So that isn’t—now that doesn’t surprise me now when I watch them. And when you think of these structures that we have in the classroom, where they are cave-like, these wooden structures, the children gravitate to that. They’re always used. They’re always used, and the teepee structures are almost always used (Jackie. Interview One. May 1999).

Admittedly. I too was somewhat astonished at first glance with the number of caves and tunnels that appeared in the models. But then I recalled that in my childhood. many summers passed building forts and hideouts down near the ravine by my house. And my own children. especially my daughter and her friends, spend whole afternoons dragging blankets and pillows from their bedrooms downstairs to our basement to make forts under our open stairwell. So, what is it about these cave-like structures that are so fascinating to children? Let us look at some examples where the term ‘cave’ appears in the conversations:

Yes, this is a cave and this is another cave (Stephen. Grade Two. Interview One).

A resting-place. It’s a cave and you can rest there (Hillary. Grade Two, Interview One).

Me: What are the caves for in your park?
Stephen: For the bats and for us to lie down in (Grade Two, Interview One).

This is a little tunnel you could work in if you want to be alone (Christina. Grade One, Interview One).

Um. that’s the cave (Leah. Grade One, Interview One).

Me: What do you want to do to help build the park?
Dylan: Build the caves or something (Grade Two, Interview One).

Me: What’s going to be your favorite part of the new park?
Anna: The caves and nature (Grade One, Interview One).

I know, journals in the cave, so you can work on your journal in the cave...as long as it’s really quiet for some privacy (Leah, Grade One, Interview One).

These examples show the importance of the caves to the children as well as give an indication of what the caves mean to the children: a resting-place, you can rest there, to lie down in, privacy, really quiet for some privacy. The words rest and privacy evoke the image of a den where a little animal is at slumber. I associate caves with the womb. A peaceful place. A nest.\textsuperscript{35} In The Geography of Childhood, Gary Nabhan (1994) explains that adults often experience nature as vast panoramic views (i.e., the Grand Canyon, mountain ranges, oceans, deserts, etc.) while children need go no further than to look beneath their feet to experience immediate nature:

Overtime, I’ve come to realize that a few intimate places mean more to my children, and to others, than all the glorious panoramas I could ever show them...when I wished my children to have contact with wildness. I sent them “out”, to climb high upon ridges and to absorb the grand vistas. Yet when they wished to gain a sense of the wildness, of animal comfort, they chose not the large, but the small. In doing so, they may have been selecting a primordial connection with the earth and its verdant cover (p. 7).

Thus, we may view the child’s understanding of the cave as a nest or perhaps a need to return to the nest. As environmental psychologist Diane Ann Kirby (Nature as Refuge, 1989) observed, “such refuges extend the sphere of safety that children sensed earlier

\textsuperscript{35} Gaston Bachelard offers an excellent phenomenology of ‘the nest’ in The Poetics of Space. pp. 90-104. (Orion Press, 1964).
while still within the constant parental care they knew during their postnatal
development" (Nabhan, p. 8).

When I asked Jackie why she thought these cave-like structures were so important,
she too made reference to our primordial animal nature and this desire for a sense of
security:

I think that we’re very animal like and that that’s part of feeling safe and
part of knowing your environment. When you’re in a wide open
environment, your environment is unknown and you always have to be
watching, you have to be vigilant—and that my dogs like to go under the
counter. They like to go under the table. They like to be in a place where
their backs are secure and I think that it’s probably the same kind of thing
for us as people. That we, we’re so used to living now in a city
environment where everything is manufactured, even our park areas are
manufactured. I think we’ve lost sight of that, but that we are like that as
well (Jackie, Interview One, May 1999).

My first thought when I saw the caves was that they would be a good place for the
children to hide. And indeed, when I asked the children what games they would play in
the new park the response was unanimous. as one child aptly put it, “Hide-n-seek looks
like a good one.” However, the children’s comments do not suggest that the caves are a
place for hiding. Caves are a place for privacy, a ‘secret place’, not a hiding place.

Martinus Langeveld (1983) in. The Stillness of the Secret Place. explains the distinction
between these two kinds of places. When a child plays hide-n-seek, he is still aware of
the ‘other’. the other is still part of his world: "Because, in playing hide-n-seek. he still
remains oriented to the ‘other’ as an object of his intentions from whom he still hides
himself" (Langeveld, 1983, p. 12). When a child is aware of the other, the place in which
he hides from the other is simply a hiding place.
A secret place, on the other hand...

The Secret Garden was what Mary called it when she was thinking of it. She liked the name, and she liked still more the feeling that when its beautiful old walls shut her in, no one knew where she was. It seemed almost like being shut out of the world in some fairy place. The few books she had read and liked had been fairy-story books, and she had read of secret gardens in some of the stories. Sometimes people went to sleep in them for a hundred years, which she had thought must be rather stupid (Burnett. 1951. The Secret Garden. p. 89).

A secret place is a place for ‘self communion’, says Langeveld (1983). “Here one can quietly withdraw, daydream, and meditate; here one can slip into a slumbering sleep. but this sleep will not be filled with adventures or perilous deeds...the actual experience of a secret place is always grounded in a mood of tranquility, peacefulness: it is a place where we can feel sheltered, safe, and close to that with which we are intimate and deeply familiar” (p. 12). Most definitely the park is a ‘secret place’, I think, for these two children interviewed several days after Riverstone Park was built:

Me: What do you like about it [the park] Heather?
Heather: When you go down here and have your own secret park—to lie down with your own sleeping bag and dream about your own secret park.

Me: Is it like a secret park?
Heather: We can bring our own sleeping bags.
Sarah: I’ll lie down here (she points to a spot).
Heather: And then we can fall asleep and pretend this is a big tent.

A little later in the same interview...

Me: What do you think you can learn about out in this park?
Heather: I know, we can learn about having our own secret hideouts out here.
Sarah: We can dig underground and have a trap door.
Heather: And we could pretend this is our own secret hideout and nobody could come in. We could put rocks right here and right there all over the entrance (she points to an open space in the berms).

Sarah: How about we have a rock entrance—no we have a front door.

Me: So, once you were in your hideout. What would you do in here?

Heather: We could just lay down and relax and play over there. We could, I mean, we don’t even have to go inside (she points to center of park), we could play, play, play and play and when we think it’s time for sleeping...(disappears skipping over the rocks).

(Sarah and Heather, Kindergarten. Interview Two).

When I discussed the caves with Diane, she recalled childhood memories of playing in hideouts and cave-like structures and explained why she feels these places are so important to children. In this description, she describes, first, what Langeveld (1983) refers to as a hiding place, where the child is aware of danger outside—the ‘other’. But as she continues, she begins to speak more about how these are places where the child establishes a sense of self-identity, which is more in keeping with a secret place. Her comments are insightful because she feels these secret places are not only for self-communion, but self-affirmation:

Diane: Oh yeah. Oh yeah! And I really identify with that because I remember hiding under bushes. You know, and loving the fact that I could have a fort inside a hedge and nobody would know I was in there.

Me: Why do you think they want caves? Why is it so important to them?

Diane: Because when you’re in a cave and if you’re in there and it’s small, no adults get in. You are totally you and the boundaries are set for you and you can’t get hurt, but there is also that element of danger that you are away from the eyes of people that will look after you as well. It’s kind of exciting and risky at the same time. I remember feeling that excitement. And also, knowing something that somebody else doesn’t. You know, that I know where I am.

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36 Diane Ann Kirkby’s “Nature as Refuge” essay is an investigation into children’s uses of semi-closed shelters. She provides statistical evidence that refuges, or places to hide, are high on the list of environmental preferences in children and how, in terms of human evolution, refuge spaces meet the developmental needs of young children, “The need to see, and not be seen.” It appears in Children’s Environments Quarterly 6.1 (1989): pp. 7-12.
and I know what I’m doing, but nobody else knows what I’m doing in here. So it’s, I think it’s an identity thing.

Me: I need you to explain more about the identity issue because I think it’s quite important.

Diane: Okay.

Me: Would you expand on that if you can?

Diane: Children are constantly searching right from the time that they’re born. searching for their place in the world and who they are and where they fit. And I think as long as they—when they are small like this, so much of their identity is tied up in their parents and what their parents expect of them, who their siblings are. and where they fit in the world. But as they move out into the school, the other children become part of their identification too. and to be able to relate to other children effectively. and to establish themselves as somebody who is worthwhile and valuable as a friend. becomes really important as well. So that, yes, they love their parents and they love their siblings, even though they fight with them sometimes, but they have to establish in their own minds and in their own hearts where they fit in the bigger world. And sometimes in that private hiding space, the only person they have in there with them is themselves. And so they start, they start to, I think speaking from my own experience, they start to be able to identify some of the things that make them who they are, some of the things that they like. You know, “I really like this and I don’t know many people who do” and “I really hate this” and maybe they fear somebody out there but. “I can be safe in here with my own feelings.” Nobody’s going to challenge me or say. “Don’t do that, you’re going to get hurt.” Or look at me and say, “You know better than that.” You know. and I think it’s an affirming thing where I do exist and I do exist outside of one of those people. Even when they are not there, I’m still here (Diane, Interview One, May 1999).

It is a place where the child can say this is who I am. A place, with boundaries, where they can feel safe and secure, but not controlled. The children really need these kinds of spaces especially at school where they are in a class with up to thirty other children. “Yeah, and I see kids who need that,” says Diane, “kids who get overwhelmed by what goes on and they just need to go to some place and just regroup. You know because they are losing themselves in the malaise around them” (Diane, Interview One,
May 1999). So, perhaps the children are not simply expressing a desire for secret places. perhaps they are expressing a need.

Caves mean something very different to adults. When I was twelve years old my father taught me to scuba-dive. I remember his warnings quite clearly. “Remember, do not put your hand in any crevices or caves, this is where the wolf-eel hides. If it bites you, it won’t let go.” It is important to note, at this point, that there will not be any actual caves in the park per se. These structures are not allowed because they hide children from a clear view. It is a ‘safety’ issue. Michelle explains:

Well, because oh we’ve got to this point in the system where we are all terribly worried and paranoid about being sued because there is always that worst case scenario and we always want to avoid it, so I think we’ve gotten to that point—okay, we don’t want to have the caves because a child might go in there on the weekend and there might be, like a child could go by themselves and someone in the neighborhood who is a stranger could go in there and because they wouldn’t be seen could do any number of things to a child, so that’s kind of a scary prospect. It’s more for the liability issues that anything else you know. And when the staff came together. I was told to think about childhood memories. We all came up with caves and forts. You know even if it’s your own living room and you put your couches together and you put a blanket over top, we all have memories of those special places where we could just kind of escape the real world and I think we would have all liked to have it, but because again of the liability or fear issues. You know, about something happening to a child, and we just don’t want that to happen here, so! (Michelle. Interview One, May 1999).

Thus, despite the fact that these cave-like structures are important to the children and form an important part of the teacher’s childhood memories of being outdoors, concern for the safety of the children means that they must be omitted. Fortunately, due to the ingenuity of the zoo staff, they have placed rocks in positions so that there will be little crevices for the children to explore and they have planted bushes and shrubs so that they
will grow over in a canopy like manner hopefully creating the effect of an enclosed space. It is unfortunate, however, that the project planners have to make compromises because of fear. What exactly is the source of this fear? Is it the growing number of highly sensationalized media cases that have made many adults feel paranoid, or is there more to it?

Caves are often portrayed as places of danger in literature, lore or, in mass media. One only has to conjure the fearful image of Injun Joe lurking in a cave in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*\(^7\) or Odysseus\(^8\) confronting the one-eyed Cyclops in a cave to be reminded of this. Mysterious things happen in caves. In the film, *Dead Poets Society\(^9\)* the cave is the place where the boys engage in hedonistic rites in order to set their wild poetic spirits free. It is also the place they bring their girl friends. Of course, there is the very impressive description of the ‘Marabar Caves’ in E.M. Forster’s (1929), *A Passage to India*. These caves are so awe-inspiring, they are almost unspeakable:

> Having seen one such cave, having seen two, having seen three, four, fourteen, twenty-four, the visitor returns to Chandrapore uncertain whether he has had an interesting experience or a dull one or any experience at all. He finds it difficult to discuss the caves, or to keep them apart in his mind, for the pattern never varies, and not even a bee’s nest or a bat, distinguishes one from the other. Nothing, nothing attaches to them, and their reputation—for they have one—does not depend upon human speech. It is as if the surrounding plain or the passing of birds have taken upon themselves to exclaim ‘extraordinary!’ and the word has taken root in the air, and been inhaled by mankind (p. 138).

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In these particular caves, the heroine, Miss Adela Quested, experiences a sexual awakening. One can only speculate on the actual nature of this experience. However, she wrongly accuses her Indian guide of “insulting” her in the caves and he is committed to prison. “They are dark caves,” says the narrator. “and they are older than all spirit” (Forster, 1929, p. 138). We fear this darkness, the unknown—a time before there was light (enlightenment).

Do children know this fear? “The animal suspects no threat in the darkness...” explains Langeveld (1983). “only humans know this kind of anxiety which arises in a world created and given significance by humans themselves. The very small child does not know this specific human anxiety” (p.16). The child’s “I” is still connected to his world; in such a place the child’s self is one with the world. Anxiety only results when the “I” experiences the world as “other.”

Caves, as Diane alludes to, as does Forster (1929), also suggest excitement and risk. Diane argues that as human beings we need this sense of risk and danger to feel alive. “Like I was saying before, there’s a chance for some danger...and there is excitement in that. Like there’s excitement in skiing fast...Cause you might fall and hurt yourself, but there’s that thing of it. I think as human beings, we all look for something that makes us feel alive” (Interview One, May 1999). Interestingly enough, in medieval literature, the cave symbolizes a place where a transformation or a rebirth can occur. In many versions of the Grail story, the hero meets “with a strange and terrifying adventure in a mysterious chapel (usually described as a cave), an adventure which, we are given to

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40 The story of the “Holy Grail” is part of the Arthurian Myths.
understand, is fraught with extreme peril to life...the general impression is that this is an adventure in which supernatural, and evil, forces are engaged” (Weston, p. 175). Percival, seeking the Grail castle, rides before a great oak which is lit with candles. He enters a hole in the oak and finds the body of a dead knight on an altar. As he leaves the great oak the candles are extinguished. J. Weston. From Romance to Ritual (1983), explains that the hero’s encounter in a perilous chapel is a kind of test or initiation to the Grail. In order to be initiated to the sources of life, the hero first has to come in “contact with the horrors of physical death” (p. 185). “Such a journey,” explains Weston (1983), “was held to be a high spiritual adventure of actual possibility—a venture to be undertaken by those who, greatly daring, felt the attainment of actual knowledge of the future life was worth all risks” (p. 185). In other words, caves provide us with the opportunity to face the unknown and overcome our fears leading to personal and spiritual growth.

...the most dangerous tendency in modern society, now rapidly emerging as scientific-industrial ambition, is the tendency toward encapsulation of human order—the severance, once and for all, of the umbilical cord fastening us to the wilderness. The threat is not in the totalitarian desire for absolute control. It lies in the willingness to ignore the essential paradox: the natural forces that so threaten us are the same forces that preserve and renew us (Wendell Berry, The Unsettling of America, 1986).41

What I am attempting to illustrate here is that caves belong to a rich mythological tradition that shapes our understanding of what caves are. And what we as adults understand them to be—a place of adventure and danger—seems a far cry from what the children understand them to be—a tranquil refuge. In both cases, however, the outcome

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41 This quote comes from David Jardine’s (1994) Speaking with a Boneless Tongue (Bragg Creek: Makyo Press) pp. 126-127.
is similar if not the same. Caves are places where one can experience a better understanding of one’s ‘self’. And thus, it becomes plainly obvious, the connection between the discussion of fantasy in this thesis and the significance of caves:

During all the stages leading to adulthood, the secret place remains an asylum in which the personality can mature; this self-creating process of this standing apart from others, this experiment, this growing in self-awareness, this creative peace and absolute intimacy demand it—for they are only possible in alone-ness (Langeveld, 1983, p. 17).

In this light, we must ask ourselves, as teachers, administrators, school board trustees, and parents. “What are we denying the children when we say they cannot have a cave?” More importantly, what is the basis for this decision not to have caves? If, indeed, it is concern or fear for the children’s safety, then I suggest we more carefully examine the sources of this fear to see if it is justified.

WILDLIFE AND CREEPY CRAWLY THINGS

The little fox and the rook were as happy and busy as they were, and the robin and his mate flew backwards and forwards in tiny streaks of lightening. Sometimes the rook flapped his back wings and soared away over the tree-tops in the park. Each time he came back and perched near Dicken and cawed several times as if he were relating his adventures, and Dicken talked to him just as he had talked to the robin. Once when Dicken was so busy that he did not answer him at first, Soot flew on his shoulder and gently tweaked his ear with his large beak. When Mary wanted to rest a little, Dicken sat down with her under a tree, and once he took his pipe out of his pocket and played the soft, strange little notes, and two squirrels appeared on the wall and looked and listened (Burnett, The Secret Garden, p. 166).

The primary reason the children give for building a park is to attract wildlife. A park is a ‘safe’ place and a home for wildlife:

Me: Why are parks important?
Sarah: Because it's a safe place for people and animals... They are important for animals and birds because they can like make a nest in some of the trees we are going to grow (Grade One, Interview One).

I think there is deer in the city, so there will be deer in the park and rabbits and birds and lots of other animals (Heather, Kindergarten, Interview One).

Trees for squirrels and birds and there are no houses in them and it is just important for the animals (Ava, Grade One, Interview One).

What would a park be without 'creatures' as Dicken refers to them in The Secret Garden? And as I noted earlier, a park, according to the original definition, includes 'beasts of the chase' such as deer, without such it is not considered a park. The idea of having birds, deer, rabbits, and squirrels in the park is very appealing to the children. One only has to look at traditional western theology for the source of this myth. Western Culture is laden with images of paradise portraying God's creatures roaming freely in unspoiled nature. Needless to say, Milton, along with the Romantic Poets, is probably most responsible for perpetuating these images. Today, however, the portrayal of nature and wildlife, especially in the form of our adorable furry friends, is more than mere image it has become an institution for Disney. It would be difficult to think of one Disney classic where the hero or heroine is not accompanied by some friendly creature as in Snow White or The Little Mermaid. Unless, of course, the central character happens to be one of these animals, as in Bambi, The Lion King, and BABE. Why

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42 Notably, Wordsworth, Keats, and Blake.
43 The Walt Disney Company. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. [Video]. (Distributed by Buena Vista Home Video, Burbank, California).
44 The Walt Disney Company. The Little Mermaid. [Video]. (Distributed by Buena Vista Home Video, Burbank, California).
45 Disney Enterprises, Inc. Bambi. [Video]. (Distributed by Buena Vista Home Video, Burbank California).
are these animals or even animated objects such as the candle and the teapot in Disney's, *The Beauty and the Beast,* so attractive to the children? And why do the children demand the presence of them in their own park?

One reason children are so drawn to these little creatures is because their thinking is animalistic (Bettelheim 1977, Piaget 1960). Piaget has shown that, to the child, everything is regarded as living up until the age of six or seven (Piaget. 1960, p. 194). This means that young children regard animals as living, thinking, and feeling subjects, and that this perception of life extends to objects such as the wind because it blows and stones because they can roll down a hill (Piaget. 1960, p. 230). This notion of life is the link between the child's inner and outer world. As Piaget explains animism is part of the child's innate egocentricity, and only when the child becomes aware of his self and his own thought will he abandon animism. Piaget writes that, "...in so far as things show an activity which is reliable in its constancy and utility to man, they must posses a psychic life" (p. 231). But as the child progressively "realizes his own subjective activity and its inexhaustible scope he refuses to allow self-consciousness to things" (p. 239). Such

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46 The Walt Disney Company. *The Lion King.* [Video]. (Distributed by Buena Vista Home Video, Burbank, California).
47 Universal City Studios INC. *Babe.* [Video]. (MCA Home Video, Willowdale, Ontario).
48 Silver Screen Partner IV & The Walt Disney Company. *Beauty and the Beast.* [Video]. (Distributed by Buena Vista Home Video, Burbank, California).
49 Piaget says in reference to "primitive cultures," that it "is the discovery of the existence of thought that brings animism into being" (p. 239). He claims it is the opposite with children as "it is ignorance of the psychic which makes them attribute life to things and it is the realization of a thinking subject which leads them to abandon animism" (p. 239). In the final stage in a child's abandonment of animism, "the self is so far distinguished from things that the instruments of thought can no longer be conceived as adherent in things. words are no longer in things, images and thoughts are situated in the head. Gestures are no longer effective. Magic is no more" (Piaget, p. 251).

Contemporary anthropological research has shown that there are cultures where animalistic thinking still exists and is in many ways more desirable, see David Abram *The Spell of the Sensuous* (Vintage Books, 1997), Richard Nelson *Make Prayers to the Raven* (University of Chicago press, 1985), and Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* (Penguin, 1987). In such cultures, this kind of thinking has resulted in a closer
animalistic thinking is revealed in the following conversation with the children about the plant life in the park. It shows this tendency to attribute human qualities and personalities to things. Piaget notes, and here we are reminded of Chukovsky’s (1968) comments earlier on in this thesis, that “adult language provides the very conditions necessary to foster the child’s animism and this the more so, since generally speaking the child takes all metaphors literally” (Piaget, 1960, p. 248). Notice the rapid leap between the suggestion of to ‘take care’ and the idea of ‘doctor’:

Me: Mark, what do we have to do to take care of the park?
Mark: Well, water it. Feed it and um like I can’t really tell if it’s sick. If it’s sick, you’ll need to like take a knife and sort of cut open the bark and see if the green stuff is a bit like dark and it needs to be light.
Me: And what should we do if the trees are sick?
Mark: Um. like give it water—give it like I don’t know. I know! Some medicine for flowers.
Shannon: His mother um his grandma is a doctor, but I don’t know the kind.
Mark: Well. not a pet doctor and not a foot doctor—a person doctor (Mark, Grade One and Shannon, Grade Two. Interview Two).

Piaget stresses that the children don’t actually believe that these objects are persons—as in this case Mark knows that the tree is a tree—but that our language provides the conditions for the child to understand and treat objects as alive, as thinking feeling entities.

Given this understanding of self-object(nature) connection, let us return momentarily to the question of fantasy. Bettelheim (1977) continues from Piaget, to connection to the earth and a more respectful management of its resources. In an interesting essay by psychologist, James Hillman, “Anima Mundi—the return of the soul to the world,” he makes an impassioned plea for a return to this so-called animalistic thinking about the world. Hillman’s essay appears in Spring (1982): pp. 71-93.
explain that it is perfectly natural for children to extend this animalistic thinking to the animals and objects that inhabit both their real and imaginary worlds:

To the child, there is no clear line separating objects from living things; and whatever has life has life very much like our own. If we do not understand what rocks and trees and animals have to tell us, the reason is that we are not sufficiently attuned to them. To the child trying to understand the world, it seems reasonable to expect answers from those objects which arouse his curiosity. And since the child is self-centered, he expects the animal to talk about the things which are really significant to him, as animals do in fairy tales, and as the child talks to his real or imaginary toy animals. A child is convinced that the animal understands and feels with him, even though it does not show it openly (Bettelheim, 1977, p. 46).

As I write this, it comes to mind that my daughter has always preferred her stuffed animals to her dolls. When I asked her about her preference, she said that she doesn’t like the faces of the dolls, especially their eyes. Perhaps, they are too realistic. When she plays with her animals, she talks to them, dresses them up, and places them in a cradle to sleep and so on. However, once when I asked her to leave a toy behind and to put it in the cradle to sleep, she looked at me queerly and said, “It’s not real Mom.” So, clearly she is able to make the distinction between what is real and what is not, yet at the same time this animalistic thinking persists. Perhaps, she is at a pivotal point in her journey between inner and outer world. In any case, she prefers her animal companions to accompany her along the way.

So to summarize, children are attracted to animals and stones and stuffed toys because “everything is inhabited by a spirit similar to all other spirits (namely, that of the child who has projected his spirit into all these things)” (Bettelheim, 1977, p. 47). As a result, these things feel what the child feels. Therefore, like the isolated hero in a fairytale or in a Disney classic, it is natural that the child would want one of these animals
as a guide or a companion to share his feelings and adventures with. This seems like a reasonable explanation as to why the children would be so adamant about having animals such as deer and rabbits and birds in the park. And, what about all those creepy crawly things?

Stephen: And there's uh insects.
Hillary: Yeah, they go in the wood and they go in the rocks and they crawl up my leg and uh *giggle* (Stephen and Hillary, Grade Two. Interview One).

Sarah: Nature plants can attract bugs.
Tara: Yeah, *hesitation* and mice, too (Sarah and Tara, Kindergarten. Interview One).

...and reptiles, like creepy lizards and poisonous crocodiles (Stephen, Grade Two, Interview One).

...and um we could attract bats! (Leah, Grade One, Interview One).

There might be some tigers and lions in the cave—it's really actually bats! But you know what, I don't want bats because some of them might be vampire bats (Sarah, Kindergarten. Interview One).

And vampire bats and spiders *creepy voice* (Stephen, Grade Two. Interview One).

So we can get in and the walls are for so the little, no, big bugs. so they can't get in...the big ones, like scorpions (Lauren, Grade One, Interview One).

Now as I have already noted, in most cases, the children were giggling and playing when they made these comments. And as I have shown, children will often engage in this kind of humor to demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge of what is real in the world. But they speak a truth! There is no paradise without hell. Insects, reptiles, and rodents represent the dark-side of this park paradise. I pursued the conversation with
Lauren, the child who wanted to erect walls to prevent insects from entering the park.

Lauren’s attitude towards insects is typical of many people in Western Culture:

“I was interested in something you said earlier about the walls being there to keep the bugs out. Where are the bugs coming from?”

She hesitates and looks around the field. Slowly, her head turns to the ground. She looks at her feet and steps back. She says, as a look of horror spreads across her face, “They are coming from underground.”

I continue. “Why do you think they will come to our park?”

“Because they like digging holes,” she answers.

She looks concerned, so I am cautious as I ask the next question. “Do you think the bugs will be good or bad for the park?”

“Bad!”

“How come?”

“Cause there’s a few scorpions around here.” She pauses for a second looking side to side and then looking very seriously at me. “And they can sting you.”

Scorpions, spiders, mice, bats! Insects and pestilence! What is it about these creatures that makes so many people cringe when they encounter them? Is it that we associate them with images of the darkness and the underworld? In an essay by James Hillman (1988), *Going Bugs*, he states, “Our history is wholly dark, wholly prejudiced against these varmints” (p. 42). He cites an excerpt from Goethe’s *Faust*, where a chorus of insects greets Mephistopheles, singing:

‘O welcome, most welcome
Old fellow from hell
We’re hovering and humming
And know thee quite well.
We singly and quiet
Were planted by thee
In thousands, O Father,
We dance here with glee.’

“Mephistopheles says: this young creation warms my heart indeed. Lord of the flies. Beelzebub, the Devil loves the bugs, like demons of the air and the night, and of hiding places in the earth, are his children” (Hillman, 1988, p. 42).
In the following anecdote, Gary Paul Nabhan (1994) shares vivid memories of early encounters with ‘monsters’ of the underworld:

Our home had been built into a sand dune not far from lake Michigan, and had thick concrete block walls that steadied the house against the shifting and settling sands all around us. My brother loved to go down into one particular dark corner of the basement with a flashlight where he would show me a chalk drawing of a dinosaur that someone had once marked on the wall. Because the sketch was tucked behind some loose paneling, it clearly predated our parents’ tenancy, and therefore had for us the veracity of a Paleolithic cave painting. We believed that whoever had drawn it had actually seen a dinosaur nearby.

Not far from the dinosaur drawing was a hatch that allowed hose access to an oil furnace: we always thought that it was a crawl space running all the way beneath the house. Norman had conjured a vision—derived from some frightening phrases my parents had tossed his way to discourage him from exploring behind the hatch door—of a primeval underworld. He shared it with me in excruciating detail.

According to his mental map, the crawl space did not stop at the back wall of our home, but tunneled into a dune, and came out beneath the small interdunal swamp just beyond our yard. There, in the tunnel, he claimed, dinosaurs, crocodiles, and vampire bats still roamed in the dark. The picture on the basement wall verified either that someone had been down there once, and had escaped to record his or her sightings in chalk, or that, on rare occasions, these monsters would surface into the swamps and dunes surrounding us (pp. 137-138).

I remember at one of the first meetings I attended when planning Riverstone Park began over two years ago and one of the parents raised the concern about anthills forming under the rocks. At the time, I recall sharing this parent’s concern. Each spring, I am out in my garden with my box of Borax trying to eradicate the ants. I wonder if the children
would share our concerns? This next story illustrates both why I have such an aversion to ants and how a young child, my son in this case, might form a life-long fear of them.

One day, soon after we moved to Dallas, Stephen called me out to the front garden. He was pointing enthusiastically at a nest in the garage eves.

“Look, Mummy. Look!” He exclaimed with jubilation. There was a mother dove with several chicks. These birds seemed so familiar yet it was several moments before I realized they were doves. I had never seen a real dove before.

“I think they're doves Stephen” I whispered with a faint note of reverence in my voice.

We just stood there standing for several minutes while the mother plumed her chicks.

All of a sudden, I felt this strange sensation on my legs. Like a tingling sensation, then a sharp burn! I looked down. My legs were covered with hundreds of ants. They were crawling up my thighs. I started screaming and shaking them off with my hand. Then the burn was all over my arms. It must have been quite a sight for Stephen seeing me thrashing around waving my arms while the ants spread up my body. He was crying out. “Mummy, mummy!”

The pain was extraordinary. It was like being stung all over by bees. The next thing I felt was the cool rush of water over my body. The elderly gentleman from next door was hosing me down.

Fire ants! I had been standing on an anthill: three weeks of red welts, intensive itching, and several bottles of Benadryl. This was the first and most horrific, but not my last encounter with these little demons!

Much of our fear of insects stems from their sheer numbers. Hillman (1988) argues that it is this multiplicity that threatens humans, or more specifically our human individuality:

Of the species of the animal kingdom, by far most are insects: 250,000 kinds of beetles alone. Our language speaks of clouds of gnats, swarms of flies, plagues of locusts, heaps of ants...Imagining insects numerically threatens the individualized fantasy of a unique and unitary human being. Should bugs take over, we become mere bits of crawling, leaping, fluttering matter. Their very numbers indicate insignificance and worthlessness as individuals...The issue is more how we regard multiplicity than how we see insects, for once we imagine multiplicity through the single lens of a unitary human being, and conceive wholeness
as oneness. the insects become the Many against the One. That swarm, that heaping itself. shows unity and multiplicity at once (p. 59).

"They go in the wood and they go in the rocks and they crawl up my leg and ugh!" (Hillary, Grade Two, Interview One).

I was not always afraid of ants. When I was a little girl I remember playing house with my friends and making salad with grass and live ants. I have a vivid recollection of those ants wiggling in my mouth leaving a strange vinegary taste on my tongue as I swallowed them down. It has been my experience with young children that they usually do not fear bugs. They might cringe or giggle at the thought or sight of them, but they are not really afraid of them.

In a casual conversation with one of the teachers, Karen, she recalls how when she was little, she would make forests in the ground and in the dirt, and that the roots in the dirt would be her little animals. "I would never do that now; it would be too creepy." she cringes (Karen, Interview One, May 1999). She mentions how one of her students brought an ant farm to school one day. She muses with discomfort about how the girl had let the ants crawl out of the jar and up her bare arms and how this had evoked delight and disgust from her classmates. Jackie also refers to this incident in one of the interviews:

Jackie: Oh Mattie’s been making ant farms and bringing ant farms in.
Me: Right.
Jackie: She was doing that a couple of weeks ago. They were a big hit and the children would love to watch that... The children are just wild about bugs. They love bugs. And they’re very funny because they bring ants in here and they sketch them and study them and lose them in the classroom. And I’ve chosen to just let that go by in terms of I’m pretty sure that our caretaker would not want our kids to have ants crawling around in the classroom, but I thought, oh well! (laugh). They really, they love it! They love seeing bugs
even if they’re afraid of them, they’re still curious about them (Jackie. Interview One. May 1999).

Hillman (1988) explains that young children do not fear insects because, as was the case with the darkness in the caves, they have not fully detached the self from the world, or cosmos as he puts it:

This cosmic sense is severed early in our lives. A sign of this “Fall” is the relationship to the insect, for children often love bugs, play with them, eat them, capture nightcrawlers and beetles. keep anthills under glass, spiders in jars. Children often are not fully severed from the minute and concrete relation with the cosmos (p. 55).

**Cultural Attitudes**

When I talked to the teachers they commented that one’s relationship to insects and reptiles is culturally bound. Jackie relates an interesting story about an iguana she and her companions come across while traveling in Mexico:

...when I went to Mexico at Christmas time, I was on a walk with—everybody else except one person was Spanish speaking—Mexican people. And we saw a little iguana. And the men immediately, grown men, immediately ran over to try and catch it. And they formed a circle and they worked as a team. They didn’t say anything to each other. They knew just how to work as a team to catch this iguana. And the women, on mass. jumped to the other side of the path and screamed. And myself and this other Canadian stood there just enjoying the spectacle. And we just loved it. It was our favorite part of the walk in the jungle—to see these women jumping around...It was like, ‘Oh. my gosh!’ And it wasn’t a women/men thing in terms of innate, because we weren’t afraid of the iguana. It was totally cultural (Jackie. Interview One, May 1999).

As Jackie’s anecdote reveals, these cultural attitudes are often gender specific. Diane also comments on how girls and boys tend to react differently to bugs and reptiles:

I think there is a lot of cultural stuff to it and I think there might be bad experiences like stinging experiences or, uh. that on the whole girls are less able to cope with that sort of thing. As you say, it’s a social thing rather than—and the boys are suppose to be tough and they can handle it. puppy dog tails and all that garbage. But I’ve always been very careful when I’m teaching that with the girls, you know, I don’t let anything get in
the way. When we had a snake come in last Fall, I mean I'm not a big snake person myself, but I held her and I made sure that all the girls and the boys had a chance to hold her. And to show the girls that I wasn't afraid to do it. You know, and that there was nothing wrong with the snake and to say she's not going to bite. She's a perfectly harmless little snake. You know you can touch her skin; it's not going to hurt you. But a lot of them had this very girly, girly idea already, like "Ooo!" (Diane, Interview One, May 1999).

It is interesting that Diane uses the example of a snake. Recently, I read a fascinating essay by Edward O. Wilson (1984), entitled, *The Serpent*. In it, he relates several exhilarating encounters he has had with these powerful creatures and how they have been a pervasive force throughout human history, appearing in dreams, myths, religion, and so on. He explains that every continent with the exception of Antarctica has poisonous snakes, and that most primates have come to greet them with fear and loathing because they have been a major cause of sickness and death (Nabhan 1994, Wilson 1984):

Here, then, is the sequence by which the agents of nature appear to have been translated into the symbols of culture. For hundreds of thousands of years, time enough for the appropriate genetic changes to occur in the brain, poisonous snakes have been a significant source of injury and death to human beings. The response to the threat is not simply to avoid it, in the way that certain berries are recognized as poisonous through process of trial and error. People also display the mixture of apprehension and morbid fascination characterizing the non-human primates. They inherit a strong tendency to acquire the aversion during early childhood and to add to it progressively, like our closest phylogenetic relatives, the chimpanzees. The mind then adds a great deal more that is distinctly human. It feeds upon the emotions to enrich culture. The tendency of the serpent to appear suddenly in dreams, its sinuous form, and its power and mystery are the natural ingredients of myth and religion (Wilson, 1984, p. 97).

Snakes, lizards, bats, insects, or 'herps' as Nabhan (1984) refers to them, play an important role in the development of children. By coming in contact with these creatures, children become familiar with and gain a better sense of the 'other'. Nabhan writes that
there is 'lizardness' within each of us—our wild side. "People who flee for comfort zones in the presence of snakes and lizards," writes Nabhan (1984), "are often the same ones who respond to their own vestigial behaviors with fear, distrust or shame" (p. 154). It is better to know these lizards, snakes, bats, and scorpions and make peace with them, because if we don't, they will rear up when we least expect it. And as Lauren aptly puts it:

"And they can sting you" (Lauren, Grade One. Interview One).

As I end this chapter, I realize how massive the imagined park space has become as a concept. And this space is riddled with contradictions. Just consider what the walls, the caves, and the wildlife tell us about children, adults, and the experiences of space itself. In understanding this space, there is a need to understand tensions between what is safe and unsafe, in(side) and out(side). For instance, are the imagined walls there for the children’s protection? To keep them safe? Or, are they there to keep something out? Danger? Do the children feel so controlled and confined that they only know how to exist within constricted boundaries? Or, are they marking off a space in which they are ‘free’ to say "I am"? Reading Heidegger (1977) has taught me that ‘space’ is that which exists within a boundary and that human beings, like many other living creatures, ‘dwell’ or exist on earth to protect and safeguard space. Therefore, in keeping with Heidegger’s notion of space, it is very human for the children to want to mark the space and enclose the park with walls. However, I also discussed with the teachers and have described in these chapters how today’s children are growing up in very adult controlled environments, both indoors and outdoors. The children’s desire for the park to be enclosed by walls may be a reflection of the restrictions and constraints being imposed on
them in other aspects of their everyday lives. In other words, to live within tight boundaries is all the children know. Another suggestion is that these imagined walls and doors provide a boundary between the real world and an imaginary world. Chukovsky (1968) and Bettelheim (1977) write about the importance of fantasy and imaginary play in the creation of a child’s self-identity. The park provides a safe and creative opportunity for the children to temporarily separate themselves from an adult world and work out who they are. Moreover, I have learned that imaginary play worlds are crucial to a young child’s intellectual and emotional development because they help children to sort out the difference between reality and fantasy, and making this distinction is essential to a child achieving maturity and ultimately adulthood.

The cave-like structures that appeared in the children’s models of Riverstone Park were very important to them. Caves are a place of refuge, security, tranquility, but they also represent darkness, the unknown, fear, the possibility for transformation. I learn in my conversations with the children that caves are a place where they could be alone and rest. This desire for solitude and tranquility concerns me deeply given that many of today’s children are being raised from infancy in very public spheres, first in day cares, then in a public school system. Reading Langeveld (1983) has taught me how critical it is for young children to experience ‘aloneness’ in peaceful environments. The children’s overwhelming desire for caves makes me believe that they know at some instinctive level what is necessary for them to thrive as human beings.

I also write about how the park may be a safe habitat for wildlife, but given the wildlife, is it a safe place for the children? Is it possible for humans and wildlife to co-exist peacefully? As I explore these questions, I learn that experiencing wildlife, like
being in a cave, provides an opportunity for the children to form self-identity. Touching, collecting, experimenting with, and even squishing, bugs and snakes teaches children about ‘otherness’. And only by experiencing the ‘other’ will they gain an understanding of themselves and what it means to share this earth with all living creatures.

These are only some of the questions and issues I have attempted to uncover and respond to. If the reader senses a certain amount of ambiguity at the end of this discussion, it is because the park space exists as everything my participants and I have said about it, but it also exists as everything that has been left ‘unsaid’ by others who have thought about and worked on the planning of the park. The meaning of this park, like life itself, is always incomplete:

Over the course of one’s life, experiences are shuffled and reshuffled as the emergent whole emerges ever wider. I cannot exhaust this experience through saying or grasping, not simply because the whole is too large, but also because the whole is always yet-to-be given (Jardine, 1994, xxi).

Probably, the most important personal discovery I have made thus far, (and I can only speak for myself because it seems to me the teachers already knew this), is that creative play spaces, caves, and wildlife provide the opportunity for children to explore their self identities and inner selves. This is an important journey for the children to undertake, but a journey they must return from— the journey must come full circle.

In the first part of this thesis, my participants have imagined what the park will be like and what that means. It is fitting then that this discussion has focused much on imaginary worlds and the child’s inner self. In the second part of this thesis, Riverstone Park will be constructed and really exist in the world. I, therefore, will now turn the focus of this conversation to the child’s experience of community— his outer world.
CHAPTER THREE
SPROUTING

The time between the end of infancy and the onset of adolescence is a time of potency when children are 'in love with the universe and poised halfway between inner and outer worlds.' Here lie, 'latent power and purpose, the seeds of the writer's art, the painter's vision, the explorer's passion.'

*Edith Cobb, in The Geography of Childhood.*

The near landscape is valuable and lovable because of its nearness, not something to be disregarded and shrugged off: it is where children are reared and what they take away in their minds to their long future. What ground could be more hallowed?

*Frank Fraser Darling, in Childhood's Domain.*

There was much getting ready, bustle, and activity in the days that led up to the construction of Riverstone Park. I had arranged to be in the school for the entire month of May 1999, so that I would be there a few days before and a few weeks after the construction of Phase I of the park. I divided my time between my daughter's classroom in the morning and my son's in the afternoon. It is important to emphasize that first and foremost I was perceived by the children as Sarah's or Stephen's Mum and was generally addressed as such. And although I had a number of casual conversations and interviews with the children about Riverstone Park, much of my time in the classroom was devoted to doing what any parent does when they volunteer—helping the children with their reading, class projects, accompanying them on walks, or in this case, accompanying the children to swimming lessons each afternoon for two weeks. These

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50 Stephen is the pseudonym for my son.
outings were actually a blessing in disguise because they gave me the opportunity to talk with children outdoors about the outdoors while hiking up the bluffs near the school to the pool each day. Furthermore, while the children were in their lessons the teachers and other parent volunteers had the time to sit down and talk with me about the park and my inquiry. If there is one thing I learned that month is that time is a valuable commodity, and as a researcher I had to make every attempt to fit my schedule into the teacher's and children's schedules and not the other way around.

A couple days before construction of the park, the children in my daughter's kindergarten class and the children from the adjoining grade 1-3 class started making pictures for a banner to thank the organizations that contributed things such as money, time, and resources to the park project. The children drew pictures of their ideas of Riverstone Park. The teachers then painted vegetable oil onto these pictures making them translucent. The pictures were cut up and made into panels giving the effect of stain-glass. It became my job to make a frame for these panels. Thus, I spent much of the next two days in the hallway cutting and pasting with children either coming by to keep me company or to make additions to the banner. In the meanwhile, the dump trucks began arriving with large boulders and loads of soil. Whenever I peeked into the classroom, I saw children with their shoulders hunched up and noses pressed against the windows gazing out at the building site, excitedly chattering about the bulldozers. Their enthusiasm was infectious and before long the school was a buzz with excitement, something momentous was about to occur in this school and everybody felt it. When I left that Friday afternoon, I felt a sense of calm, not unlike the sense one experiences
when settling into bed on Christmas Eve. After months, even years of planning, everything was in position—the rocks, the soil—silently awaiting the next morning.

Everything went as planned on building day. The construction went without a hitch. The weather was perfect. The turnout of participants was outstanding. For once, success was sure to be inevitable. The teachers and staff arrived early for a potluck breakfast. During this time plants and trees were delivered and tagged. That day, volunteers from the entire community came to help. There were teachers and their families, parents and children, neighbors, volunteers from corporations, and everyone came ready to dig! All morning there was digging, planting, mulch moving, fertilizing and watering. By the early afternoon, what had been a flat schoolyard only the day before was now completely transformed into a little natural park area. The morning’s efforts were celebrated with a BBQ lunch.

I spent most the morning digging a hole for one of the trees. Indeed, the tree described in the introduction to this thesis. I assisted Kevin (Grade One) and Lizzie’s (Grade One) Dad in this task. For me, this was the most noticeable aspect of this building experience—that children were working peacefully side by side with adults and not necessarily with their own parents.

The hole we were digging got so deep that Kevin climbed in it to dig. When we had dug a hole as deep as his shoulders, I left and began digging holes for shrubs. It is difficult to describe what it was like to be there except to say that it was not noisy and there was not any confusion about who was to do what. Near 100 people arrived that morning. They were assigned a task. And they went to work doing it. To say that the day went smoothly, would simply, I believe, be an understatement. It really was quite
remarkable. Needless to say, the teachers shared similar sentiments about their own experiences of that day. In the following excerpt, Diane refers to the cooperative spirit and sense of community that arose from this event:

Diane: It was really really exciting—remember I told you it was a little like pregnancy. You know, where'd we'd been planning and planning and we'd had that couple of false labors and the disappointment and the annoyance and the hassle of having to put it all on the back burner and carry on again and jump through more hoops. Which is what we were talking about with the city and their regulations. So the day that it actually happened, it was almost surreal because we'd been building up to it, almost like Christmas, building up, building up, and building up, and all of a sudden, there it was. And it was just as exciting, I think, in the actual happening as it was looking forward to it. I found that the organization and sense of community that arose from that—that included members of the community that were here, members of the school community who were not from this immediate school district, people from Telus who came you know, spouses and significant others—that all kind of pitched in and did things. I mean my own children came down and helped which was really fun and they had a good time doing it too. So, it was just exciting and it was so wonderful to see how it came together kind of “poof” and there it was, you know. I loved it.

Me: Was there anything else that struck you?
Diane: Um. I think it was the idea particularly. I don’t. I felt so much a part of kind of almost like a machine. You know, I was just one little cog in it, but the way it just all seemed to move like a well oiled machine when we were putting it together. And nobody fought. I mean there weren't any fights. There was no complaining. It was just all positive energy in it. And I think that was what struck me about it, was that it was so positive, especially with all the nattering and stuff that's been going on in the classroom... Yeah, and I think it struck me because I've had such a struggle with getting cooperation in the classroom. But to see an age range from little wee to middle age and a little older all coming together and all working and everybody pitching together and as I say not complaining, not whining, not tattling, not asking for things that cannot be delivered, it was just so happy and it was so positive. It was just a real lift for me (Diane, Interview Two, June 1999).
Jackie, significantly, also emphasizes the importance of the child-adult dimension of this event:

I arrived at about quarter to eleven, so it was well underway. And I was just delighted. I felt actually thrilled to see that all of everything was in place and all of the activity. And the thing that was most amazing to me, looking at it from outside of the school field when I was approaching, was it was like an ant farm or like a bee hive in terms of everybody was busy and everybody was moving, but they were moving so cooperatively. And working in a kindergarten as a kindergarten teacher, that doesn’t happen very often in a day. There is usually commotion which is part of the learning of the children, so it’s not something that I want to eliminate, but it is something that I experience daily—the conflict that’s going on and the kids resolving conflict all the time. So to come to the school and see people working so cooperatively and so calmly and to see the children working so calmly and to see—and this is just reflecting now how differently the children interacted with one another and with other people when there were so many more adults. That was very telling to me—that it was much more peaceful. There was a sense of togetherness and the common cause was so clear and it must have been so clear to everybody...It was delightful to see how, particularly I’m thinking of how the adults treated the children, so that if a child was doing something that wasn’t necessarily productive to the end result of the park, it didn’t seem to upset any of the adults. They just gave the child the time, so if there was a child who had a little watering can and just wanted to water around in a circle, nobody worried about that...And children would have their parents there, but not be working necessarily with their parents, they’d be working with another adult. And some of the adults—they weren’t parents of the children! It truly was a community endeavor and it was so healthy, so peaceful, and yet so much work got done in such a short time. Nobody yelling and nobody barking orders and nobody making kids tow the line (Jackie, Interview Two, June 1999).

The two excerpts highlight the contrast between the serenity of children and adults working together outdoors with the day to day commotion encountered in the classroom.

In reading these responses, one cannot help but wonder if placing children in traditional classroom settings where they are isolated from the greater community is really beneficial
to their learning? The urgency of this question is perhaps best expressed in the following comment as I continue my interview with Jackie:

And now I’m thinking, my gosh, why do we have a school system like we have at all? If this is what is possible, if this is the kind of learning that can go on? If this is the kind of cooperation there could be? If our school system really is driven by the demands of the parents—if it really is for the children. then let’s use this as an example of how it could be! (Jackie. Interview Two, June 1999).

In Hannah Arendt’s (1961) essay, “The Crisis in Education”, she sets out to show how the educational system in America where children are removed from an adult community and placed in traditional classroom settings is at best problematical, at worst, detrimental to the well-being of children and by extension society as a whole. This is certainly a contestable suggestion by Arendt, who wrote this essay forty years ago. However, given that there are now more than ten schoolyard naturalization projects underway in this city. I feel as a researcher it is an issue I must take up. One of the interesting things about doing this kind of research is that one often begins very localized. as I have with this schoolyard park, but over the course of the inquiry one inevitably ends up in a more universal sphere. Thus, again I invoke the words of Gadamer (1989).

“And every word causes the whole of language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole-world view that underlies it to appear” (p. 458). And as the world appears, some of its more pressing questions appear with it. Is there, indeed, an educational crisis in North America?

When Arendt (1961) wrote “The Crisis in Education”, she was addressing a social situation that she believed was imminent in America in the 1960s. Her work is relevant to educators because the crisis she outlines and responds to is arguably even more clearly visible today. Indeed, if there is not a crisis in today’s educational system, there certainly
has been one impending in the latter half of the twentieth century. For instance, over the past few decades, there has been continuous growing concern about literacy and the general decline of scholastic standards in schools across North America. Perhaps, evidence of this concern is located in my own province where the government has re-instituted mandatory exams which commence in grade three. There also seems to be a growing awareness and concern about juvenile crime and violence in today’s schools. Perhaps, the most recent and horrific example of juvenile violence is the massacre of High School students in Columbine, Colorado. But those of us living in Canada know all too well that such violence is not restricted to those “American” schools. only months after this shooting we experienced a copycat shooting at a rural high school in Alberta.

Thus, for the sake of this inquiry, I will make the assumption that there are ever pressing ‘big’ issues in education. Arendt (1961) writes of the origins of the educational crisis and argues that it is particularly acute in America where the ‘advanced’ political principle of equality has erased “as far as possible the difference between young and old, between the gifted and ungifted, finally between children and adults, particularly between pupils and teachers” (p. 180). Arendt outlines three basic assumptions that are the cause, as she sees it, of the crisis. Here I am concerned with the first,51 “That there exist a child’s world and a society formed among children that are autonomous and must insofar

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51 Arendt’s second assumption is that the crisis in education has to do with teaching. She explains that a teacher’s training is in teaching, not in the mastery of any particular subject. The problem, writes Arendt (1961), is that since “the teacher does not need to know his own subject, it not infrequently happens that he is just one hour ahead of his class in knowledge” (p. 182). Her third assumption has to do with learning. She rejects the method of learning through doing or playing, for example, learning a language by speaking rather than by studying grammar and syntax. Although it is possible to teach and learn a language this way, she believes this procedure “consciously attempts to keep the older child as far as possible at the infant level” (p. 183). In this way, the child is also barred from an adult world. Although Arendt’s final assumption is interesting, it goes completely counter to what I discover in the course of this inquiry.
as possible be left to them to govern” (p. 181). She explains that adults are only there to help with this governance, when she writes, “The authority that tells the individual child what to do and what not to do rest with the child group itself” (p. 181). The result of such a world, notes Arendt (1961), is that “the real and normal relations between children and adults, arising from the fact that people of all ages are always simultaneously together in the world, are thus broken off” (181). To make matters worse, Arendt (1961) argues, children are not only banished from the adult world they are left to their own devices and faced with a more severe and “tyrannical authority”, the child majority:

Therefore by being emancipated from the authority of adults the child has not been freed but has been subjected to a much more tyrannical authority, the tyranny of the majority. In any case the result is that the children have been so to speak banished from the world of grown-ups. They are either thrown back upon themselves or handed over to the tyranny of their own group. against which, because of its numerical superiority, they cannot rebel. with which, because they are children. they cannot reason. and out of which they cannot flee to any other world because the world of adults is barred to them (p.182).

Arendt’s (1961) main supposition is that “The essence of education is natality, the fact that human beings are born into the world” (p. 174). She believes that when two parents give birth to a child. they give birth into a world and, therefore, are responsible for both the child and the world that the child is born into. The child must be protected from the world, but the world, too, “needs protection to keep it from being overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the new that bursts upon it with each new generation” (Arendt, 1961, p. 186).

In a very convincing passage Arendt outlines a basic problem with our modern educational system. one I have already identified and written of in the first part of this thesis. and that is, children need privacy in order to develop into mature responsible
adults. The classroom setting, with one adult and thirty or more students, quite simply, does not provide the necessary conditions for this essential development:

Because the child must be protected against the world, his traditional place is in the family, whose adult members daily return back from the outside world and withdraw in to the security of private life within four walls. These four walls, within which people's private family life is lived, constitute a shield against the world and specifically against the public aspect of the world. They enclose a secure place, without which no living thing can thrive. This holds good not only for the life of childhood but for human life in general. Wherever the latter is consistently exposed to the world without the protection of privacy and security its vital quality is destroyed. (As Arendt continues, I am harked back to comments I made earlier in this thesis about caves). Everything that lives, not vegetative life alone, emerges from darkness and, however strong its natural tendency to thrust itself into the light, it nevertheless needs the security of darkness to grow at all (Italics mine). This may indeed be the reason that children of famous parents so often turn out badly. Fame penetrates the four walls, invades their private space, bringing with it, especially in present day conditions, the merciless glare of the public realm, which floods everything in the private lives of those concerned, so that the children no longer have a place of security where they can grow. But exactly the same destruction of the real living space occurs wherever the attempt is made to turn the children themselves into a kind of world. Among these peer groups then arises public life of a sort and, quite apart from the fact that it is not a real one and that the whole attempt is a sort of fraud, the damaging fact remains that children—that is, human beings in process of becoming but not yet complete—are thereby forced to expose themselves to the light of a public existence. That modern education, insofar as it attempts to establish a world of children, destroys the necessary conditions for vital development and growth seems obvious (Arendt, 1961, p. 187).

I have to say there is a deep irony in Arendt's view that modern education hinders the development and growth of children because as I will show later with the assistance of several historians, notably Phillipe Aries (1962), Centuries of Childhood, that indeed it is the same educational system that played a crucial role in creating and sustaining our contemporary understanding of childhood in the first place.
It seems to me that the current crisis in education has less to do with education (and the same can be said of the current crisis in childhood), and more to do with our conceptions of what is private and what is public. And again, I am completely baffled by the irony of the situation with Riverstone Park. Community School has an outdoor open-space that gives the children access to privacy, while the indoor closed-space puts children under the scrutiny of the public eye. I am absolutely convinced of this given some of the remarks the teachers have made. For example, Diane explains that the classroom is too small and crowded for the children to concentrate while they are writing, and that the park will give them some privacy:

...They can be away from each other and they can talk to themselves and write what they want to write about without interfering or interrupting somebody else around them. I think that’s going to be the biggest thing for me. getting them away from each other and giving them some space and some time to think alone (Diane. Interview One, May 1999).

And Jackie comments on how some children feel more at ease in the park environment:

...Some of the children who are at ill ease in the classroom are not ill at ease in that environment. that was really neat to see—how cooperative and calm and content and involved in the community that some of the children who are in the classroom either isolate themselves so that they are not part of the commotion in the classroom or themselves cause commotion in the classroom—how much more at ease they were in that environment. And I don’t think it was just because it was outside I think it was because of the atmosphere (Jackie, Interview Two, June 1999).

I will discuss later how the advancement of technology, specifically television, is without a doubt the single most important cause in the breakdown between the public and private worlds of children. But interestingly, Arendt points to another cause. In the twentieth century, different classes of people who had been suppressed the century before, such as workers and women, brought their issues to the public light, and as a
result. were emancipated. The last affected by this process of emancipation, argues Arendt (1961), were the children:

The very thing that had meant a true liberation for the workers and the women—because they were not only women but persons as well, who therefore had a claim on the public world, that is, a right to see and be seen in it, to speak and be heard—was abandonment and betrayal in the case of the children. who are still at the stage where the simple fact of life and growth outweighs the factor of personality. The more completely modern society discards the distinction between what is private and what is public, between what can thrive only in concealment and what needs to be shown to all in the full light of the public world. the more, that is. it introduces between the private and the public a social sphere in which the private is made public and vice versa. the harder it makes things for its children, who by nature require the security of concealment in order to mature undisturbed (p. 188).

In a lengthy discussion on authority. Arendt (1961) concludes that children cannot throw off educational authority as the adults have already discarded it. There is only one authority in the present system, the moral majority of the other children. In the end. she writes that it is high time adults assume responsibility for the world into which they have brought children:

What concerns us all and cannot therefore be turned over to the special science of pedagogy is the relation between grown-ups and children in general or, putting it in even more general and exact terms, our attitude toward the fact of natality: the fact that we have all come into the world by being born and that this world is constantly renewed by its birth. Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. And education. too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices. nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world (Arendt. 1961. p. 196).
What better metaphor for the renewal of a common world than schoolyard naturalization project? It does provide, as I am showing, the necessary conditions for children to experience a private world where they can develop an inner sense of self. But at the same time, such a space invites children back into the world, a world shared by adults and children. Indeed, the connection between the nurturing of children and the renewal of this earth does not go unnoticed by the teachers:

...And the nurture part is the most important thing I think because we nurture the learning in our children and we nurture the plants. so there's kind of a metaphor there of the growth. the new growth and the learning and the new growth of the plants and how it feeds on itself. The plants grow and new shoots go out in new directions and the same thing happens in the classroom. You start off with one little kernel of truth and all of a sudden the shoots start to grow and all these other connections are made...The natural space nurtures creativity and it nurtures imagination and it fosters all those things the connections we try to make with the earth and with us as part of the earth and part of the world and where we fit in the world and if we're able to be in that space that the nurturing of the plants also nurtures us, in both the sense of the connection that we have with the world and with what we can do with our minds, with the imagination that it sparks (Diane, Interview Two, June 1999).

One could interpret Arendt's comments as impetus for removing children from school to instruct them at home. However, I think this would be a gross misinterpretation because to isolate a child in the home is also to remove him or her from the world. Certainly, one of the reasons I send my children to school is so that they will become socialized and develop a sense of community. But what is in question here is the nature of the community children are experiencing. Is it an artificial community, a 'fraud', as Arendt suggests? When I spoke to Jackie, she emphasized the importance of community, but warned that all its components must be there in order to avoid it becoming a 'false unit':
...Your children don’t need to come to school to learn anything from me. You are perfectly capable and they are perfectly capable to learn all that at home. The only reason for coming to school is to learn community, which I think is valid. But I don’t think it has to be in school...And it’s important to me that it be a happy place to come to. And part of what makes it happy for me is if there’s just the right number of children and adults and right number of kids of different ages, so that we can really be a community. Rather than a false unit. Like a wolf pack. We’ve lost our wolf pack west of Calgary here because the one breeding female died. That’s how important it is to have all the components. And that’s why having a multi-aged classroom is so important (Jackie. Interview Two. June 1999).

So, what we are seeing here is not a rejection of school per se or even the idea of a classroom. What we are seeing is the recognition that our learning communities are undergoing a transformation. The park is a response to this. When I asked Michelle what these schoolyard naturalizations projects were a response to, she said they are “A wake up call!” She explains:

Well, I think it could be a shift in paradigms, too. I mean for so long we’ve been thinking that—especially when you look inside the classroom and what a classroom should look like. For so long it’s been considered cookie cutter art and that classrooms should be arranged in rows and things like that with the desks. But maybe outside it’s kind of a wake up call. Well, maybe we never really thought outside the box and that there is a different possibility. So, maybe it is kind of a shift in thinking, you know. that people are starting to consider new ideas, and even though it may be considered more work or need more planning or the board changing their views on things, maybe this is better for our children (Michelle. Interview Two, November 1999).

The park offers a different possibility, a chance for undertaking something new, something unforeseen by most adults. The park provides a location for these new possibilities to be realized and experienced. It provides a location for a new learning community to be established.
BUILDING A PARK; BUILDING A COMMUNITY

I have not yet addressed the children’s responses to the experience of building the park. Simply, this is because the children either gave very brief descriptions of the day’s activities or they did not describe their experiences at all. In fact, the second set of interviews with the children was the most difficult. In the first interviews, before the park was built, the children gave rich descriptions of what they thought the park would look like, but once it was there, their ability to talk about it almost disappeared, and I found myself having to coax responses out of them. I will take this disappearance of voice up in the next section, but what I began to notice was that it was easier for the children to talk about the future, the unseen, and more difficult for them to talk about the park as they were experiencing it, the seen: the present.

The children’s descriptions of building the park, then, are short and simple. I had to ask very specific questions to elicit responses from the children. When I asked a general question, for example, “What was it like that day?” the children described the weather. “Um hot.” “Cold—cold hot, warm, freezing ice” (Stephen and Hillary, Grade Two. Interview Two). So, I had to change my strategy and asked questions like. “What did you do there?” “What were other people doing there?” and “What was your favorite part of the day?” These were some of their responses:

Me: What did you do when you first got there?
Lizzie: I was helping my Mom rake some of the dirt.
Me: Were there a lot of people there?
Lizzie: Hm Hm.
Me: What were some of the other people doing?
Lizzie: Well, I know my Dad was digging a huge hole (Grade One, Interview One, May 1999).
I did, let’s—I put some of that white stuff, fertilizer was it? With the blue balls. I did fertilizer. I planted a big tree and we made a mud pie thingy. People put their foot in it. “Oh, like I can’t get it out!” And I pushed some mulch. I think that’s about it (Stephen, Grade Two, Interview Two).

Me: What was your favorite part of the day?
Dylan: And digging mulch (Grade Two, Interview Two).
Christina: My favorite part was planting. It was two things. I didn’t do mulch (speaking to Dylan). I helped my Mom plant (Grade One, Interview One, May 1999).

(Mark and Ava, Grade One and Shannon, Grade Two, Interview Two. Role-playing a televised Newscast)
Shannon: Well. Mark. how about if I tell some of the park. Well. on Saturday um some people came and helped with Riverstone Park.
Mark: Which were 92 people.
Me: Wow that’s a lot of people.
Shannon: It was so fun.
Mark: It was really fun. We got lunch and we had ice tea and we had hotdogs.
Shannon: Well. I didn’t get to eat the hotdogs. of course. because I had to go to my Russian test.

(A little later same conversation)
Shannon: Well. first I was picking the big sticks. but then I decided to dig with Kevin with a shovel and he did some other things. so um I helped Lizzie’s Dad and it was pretty fun. Um. well Ava she watered some plants, and um of course we had a lot of fun. Um, but I didn’t get any of the hotdogs because I had to go to my Russian test—I say that once more.

Me: You were here the day they built the park. What did you do?
Rachael: It was pretty fun. Well, I sort of, I had a wheelbarrow of mulch and I tipped it over by accident (pause).
Me: Can you tell me more about that day. Were there lots of people?
Rachael: Yeah, it was pretty much everyone in the school there.
Me: And what were some of the things the other people were doing?
Rachael: Some of them were watering the plants and digging holes to put them in and carrying piles of mulch over in wheelbarrows and dumping them here.
Me: What was your favorite part of that day?
Rachael: The lunch (Grade Two, Interview One, May 1999).

I identify two things that are important to the children from their responses. First, the presence of parents, and second, the 'meal'. Jackie, as I mentioned earlier, explains that in order to have an authentic community, you need to have the necessary components. Clearly, in this case, the lunch was one such component. The presence of adults another. These components are not only necessary in order to have an authentic community they are essential to building an authentic community.

I should now like to return momentarily to a topic introduced earlier in this thesis relating to Heidegger's (1977) notions of building and dwelling. If the reader recalls, Heidegger claims that people don't actually build in order to dwell, instead our building is already our dwelling. Space is the necessary condition for this building and dwelling to occur. However, space doesn't exist as just space: it exists as a locale. Heidegger (1977) suggests that only something "that is itself a locale can make space for a site" (p. 355). I shall use Heidegger's example of a bridge to explain his definition of locale. He states that bridges 'initiate' in many ways. They gather the landscape around them. For example:

The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge expressly causes them to lie across from each other. One side is set off against the other by a bridge. Nor do the banks stretch along the stream as indifferent border strips of dry land. With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighborhood (Heidegger, 1977, p. 354).

It is the bridge that initiates, opening up the possibility of a locale thereby making space for a site. In Heidegger's (1977) words:
Before the bridge stands, there are of course many spots along the stream that can be occupied by something. One of them proves to be a locale, and does so because of the bridge. Thus the bridge does not first come to a locale to stand in it; rather a locale comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge. The bridge is a thing; it gathers the fourfold (earth, sky, divinities, and mortals), but in such a way that it allows for a site for the fourfold. By this site are determined the places and paths by which a space is provided for (p. 356).

Now let me apply my understanding of Heidegger's notion of space to the park. When planning for the park started, one of the goals was to bring the school community together. But, according to Heidegger's reasoning, it is not simply first there is a community and then there is a park—it is the park, as a locale, which gathers the community around it, realizing the community in such a way that without the park it would not be. This realization came to me one day shortly after the park was built. I received a telephone call from one of the parents on the school's Parent Council. She had been asked to prepare a speech for the opening ceremonies of Riverstone Park. We talked for some time about the building day and the strong sense of community we had experienced that day. It was during this conversation that I began to understand the implications of what Heidegger meant. For example, it was not as if first the planning committee called the zoo and said let us plan a schoolyard naturalization project. First, there had to be a locale—the possibility of a site—a site which gathered people unto it. First, teachers and children, then parents, then the zoo staff and other community members, and even myself as a researcher. Eventually, the community involves even the birds and the insects. As Marnie\textsuperscript{52} and I spoke on the phone, it became clearer to both of us that this was not simply a community coming together to build a park; this park made

\textsuperscript{52} Marnie Schaetti, the parent who was to speak at the opening of the park, specifically requested that I use her \textit{real} name.
a community possible. This is particularly significant given that more than seventy percent of the students who attend this school do not live in close proximity to the school. The teachers and students and parents needed to build this park in order to become a community. a real community. I shall produce Marnie’s speech here for several reasons. First because she is so eloquent in her interpretation of the ideas shared in our conversation. Second, the speech serves as a concrete example of how a community is built in a Heidegerrian sense. Third, it is my understanding from the zoo staff that this particular speech has become an ‘inspiration’ (a benchmark) to other schools who are now undertaking similar projects of their own.

Speech for the opening of Riverstone Park
by Marnie Schaetti, June 4, 1999

My son and I arrived late on the Riverstone Park workday.

And having arrived to Calgary only at the beginning of the school year, we arrived late in the planning process that led to Riverstone Park.

And having arrived in Calgary from a small town where there was one school to go to and everyone went.
I didn’t know I had a choice about where my son went to school.
So when we moved into this neighborhood, we came to this school.
(Aren’t we lucky?!) And having arrived to this neighborhood, new to Calgary, this school turned the neighborhood into a community.
My son has friends living near by.
When I walk home from taking him to school.
I can greet other parents and children by name.
I know who they are and they know me.

And on that day, when my son and I arrived that half hour late, with rakes and spades and gardening gloves

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53 Marnie Schaetti’s speech is reproduced as it appears in the text given to me.
and rounded the corner of the school
and saw Riverstone Park in the making, when we saw the dance of planting and watering
and park-in-the-making, I saw that the community of this school is not just geographical,
an accident of neighborhood.

On that day. I saw and felt and learned that community also means everyone cooperating
everyone working according to ability
everyone's contribution being honored.

I saw and felt and learned that community means
people from all over
people of all ages
working together to make a dream come true.

You know those old-fashioned barn-raisings?
Where what would take a farm family weeks and weeks
is done in a single day by the whole community?
Well, after the day we made Riverstone Park a reality
I learned that people don't raise barns because they are a community
People are a community because they raise barns.

And on that day in early May.
when we built Riverstone Park.
when we put years of planning into action.
we also built a community.

And now this school.
this community of learners and teachers
of parents and grandparents and friends of hand-bell ringers and West African drummers
of experimenters and problem solvers
of writers and readers
of people who live near and people who live far,
this community is made stronger by this park.

This park.
very real and very magical.
is ours.

I cannot understate the importance of the fact that when the children, the teachers,
the parents and the volunteers came together to build the park they built a community.
Indeed, it may be the single most important thing the school gains from this experience. And as Phase II of Riverstone Park begins in Spring 2000, this new community will continue to be strengthened.

And while the teachers and I talk about the children taking ownership of the park, as Marnie put it, this park "is ours", she and the others perhaps forget that they belong to it, too. The park is part of who the participant builders are, but they are also a part of it. The park invites children and adults alike to participate in a shared world. All are part of that world. Perhaps this is why it is so difficult for the children to talk about the park now that it is there. And, why it is impossible for the children to speak about the park as if it were something separate from themselves.

As I end this section, I cannot help but feel the pull between the two worlds of the child, the private and public. Indeed, this is a troublesome place to be. On the one hand, I am saying that children need privacy in order to reach maturity and on the other, that they need the experience of community. The tension I am describing between the child's private individual self and his public communal self was identified long ago by educational philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau (1956, original publication 1762) distinguishes these two selves as the 'natural man', a man in himself, and the man who lives in some society, the citizen of some state (W. Boyd in. Rousseau, 1956, p. 9). In his famous work, Emile, Rousseau (1956) claims that the two selves are incompatible and that both suffer at the expense of the other:

If we have to combat either nature or society, we must choose between making a man or making a citizen. We cannot make both. There is an inevitable conflict of aims, from which come two opposing forms of education: the communal and the public, the other individual and domestic...We are drawn in different directions by nature and by man, and
take a midway path that leads us nowhere. In this state of confusion we go through life and end up with our contradictions unsolved, never having been any good to ourselves or to other people (pp. 13-14).

The conflict presented in this way seems hopeless. But it needn’t be thought of as an either-or situation. In fact, it must not because such thought leads to idealistic extremes. “Every man an end to himself: the state as the supreme social end” (W. Boyd in. Rousseau, 1956, p. 197). In terms of modern education, the solution, I believe, is not to isolate the child from society (i.e. Rousseau’s experiment with Emile, a version of home-schooling) nor is it to abandon him or her to a world without adults (present day school in America according to Hannah Arendt). I think the answer has something to do with how we dwell, and how we live with children in the world. By this I mean, of course, how we build our lives with children. Perhaps, as Jackie suggests, the park can be a model of how things could be for one community. As educators and parents, we must start thinking of school as “that from which something begins its essential unfolding” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 356). “Usually we take production to be an activity whose performance has a result, the finished structure, as its consequence,” writes Heidegger (1977). “It is possible to conceive of making in that way; we thereby grasp something that is correct, and yet never touch its essence, which is a producing that brings something forth” (p. 361). Is this not what education should be striving for?54

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54 Sadly, I return from my lunch break with the news that a six year old boy from Michigan has shot and killed a six year old girl in his class. This report is followed with the news that a teacher in Prince George, British Columbia has been suspended for five days after duck-taping the head of one of her students to his desk. Just how many “Wake up calls,” as Michelle puts it, do we need!
THE OPENING CEREMONY

Let me continue with Diane's metaphor. If the construction of Riverstone Park was its birth, then the opening ceremony was its christening. This was a very formal, but pleasant event. In attendance were teachers, children, delegates from the zoo and the school board, and corporate sponsors. A number of speeches were made by adults intermingled with musical performances by the children. The ceremony was held outdoors with the park as a backdrop. Prior to the ceremony each of the children had written their names on a piece of mulch, thus the event concluded with a ceremonial mulch drop. This involved all the children gracefully marching single file through the park and placing their piece of mulch in a place they had designated as their own.

The response to this celebration was varied. In a casual conversation with one teacher, Karen, she expressed her dissatisfaction with the political nature of the celebration. For myself, it seemed official, and where I had felt very connected to the building of the park and the celebration lunch afterwards, I felt somehow disconnected and removed from this event. But, like the other parents and guests and many of the children, I was sitting in the audience where I found myself being easily distracted by Sarah who was climbing up and down on the chair next to me. Afterwards, I wondered what the children thought about it. The next day I was able to pin down two of my participants, Ava and Christina, playing on the swings. When I asked them what they thought of the celebration, they said it was good and that they had enjoyed it. I asked them what they liked about it and they said the music. Then I asked them about the speeches, what they thought of those. Both of them said that they did not know who some of those people were or what they were talking about. The general mood and
atmosphere of this ceremony is perhaps best expressed in a conversation I had with Diane (Interview Two. June 1999. I should just note that Diane leads the hand-bell choir that performed at this ceremony. This choir consists of children from grades 4-6, none of my participants):

Me: Now what about the celebration? How would you describe that, sort of in relation to the actual building day?

Diane: I thought it was very well done. I really did. I thought that the kids were excited about it. They were pleased that they were able to present things in the celebration of the opening of the park. The kids who were in the audience did a really good job, but they were all engaged. There were a couple of them that were kind of fidgety, but for the most part they were engaged. They listened to the speakers. I think that the enthusiasm of the people who have been involved in building this park—I don’t think the children can help but be enthusiastic about it. They’re kind of like “If Miss Lane is excited about it, then this is a pretty exciting.” Or if Miss Ritter is excited or Joan is going to have us do the drums, then it must be and Mrs. Tyler’s got the bell’s ringing, this must really be a fun thing—and I think it was almost a rite of passage for them. Okay. we built the park and now, you know, we can stand back and say “Wow, we did this and look at this and we carry on from here.” I think that is the sense that I got, at least that I—the older kids anyway. I’m not sure about the younger ones. I think they realized that it was a special occasion and we talked in here about it being a special occasion and that it was solemn. It wasn’t unhappy. it was just solemn and it was important because it marked the official beginning of something that was new and exciting and it was going to grow and be a part of the community.

Me: Like a Christening.

Diane: Yeah, it was like a Christening—exactly, yeah.

Me: Yeah, just like what you are saying—it’s like going to church.

Diane: Yeah, it is, it is.

Me: I just thought of it that way.

Diane: Sure, that’s exactly true—that’s what it’s like.

Me: It’s true—it’s certainly the quietest I ever saw them.

Diane: Oh, I know. It was almost like church for them I think—that they sat there and they paid attention and they...
Me: And the little ones didn’t actually listen to or maybe didn’t understand the talks. No they knew they were important, but I asked a couple of the kids, “So what were those talks about?”

*(Flip over tape)*

Diane: That’s a lot what it was like. But because it was like, that. they also. I think, realized that it was an important thing.

Me: It’s important. yeah, I got that from the kids I talked to. it was a special thing, exactly. But what those speakers were talking about, “I haven’t a clue.”

Diane: Yeah (we laugh).

Me: And of course they liked the music the best—that’s like church, too. actually.

Diane: Yeah. And there is something almost—I mean if you have an event like that, you know. The people don’t always go to church to worship or to appreciate nature. but there is almost a cathedral like—it could be a cathedral like place for them if they need to go to one. We were talking about before about the quiet place where kids really need to be by themselves.

Me: Hmm. yeah. a refuge.

Diane: A refuge. yeah. And that whole idea of sanctuary. You know that they can have sanctuary inside that space in the park. And I think there is that part of it as well.

I find the idea of the park being a place for sanctuary, like a cathedral, quite interesting. Indeed, when I first saw the archways in the models the children had made, I was reminded of the enormous arched doorways of the magnificent cathedrals I had once seen traveling through Italy. But there is a wonderful ironic twist again to this idea because, as James Hillman (1985) explains, cathedrals were erected to provide sanctuary from the outdoors. the natural world: “The great cathedrals of Europe, for instance, were God-given and man-made both—and these were built at a time when the large outdoors was usually felt to be haunted by evil” (Hillman, 1985, p. 53).

The other idea that intrigued me was that Diane felt as if this ceremony was a rite of passage for the children, particularly the older ones. Again, I feel this is an important
idea because it focuses on the transitional space between childhood and adulthood.

Traditionally, rites of passage ceremonies are important in this movement, and today in Western society, these often occur, if they occur at all, in cathedral or church type settings, for example a child's confirmation or Bar mitzvah. But historically, these rites of passage occurred in nature and the wilderness. This is still the case for some cultures today. (Christianity teaches that even Christ had to go into the wilderness to be tested, to achieve knowledge and man-hood). Stephen Nabhan (1994) in *The Geography of Childhood* argues such rites of passage are necessary for children to reach maturity:

> Earlier in our history as a species, nearly all individuals went through rites of passage in the wilderness. These rites transformed children into adults—adults who could hardly forget the importance of nature-as-teacher for the rest of their lives. Western society today fails to provide such rites of passage to a significant portion of our population...Those who as adolescents fail to pass through such rites remain in an arrested state of immaturity. They lack the tangible experience and symbolic touchstones that would otherwise enable them to become mentally and emotionally whole, and potentially at peace with the world (p. 40).

Nabhan (1994), like Arendt before him, points to the educational system, explaining that it doesn't sufficiently meet the needs of today's students:

> Worse yet, the disaffection found in much of today's street graffiti, videos, and rap music indicate that schools are now offering youth less experience which they consider to be of lasting value. The physical and social survival skills adolescents so urgently need are not being offered to them through conventional education. It is not surprising that over 28 percent of those who currently enter American high-schools will not complete their coursework over the next four years, and even those who do may be chronically distracted by the guns, drugs, and alcohol that they take with them into the classroom. Most will be forced to learn what they have to learn about survival from sources entirely beyond the schoolyard, with little guidance from adults (p. 41).

Indeed, this raises the question of whether or not it is the responsibility of the schools to provide these rites of passage experiences? If it is, society is certainly asking a
lot of its teachers. But today with the breakdown of the traditional extended family
structure and a steady decline in other community support systems, such as the church, schools may be the only place left for children to experience these rites of passage. After all, this is where they spend most of their days. Clearly, the teachers perceive a need that, for many inner city children, is not being met. As Jackie says, “I think it’s so unbelievably important that we give our children a sense of who they are within nature. They don’t have it, and it’s natural to them. These are children who live in the city,” she continues. “and most of their parents don’t provide them with wilderness activities and experiences...It’s not part of most adults’ lives. So, as a teacher, I think it’s really important that I contribute to providing that by the walks we do down to the river”
(Jackie, Interview Two, June 1999).

It is a teacher’s role to act *in loco parentis* and, therefore, to feel responsible for the nurturing and well being of his or her students—in other words, to provide what the teacher feels is best for the education of the students. The problem which exists in modern educational systems is that the roles teachers are expected to fill and the relationships teachers have with their students have become more conflicted. It is a problem of expectations, identity, and intentionality. For example, parents want teachers to behave towards their children as they would. This is difficult in a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic culture, in a culture where children are brought up by two parents, by one parent, and by grandparents, and in a culture that experiences such wide socio-economic

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55 This attitude, explains Nabhan (1994), is increasingly being adopted by educators across Canada and the United States. Nabhan (1994) cites several successful educational programs that have been implemented to provide youths with rites of passage experiences in the wilderness. He outlines the ‘Vision Quest’ and ‘Walkabout’ programs in his chapter entitled, “Going Truant: The Initiation of Young Naturalists”, in Nabhan and Trimble (1994), *The Geography of Childhood*, pp.35-51.
variance. In effect, teachers have to be different with every child. When parents and teachers, and for that matter, the community at large, can no longer meet the needs of each individual child, the child may seek out alternatives and, as Nabhan (1994) has suggested, often less desirable ones. Someone or something has to replace or fill such roles as tribal nurturer and spiritual guide. This ceremony and the creation of this park then, is not just simply an attempt for the teachers and children to connect with the larger community. it is an attempt to reconnect to or to recreate something that is sadly lacking in today’s society, a sense of belonging to tradition, while at the same time, providing an opportunity, in essence a clean slate, for the teachers to sort out their roles and relationships with the children.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE PARK

When I arrived at school the Monday morning after we had built the park it was completely concealed by a blanket of fresh snow. How strange and silent it seemed. The park appeared as little mounds of snow with the odd branch sticking out here and there. Only two days before there had been swarms of people digging and planting under a glorious blue sky. And now the park had all but disappeared under the snow—it was as if winter had come to make its last claim. Although it is not unusual to get these late spring snowfalls, they always come as a bit of a surprise.

That Monday morning after the children had arrived at school, a general assembly was called. Diane gave a lovely little talk about how the young plants are like babies that need nurturing and protection in order for their roots to be established. She was clearly thankful for the snow which would provide such protection:
Actually, I was relieved. I was relieved because I had that, you know, that mother thing. That mothering thing that I felt, that oh good you know it’s under a blanket, it’s safe for now. Nobody’s going to get in there and trample the little plants or the little trees or the little grasses or anything. It’s got a chance to kind of rest under the snow (Diane, Interview Two, June 1999).

Indeed, it was several days before I saw children playing in the park. During this time and in the days to follow I had a chance to interview some of the children about their impressions of the park. Many of the children thought the park would be bigger. Some thought that it would be more like the equipment playground or like a cultured flower garden. A few of the children made reference to the absence of caves and tunnels.

Yeah, I thought it was going to look like there, like in one day there’s going to be a cave. It’s gonna be really big. It’s going to be so dark which I like dark (Shannon, Grade Two, Interview Two).

And I’d really like it if they’d do some more detail in it and build it bigger (Mark, Grade One, Interview One).

And I thought there would be a lot more flowers like starting to grow when the day when we built the park...I thought there’d be picnic tables (Tanis, Grade Two, Interview One, May 1999).

Well, I thought it was sort of going to be—I didn’t know they were putting mulch in it. I thought they were just keeping the grass there...I didn’t think they’d put all the rocks and didn’t think they’d plant so many plants, and I was expecting them to plant flowers. And I thought it was actually going to be much bigger (Rachael, Grade Two, Interview One, May 1999).

I thought it was a play park like that kind points to equipment playground (Sarah, Kindergarten, Interview Two).

I thought there was a slide...I thought it would be like that park (Regan, Kindergarten, Interview One, May 1999).

Christina: And I was thinking there would be a tunnel.
Me: You thought there’d be a tunnel.
Dylan: I thought there was going to be a cave (Grade Two, Interview Two).
Christina: Tunnels and cave (Grade Two, Interview Two).

None of these children expressed disappointment whilst making these comments. They were mainly making observations. I believe, about structures that appeared in their models that did not appear in the park. I would just like to mention briefly that the children’s comments should not be taken for granted. The fact that the children do not feel it is out of the ordinary for them to make these observations and comment on the appearance of the park. I would suggest, indicates a strong sense of ownership in regard to this space.

British naturalist, Robin C. Moore (1986b), conducted a study of children’s outdoor play environments in three British neighborhoods. He tracked the children’s play routes from their backyards, to school playgrounds, lanes, open marsh areas, forests, abandoned building sites and so on. One of the questions he asked the children was “What would you like to see added or changed in the outdoors?” A third of the children answered: “I don’t know.” Moore (1986b) explains:

This sizable group either did not understand the point of the question (even when prompted) or could not conceive of changing the conditions that they were used to. They had learnt to accept reality—with a working class ‘know thy place’ outlook—not to question it (p. 220).

Moore (1986b) also asked the identical question to a similar sample of North Californian children. and notes that “very few had nothing to say—possibly reflecting a more pronounced self-expressive style” (p.220). Or perhaps, this reflects, writes Moore (1986b) “the American habit of constantly evaluating material existence, versus a British habit of resignedly accepting things the way they are: an intriguing cultural difference”
The fact that the children, in my study, are so open about their opinions of the park may, as Moore suggests, be cultural. But I also think this critical attitude comes from the fact that they have been involved in the project since its conception and, therefore, feel completely justified expressing their opinions.

In truth, there was only one girl, Hillary, who seemed genuinely unhappy with the appearance of the park. What I find particularly interesting about her conversation with Stephen is that he tries to convince her that this is only Phase One of the park project and that its appearance will improve in the future. Notice how much bigger the imaginary space he describes is compared to the newly existing real space:

Me: Is the park how you thought it would look?
Hillary: No. It's nothing like I thought it would be. Cause it's a garden (she says disparagingly).
Me: What did you think it was going to look like?
Hillary: Not like a garden.
Me: What did you think would be different?
Hillary: I thought it would be bigger and I didn't think there would be mulch. What do you think of the mulch? What does it look like?
Hillary: I think it looks like icky brown things. It looks like sand. You see there's lots of beaches back in England, it's kind of like that.
Me: Did you think it would be different any other way?
Hillary: I just didn't think it would look like a garden.
Me: Well, do you like it?
Hillary: Hmm. kinda.
Me: Do you like playing out there.
Hillary: I haven't played out there yet.
Me: What do you think (asking Stephen)?
Stephen: I thought there was gonna be big trees and there could be vines you could swing on. And I thought there was going to be you know those big leaves—I thought there might be like coconut trees.
Me: Like palm trees.
Stephen: Yeah, and lots of flowers.
Hillary: Yeah, I thought it would be way nicer. I didn’t think it would be a little garden with mulch.

Me: So you thought it would be much bigger with bigger plants?

Stephen: Yeah.

Hillary: And much nicer.

Stephen: And there could be little ponds with alligators in it.

Hillary: Ooh. Eee!

Stephen: No. no. There could be spiders crawling around.

Hillary: Ooo!

Stephen: Not poisonous ones, but there might be some black widows.

Me: Do you like the park Stephen?

Stephen: But I wish there was more stuff though. I wish there were little traps.

Hillary: It’s just a boring old garden with mulch instead.

Stephen: So! We’re gonna do Phase Two!

Me: What kind of games have you been playing there?

Stephen: Tag, Pokemon, Star Wars.

Hillary: I still play at the other park!

Stephen: Well, there’s still Phase Two! (Hillary and Stephen, Grade Two, Interview Two).

Hillary is clearly disgruntled with the addition of the mulch to the park. It is the one structure added to the park that no one really expected and there is no doubt that, initially, it dominated its appearance. I remember thinking as the park was built how nice the river rocks and shrubs looked against the dark rich soil and then afterwards feeling a little surprised and disappointed by how these structures were dwarfed by the mulch. Jackie had a similar impression and she describes the effect of the mulch in very much the same way as Hillary does:

If we had the rock that we are supposed to have and that I hope we are getting—and I haven’t heard anything about that. We have a staff meeting tomorrow, I’ll ask. That wouldn’t happen because the rock would provide a textual and a color relief within the mulch. And also once our trees bush out, it’ll provide again textual and color relief. Because right now it looks pretty much like a big pile of mulch with some rocks sticking out. The
rocks are dwarfed by it. Nevertheless, I still feel very good every time I see it because it's so much different from the flat land. And, nevertheless, the children are out there playing beautifully (Jackie, Interview Two, June 1999).

Hillary also complains that it is just “a boring old garden.” It is difficult to say exactly what she had imagined. But clearly the idea of a park suggested something else—something bigger and something more magnificent. When I spoke to Jackie about the children's desire for the park to be bigger and more complete she commented that their responses didn’t surprise her and that they are symptomatic of today’s manufactured instant-gratification society:

Some of the children who arrived expressed disappointment because they, I’m thinking they were expressing grandeur and they hadn’t participated in the process, so the grandeur wasn’t there for them. Whereas for the children who were there, the grandeur was in the experience and the closeness they had to that work. So, what I did with the children who were expressing disappointment was talked about that this would be the first phase and I talked about other things so they understood phases of development. I think that they'd anticipated that everything they had planned and created in clay and planted and drawn was going to be there instantly. Which also speaks to how we live where we move into a ready-made house. We buy ready-made furniture. We buy made artwork and we live in a ready-made environment. We buy ready-made food and even if you are buying milk, if you are buying what we think of as distinct ingredients—it's all there. When I was a kid on the farm, we lived with the chickens, we collected the eggs, we milked the cows, we separated the milk, we pasteurized we did everything! Nothing was ready made. We made our own clothes. We made our own toys. We had some ready-made things. obviously, but we made so much. That's missing from our children's lives. The children who experienced it in the park and actually made that park have a different response than the children who didn’t. (Jackie, Interview Two, June 1999).

Michelle also makes this observation and explains that children of today have lost this connection with the earth because of mass suburbanization:

Well, and I think in this day and age and in the generation that these children are in now—I mean, for example, not too long ago with my own grandparents, the children worked the land often on the farms and they
had an understanding of how you had to care for the earth, that you had to, for example, even putting nitrogen back into the earth. Like they understood that what they take from the earth, they have to put back into it to make it more fertile for the next year and everything. And I think a lot of children are far removed from where their food source comes from, you know. They don’t quite understand where that all comes from and how it all works because we’re just—they’re suburbanized. I think we’re just disjointed from that, we don’t have that connection anymore. And I think it’s quite interesting because not too long ago, I’m thinking of my grandparents, all of a sudden with industrialization where I feel like there is this cut-off, you know, from the outdoors and from the connection of how things work and how I rely on the environment to get what my needs are. I just go to a supermarket or I just go to a Wal-Mart and I get what I need (Michelle, Interview One. June 1999).

The problem, I think, is that although the objective was to create a natural environment for the children in the schoolyard, the children recognize that it did not occur, at least initially, naturally—that it, too, is manufactured. Perhaps, so much so that, as one kindergarten child suggests, it was purchased from a store:

Me: Do you remember when they built the park?
Tara: Hmm.
Me: What was that like? Do you remember?
Tara: When they cut the tree down and they move rocks here to make a park?
Me: Where do you think the trees and rocks came from?
Tara: They get it at a store. They sell it at a store, but they bring it up here.
Me: How did they get here?
Tara: How did they get there? They drive a car, like a truck (Tara, Kindergarten, Interview Two).

This, of course, is more or less true. Thus, it may be confusing for some of the children, especially those who live in apartments and might not have even had the experience of a backyard garden—the idea that it will take time for the park to fill out and to become the way they have imagined it, if that is even at all possible. This points to the obvious fact
that those involved in the planning of Riverstone Park are not creating a ‘natural’ play space. but rather are manufacturing a space that will hopefully be perceived by the children as ‘natural.’ But do the children even understand what is meant by the term ‘natural’. When I asked Hillary if she thought this park was natural. she replied. “We don’t usually build a park do we?” I will explore several common conceptions of nature and take up the question of what is natural in Chapter Four: Tending.

For the most part. however. I detected very little disappointment in the appearance of the park among those who planned and constructed it. Rather what I detected was a sense of hopefulness. This sense of hope and anticipation characterized many of the conversations. For example. Lauren explains optimistically that in time there will be caves. “Because they are going to make plant caves” she says. “The plants are going to grow like this she arches arms over her body” (Lauren. Grade One. Interview Two). And looking closely at Stephen’s comments in the above conversation with Hillary. the reader sees that his vision of the park has become more elaborate. In the first interview he mentioned caves. tunnels. and bats. Now his description has taken on a tropical theme with vines. alligators and so on. Again. in reference to comments noted earlier in this thesis. one must not take these comments too literally as if Stephen actually believes these structures will appear in the park. rather such descriptions demonstrate his understanding of external reality. And as I have already mentioned. the joking and giggling indicates that he is voluntarily engaging in self-deception. Nonetheless. his description points to some imaginary future. While I was reading through this transcript. it occurred to me that the children’s understanding of this space continues to be expressed as an imagined space—a space of future possibility. as the verbs ‘could’ and ‘might’
suggest in Stephen's description, while the teachers' understanding of this space, and for that matter, their attitudes towards nature, is most often expressed as a childhood experience, a simple anecdote or an evocative memory from the past, as in the following examples:

I'm just thrilled with it [the park] because I see them doing all the things I was able to do as a child in the ravine behind my house, climbing on the trees and playing 'king of the castle' and you know all of that free exploration stuff (Diane, Interview Three, November 1999).

See when I was a little girl we had a big back yard that was mowed grass and all that, but we built and played imaginative games all the time. And I spent the summer on the farm in the woods with kids only, only the cousins played together. We hardly, we only saw our parents for meals. And I just, it went on and on after year, that kind of play. And I ran these hillsides (Jackie, Interview Three, November 1999).

And then as a child on the farm, my grandfather was a deeply spiritual person and they were Lutherans. And on the farm, I experienced my interaction with my grandparents which was so tied to the earth and my grandparents were environmentalists way before their time perhaps. Or perhaps that was their time. Like all the practices, they were very very careful. My grandfather wouldn't let his cows be injected with hormones or just all kinds of things. Consequently, as a child, I grew up tying nature on the farm with my grandfather and with religion because he would pray and sing, and if it rained, this is Saskatchewan, my grandfather would stand out in the rain and sing hymns. So instead of religion being a separate thing and God being a separate and people being separate—because of my great fortune of the family I come from we weren't separated at all. If it rained, you sang to God. And you treated animals with respect and you didn't harm them. We ate them, but we didn't harm them. I mean we treated them really really well while they were living, really well! (Jackie, Interview Two, June 1999).

One writer, who has greatly influenced my understanding of how the natural world affects child development, is Edith Cobb. In her early essay, "The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood" (1959), and later in her book (1977) entitled the same, Cobb explores the connection between the creative imaginings of children and the
autobiographical recollections of adults. Cobb's book (1977) is based upon a collection of over three hundred autobiographic works of "creative thinkers" from many different cultures, ranging from the sixteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. In her book, Cobb asserts that the genius of creative thinkers stems from the memory of a pivotal childhood experience they had in the natural world. "If we examine the statements made by adult geniuses about their own childhood," writes Cobb (1959), "it seems clear that there is and always has been a widespread intuitive understanding that certain aspects of childhood experience remain in memory as a psychophysical force, an elan, which produces the pressure to perceive creatively and inventively" (p. 538). Cobb's (1977) position is based upon her belief that "there is a special period, the little understood, prepubertal, halcyon, middle age of childhood, approximately from five or six to eleven or twelve—between the strivings of animal infancy and the storms of adolescence—when the natural world is experienced in some highly evocative way, producing in the child and sense of some profound continuity with natural processes and presenting overt evidence of a biological basis of intuition" (p. 53).

Cobb notes that the primary characteristic of a child between the ages of five and twelve is plasticity of response to environment. This means that the child takes in, reshapes, and gives out in some altered form, his perception of the natural world (Cobb, 1977, p. 8). Similar to my findings in Chapter Two of this thesis, Cobb (1959) also, in her own explorations, became "acutely aware that what a child wanted to do most of all was to make a world in which to find a place to discover a self" (p. 540). "Furthermore," Cobb (1959) continues, "while observing the passionate world-making behavior of the child when he is given plastic materials and working dimensions which are manageable..."
and in proportion to his need, accompanied by a population of toys, fauna, and flora, and artifacts that do duty as 'figures of speech' in the rhetoric of play, I have been keenly aware of those processes which the genius in particular in later life seeks to recall" (p. 540). This last statement is the point on which I would like to dwell for a moment. Cobb (1959) explains that in many of the autobiographical accounts of adult geniuses she examined, these writers often refer to memories of experiences they had in nature as children and that these memories are the source of their creative or artistic impulses:

...it is principally to this middle-range in their early life that these writers say they return in memory in order to renew the power and impulse to create at its very source, a source at which they describe as the experience of emerging not only into the light of consciousness but into a living sense of the dynamic relationship with the outer world. In these memories the child appears to experience a sense of discontinuity, an awareness of his own unique separateness and identity, and also a continuity, a renewal of relationship with nature as process (p. 539).

As an example, Cobb (1977) cites an excerpt from the autobiography of Bernard Berenson:

As I look back on fully seventy years of awareness and recall the moments of greatest happiness, they were for the most part, moments when I lost myself all but completely in some instant of perfect harmony. In consciousness this was not due to me, of which I was scarcely more than the subject in the grammatical sense...In childhood and boyhood this ecstasy overtook me when I was happy out of doors. Was I five or six? Certainly not seven. It was a morning in early summer. A silver haze shimmered and trembled over the lime trees. The air was laden with their fragrance. The temperature was like a caress. I remember—I need not recall—that I climbed up a tree stump and felt suddenly immersed in itness. I did not call it by that name. I had no need for words. It and I were one (p. 32).
The ‘Itness’ Berenson describes here is the same feeling I write of earlier in this thesis when Diane refers to an ‘emotion’ one feels in nature or as Colin refers to it in *The Secret Garden. ‘Magic’*. Cobb (1959) describes this feeling as “the joy of recognition, a delighted awareness that knowing and being are in some way coincident and continuous within a larger process,” and explains, “that this kind of knowing is in itself an achievement of psychological balance” (p. 330).

Cobb then elaborates on the child’s perception of time and space. Indeed, much of her work is devoted to explaining in evolutionary terms how a child’s perception of these two dimensions involves the elements of hope, expectancy and purpose. Here Cobb (1959) defines ‘purpose’ as “a striving after a future goal retained as *some kind of image or idea*” (p. 543). In conclusion, Cobb (1959) explains, that adult genius consists in the continuing ability “to recall and to utilize the child’s primary perceptual intuition of time and space” in terms of *futurity* (p. 545):

...perception is a comparative activity which contains the neural experience of duration, and that ‘perception of a time dimension including an element of expectancy is as fundamental to organisms as is perception of space...In human life the primary perceptual activity is not the photochemical synthesis of a prefabricates gestalt, but a creative imagination of form...Taken together, the child’s intuitive sense of perceptual continuity with nature and the often expressed hope that the poetic and scientific aspects of our culture may be evolving toward a new synthesis with nature suggest that the ‘unmediated vision’ of childhood is the primary evidence, perhaps the source, of the predictive, prefigurative imagination of man, and that the exercise of this imagination is dependent upon autobiographical recall in some form (p. 544).

Essentially, Cobb is expressing that as human beings we are world-makers and that it is a basic human goal to create forms. This innate need, ‘to body forth the forms of things unknown’, as she puts it, is most noticeable during middle-childhood and is often
expressed in "extreme personal originality and the creation of private worlds", as seen in many of the children's descriptions of the park throughout the course of this inquiry (Cobb, 1959, p. 538). What I find particularly interesting about Cobb's work is the correlation she makes between the child's basic biological striving towards an undetermined future and the adult's memory of past experience. Perhaps, as Cobb suggests, these creative intuitive forces are one and the same. If so, and certainly my interview transcripts provide ample evidence to support this claim, the park, as an experience of nature, continues to inspire and act as a portal for these creative forces to be released and exercised.\textsuperscript{56}

Several days after we had built the park and the snow had melted away, I joined Karen's class in the park to write and sketch. The children sat lazily on the rocks. One boy, Mark, even took off his shoes and socks and lay down in the mulch to bask in the

\textsuperscript{56} I am particularly interested in Edith Cobb's work because her description of space and time is consistent with and compliments my understanding of the philosophical pragmatic and pedagogic notion of 'space' as conceived and described phenomenologically by Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Each philosopher, in his separate investigation, came to suspect a dimension of experience where space and time is unified. See David Abram (1996) \textit{The Spell of the Sensuous} for a substantive account of their philosophies. Husserl was the first to suggest that the experience of time/space is not 'strictly temporal' and is rooted in a deeper more embodied dimensionality. His student Heidegger, in \textit{Being and Time} (1967), explored this idea further and introduced a spatial metaphor, 'horizon', to describe the temporality of human existence. Later in his career, Heidegger suggested that our "preconceptual sense of time could not be held apart from our preconceptual experience of space" (Abram, p. 205). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his investigations, asserted an "experiential realm more originary than space and time, from which these two dimensions have been derived" (Abram, p. 205). Thus, all three phenomenologically called into question the conventional distinction between space and time, opening up the possibility for us to conceptualize these two dimensions differently. The significance of this unification of space and time in our understanding of this place, earth, is explicated by David Abram (1996):

...when our awareness of time is joined with our awareness of space, space itself is transformed. Space is no longer experienced as a homogenous void, but reveals itself as this vast and richly textured field in which we are corporeally immersed, this vibrant expanse structured by both ground and horizon. It is precisely the ground and the horizon that transform abstract space into space-time. And these characteristics—the ground and the horizon—are granted to us only by the earth. Thus, when we let time and space blend into a unified space time, we rediscover the enveloping earth (p. 216).
sun. I poked over a few of the children’s shoulders to see what they were writing. I saw no words, but a few had begun a little sketching. The children had been asked to go out and write a description of the park. So I asked the two girls next to me, “What are you writing about?” They shrugged their shoulders. “Well,” I said rather nonchalantly, “Maybe you can write about what it’ll look like next spring.” Their eyes lit up and their faces became animated as they began describing excitedly the prospect of a whole, new, future world.

**USING THE PARK SPACE**

“Mummy, mummy, you come play with us,” Sarah said coyly in a babyish voice. I gave her a disapproving look and she giggled. She and Shannon latched on to my arms and tugged me over to the park. It was recess and was still quite cool outside. I halted for a moment to do up Sarah’s coat and put her hood up. I glanced around the field and saw that Stephen was running around with his jacket undone drooping around his elbows. I shook my head and gave a sigh of resignation as I followed the girls.

Sarah hopped up onto one of the logs that had just been placed around the perimeter of the park. Incidentally, in the months that had passed since the construction of Phase I of the park, the school board maintenance department had complained that the mulch was encroaching on the grass (thereby, interfering with lawn mowing) and that it would have to be contained. As a result, another workday was planned for October 13, 1999. Enormous logs were placed around the perimeter of the park and one large stump

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57 I was only able to obtain one writing/sketch sample from this outing in Riverstone Park. It was produced by Claire in Grade Two. I found this sample interesting because she refers to ‘imagining’ and ‘dreaming’ in her writing and she includes wildlife in her sketch. See Appendix A.
with branches ascending from it was placed in the center of the park for the children to
climb on, as well. several little stumps were placed randomly in the center space for
children to sit on and use as a writing surfaces. Needless to say, the logs provided a
physical boundary. a wall surrounding the park!

“Sarah. you go behind me. then Hillary. then your Mum.” Shannon directed.

I followed the kids along the logs as they carefully balanced themselves arms
stretched out from their sides. Every couple of feet we would slow down and myself
being at the tail end would come to a full stop as each of us leapt in turn onto the next
log.

“Look out. look out.” Sarah shrieked. “You’re gonna fall in!” She lunged
towards Shannon who lost her balance stepping into the mulch.

“Get out. get out of the water. help her. help her!” shouted Hillary. The two girls
grabbed Shannon and pulled her back onto the log. Our journey re-commenced. Two
more logs and Shannon halted again. Rachael and Tanis were sitting crouched down
around a large knot in the log, which had a deep hole in it.

“Look out. we’re coming through.” Shannon announced.

“You guys go around.” Rachael exclaimed indignantly, “This is our Beanie58
house” she said pulling out one of her Beanies from the knot in the log.

The girls paused respectfully taking a few moments to observe the Beanie haven.
Then without warning. they jumped from the log into the mulch spinning around and
waving their arms shrieking “Swim for your life! Swim for your life!”

58 “Beanie” is a reference to Beanie Baby, a little bean bag animal toy.
They were already up on the logs on the other side of the park, when to my surprise I found myself standing alone, marooned, on my log.

They have created a sense of the danger of it. And I think that the danger is a big part of it. You have to have something that involves a little bit of risk taking for the kid's because that's what makes it fun and exciting...And I think feeling competent too. You know nobody is hovering over them saying, 'Oh be careful, oh don't do that, oh you're gonna fall'. You know, they have a really good sense. I mean watching those kids: they have a really good sense of just how much they can do without really hurting themselves. I mean they might fall and scrape a knee or something, but they are not really going to hurt themselves because they know where their limits are and they are not going to go past them unless they are pushed. But I don't find that that happens either—that nobody's out there pushing the kids off the logs, or they're not playing that kind of game where you have to fight one another off or anything. It's more like the adventure almost like you know Gandalf and...{(I interrupt to say. "The Lord of the Rings")}...Yeah, you know where there is that venture, that trek that they take and it's almost like a trekking thing where they make up their own things that they are going to be meeting up with, monsters or ghosts, or whatever. As I say, there's just kinda that over the hill this way along and back over, you know, and "Watch out for the trees" and "Careful the spider webs don't get you" and things like that. There aren't any spider webs there either {chuckle}. But they've imagined it so! (Diane. Interview Three. November 1999)

When I interviewed the children about the kinds of activities and games being played in the new park, some of the more general responses included jumping and climbing on the rocks, skipping, tag, and hide-n-seek. The two boys I interviewed, Stephen and Dylan, both mentioned 'Pokemon' and 'Stars Wars' but did not elaborate on the exact nature of their play. When I observed them in the park, they seemed to be role-playing, incorporating characters from these stories into their own play. They were playing chase games, hiding behind rocks, and occasionally shooting at some imaginary

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figure, presumably the ‘bad’ guy, as they were both playing the ‘good’ guys. Similarly, one afternoon while I was driving the kids home from school, Sarah said that she and her friends had been playing ‘Pokemon’ in the new park. I asked her to explain the game. She said that each child was a different Pokemon and the object of the game was to hide from the evil ‘Pokemon’ master. It did not seem to me that they were acting out story lines they had seen on television, but rather like Stephen and Dylan were incorporating these characters into their own play. One of the games that was quite popular and was mentioned by a number of the children in the interviews was a game called ‘invisible pets’. This game also involved role-playing. It is interesting to note, that although most of these children spoke of exotic wildlife in their descriptions of the park before it was built, their play here involves primarily domesticated animals:

Tanis: We played invisible pets outside because there isn’t really any pets.

Me: What kinds of pets?

Tanis: Horses, dogs, cats—that kind of thing.

Me: Is the park kind of like a pet shop?

Tanis: Well, we used some of the wood chips for food and stuff (Grade Two, Interview One, May 1999).

I’ve been playing invisible pet. It’s where you have an invisible pet any kind of pet and then you take them for walks and you have a doctor, a vet, a babysitter and a Mom and um... (Christina, Grade One, Interview Two).

Me: What part do you like playing on?

Rachael: That part over behind the rock that’s hard to see. Because we have um little hollow logs back there and we make food out of the mulch and stuff and put them (invisible pets) in it.

Me: Do you want to show me? (We walk over) Is this the spot you like best?

Rachael: Yeah.

Me: Why?
Rachael: I don’t know. Because there’s a little shelter there, even though I can’t fit in.
Me: So it’s kind of hidden?
Rachael: Yeah, like a cave (Grade Two, Interview One, May 1999).

Incidentally, Robin Moore (1986b) notes that the children, in his study, rarely mentioned animals, but the few children that did referred only to domesticated pets. Moore (1986b) suggests the reason for this is that children growing up in urban settings have had very few or only brief encounters with wildlife:

Very few mentions of ‘animals’ were made, except for pet cats and dogs and the occasional bird. One reason is that children’s relationships with urban wildlife are hard to document. The scale of organism is usually too small to draw on paper. Neither are they often mentioned verbally. Perhaps it is because of the ephemeral quality of interaction. Animals are not place specific. They migrate and hibernate and constantly move around in search of food and shelter. Children move around a lot too, so that although the paths of children and wildlife may cross frequently, they are the briefest moments... a butterfly fluttering out of reach... a beetle disappearing down a crack in the pavement (p. 15).

It is difficult to conceive of a child living in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, as the children participating in this inquiry do, having never encountered wildlife. Even in my own backyard, and I live minutes from the center of the city, there are robins nesting, squirrels leaping from tree to tree, we have even had the occasional falcon sitting in one of our giant spruces. So, I would be hard pressed to say that these children have never encountered wildlife, but like Moore I agree these encounters are often fleeting. Certainly, the animals the children know best are their household pets and, therefore, I am not surprised that these are the preferred animals for their games. It will be interesting to see, later this spring, as the plants leaf out for the first time and the park takes on a ‘wilder’ appearance if the children’s games reflect this transformation.
I was particularly excited when Rachael showed me her special place in the park, a rock with an over-hang on it with a small enclosure underneath which she described as a 'little shelter' and 'a cave'. There had been concern that the children would feel disappointed when some of the structures such as the caves and a pond did not receive approval from the school board and were not incorporated into the park design. So, it was wonderful to see that Rachael had created a cave out of such a small enclosure. And even though the children expressed in the interviews that they would like to see things bigger, I have noticed in my observations of the children that it is not uncommon for them to take a very small space and turn it into something much larger. Like in this next example, where I ask Regan what she likes about the park and she makes reference to a pond:

Me: What do you like about it [the park]?  
Regan: Because you can climb on the rocks and it has a pond.  
Me: Does it have a pond?  
Regan: Yeah, I'll show you she takes me to a rock with a dip in its surface. There used to be a pond in there.  
Me: Oh yes, but I guess the sun dried it up. but I bet when it rains again or if you brought some water out here...  
Regan: I'm going to get some water...she takes off (Kindergarten, Interview One, May 1999).

Reading Gaston Bachelard's (1964), *The Poetics of Space*, helped me to understand the importance of these 'miniature' spaces. When we see the children making little houses out of knots in the wood and food items out of pieces of mulch it is easy to liken these objects to toys. But, as Bachelard (1964) exclaims, "the imagination deserves better than that!" (p. 149). In point of fact, he writes, "imagination in miniature is natural imagination which appears at all ages in the daydreams of born dreamers" (Bachelard,
1964. p. 149). He cites a wonderful little passage with a myriad of evocative images of a "world in the diminutive" written by Victor Hugo:

In Freiberg I forgot for a long time the vast landscape spread out before me, in my preoccupation with the plot of grass on which I was seated, atop a wild little knoll on the hill. Here, too, was an entire world. Beetles were advancing slowly under deep fibers of vegetation: parasol-shaped hemlock flowers imitated the pines of Italy...a poor, wet bumble-bee, in black and yellow velvet, was laboriously climbing up a thorny branch, while thick clouds of gnats kept the daylight from him: a blue-bell trembled in the wind, and an entire nation of aphids had taken to shelter under its enormous tent...I watched an earthworm that resembled an antediluvian python, come out of the mud and writhe heavenward, breathing in the air. Who knows, perhaps it, too, in this microscopic universe, has its Hercules kill it and its Cuvier to describe it. In short, this universe is as large as the other one (p. 160).

The musings of Hugo remind me that miniatures offer both child and adult alike the possibility of an entrance to another world, often a much larger world, perhaps even a universe, and an escape from the confinements of day to day life. "Large issues from small," writes Bachelard (1964). "not through the logical law of a dialectics of contraries, but thanks to liberation from all obligations of dimensions, a liberation that is a special characteristic of the activity of the imagination...Thus the minuscule, a narrow gate, opens up and entire world. The details of a thing can be the sign of a new world which, like all worlds, attains the attributes of greatness. Miniature is one of the refuges of greatness" (p. 155).

For Bachelard, phenomenological notions of ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘world-being’ are too "majestic" and he claims that he does not succeed in experiencing them

60 Baron Georges Cuvier, eighteenth-century zoologist and founder of the science of paleontology.
Only in miniature worlds, he confesses, can he truly experience world consciousness:

I feel more at home in miniature worlds, which, for me, are dominated worlds. And when I live in them I feel waves that generate world-consciousness emanating from my dreaming self. For me, the vastness of the world has become merely the jamming of these waves. To have experienced miniature sincerely detaches me from the surrounding world, and helps me to resist dissolution of the surrounding atmosphere. Miniature is an exercise that has metaphysical freshness; it allows us to be world conscious at slight risk. And how restful this exercise on a dominated world can be! For miniature rests us without ever putting us to sleep. Here the imagination is both vigilant and content (Bachelard, 1964. p. 161).

As we continue to see, the children seem to share this innate sense or understanding of how to experience the world in miniature whether it be a world that encompasses the space of the entire park or just a mere dip in a rock. In fact, it is quite possible that if there had been a cave or a pond built to scale, although I am quite sure these structures would have been used and enjoyed, they would not have allowed for this kind of creativity and imaginative play. We can liken the creation of these miniature play spaces to the exaggerated descriptions the children gave in their descriptions of the park; they create a distinction, or a boundary, between imaginary space or fantasy and external reality.

There is little play in realism. As Robin Moore (1986b) warns, those who are interested in making natural play environments for children must be cautious of making these environments too realistic or adding too many structures. Indeed, he recommends the best play space for children might be an empty lot with a big pile of dirt, what he calls the ‘rough ground’ approach:
The indeterminacy of rough ground allows it to become a play partner, like other forms of creative partnership: actress-audience, potter-clay, photographer-subject, painter-canvas. The exploring/creating child is not making 'art' so much as using the landscape as a medium for understanding the world by continually deconstructing it. Where is this vital activity to be carried on if every part of the child's environment is spoken for to meet the economic, social, and cultural needs of the adult community?...Rip up some of the asphalt, surround it with a sturdy enclosure, add some fertile soil and leave it alone. In other words, make it a building site: a leaderless, do-it-yourself adventure play area: an anonymous spot for kids and wildlife to colonize together...Qualities of openness, diversity, manipulation, explorability, anonymity and wildness must be planned, but in a non-designed way. Forget the official stamp of tidy overdesign. Leave it open to the users' own hands and imaginations to define (Moore, 1986b, p. 243).

All those who continue to be involved in the Riverstone Park Project need to heed this warning and continue to observe closely how the space is being used. The day the logs surrounding the park were placed, a large pile of soil was also deposited in a mound beside the park. This dirt was left uncovered and has become one of the spots in the park where the children congregate the most. As Michelle remarks, "That seems to be an attraction lately—digging right into the dirt and digging into the berm that hasn't had any grass planted or any other types of planting yet" (Interview Two, November 1999).

When I asked Diane to describe some of the games the children have been playing, she put it succinctly, "Oh I'm not sure because I'm not privy to their conversations" (Interview Three, November 1999). Nonetheless, the teachers' observations of the children the past few months give us some indication of how this space is being utilized. The teachers have observed a lot of movement such as running, jumping and climbing. Jackie describes this kind of movement as 'natural movement' and she compares this movement with the movement of puppies. And both Jackie and Diane liken the movement of the children to ants:
The kind of play I see going on and the kind of movement that I see going on, I can relate to for myself as a child, and I think it’s a very natural movement. There’s a lot of swarming around. There’s a lot of skittering around, so the children are moving quickly and stopping and then moving quickly and stopping, and then moving in little groups or they are moving as individuals. They are not moving in massive groups like a soccer game that’s on a field that’s like an organized game. They’re in two’s or three’s or by themselves and their movement is like, it’s like watching puppies. When you have a puppy and you take them out for their walks at first, and they quickly go somewhere and then they slow down and then they stop and they take a moment...And they hop from rock to rock just like we hoped they would’ve done. They are aware of the vegetation even though they don’t always see it, and the smaller things are getting trampled. I think that’s okay. Because it certainly isn’t deliberate. It’s just what happens if you don’t see something, you step on it! And those things aren’t going to survive out there because they are not meant to be there where there are a lot of children...It always, it reminds me of ants! When I watch them up close or when I watch them from afar, they remind me of ants just doing their thing. And I’ve noticed that we don’t have much elevation there. but obviously you don’t need very much elevation to make the difference between a flat field and a contoured surface. Because they are up and over and around the berms and the logs and the rocks, even though they are not really high (Jackie. Interview Three. November 1999).

It just amazes me to go out there when I’m on supervision. They all seem to congregate, from very little to very big seem to congregate there. Whether it’s to use the stumps as a sitting place, or climb up on that tree-stump, to be sitting amongst the bushes, or just be running up and down over the hill. It’s just like an anthill, you know, it’s just swarming with children (Diane. Interview Three. November 1999).

One day when I was out in the park at recess time. Jackie and I noticed three grade five or six girls playing on a large boulder that is placed in the center of the park. The girls would climb up on the rock, stand up arms outstretched, join hands and then with all their might would start pushing; they pushed back and forth, back and forth, laughing and grunting six feet desperately clutching the surface of the rock; they would push until one of them fell off; then the two girls remaining on the rock would continue the game until only one was left standing victorious on the rock. Only days before I had been to the zoo
and observed two grizzly bears displaying this exact behavior while they balanced themselves on a log. The similarity between the two scenes struck me as uncanny. Jackie explains that these kinds of activities are really helping the children to develop a finer sense of balance and that she will be able to apply these skills to gymnastics unit:

...But what I am really aware of is, with say the curriculum, where out there they are doing a lot of climbing and they are developing their balance: and I am very aware of this because, of course, I have so much training in gymnastics and in educational movement, so I'm aware of that as their teacher. My comfort level with them working on that—and if they fall off some of those things, which they do, or step off when they lose their balance, they don't get hurt. They're not worried about it. It's not a liability issue. We haven't put them at a high level, so that the children are going to topple off and hurt, you know, land on their head...So curriculum wise what I am aware of are the social interactions, developing social skills helping them to become aware of strategies for play and the physical education aspect (Jackie, Interview Three, November 1999).

All three teachers I spoke to commented on how this space promotes more thoughtful and cooperative play. Michelle says the children have a "natural respect for the park" so they are "more conscientious." For example, she says, "You know how if they are treating someone else, like if they push them, they could accidentally step on a young tree that's trying to grow. I can even remember one student taking the time to take these little twigs and almost make a little gate around a tree. So, I think there is a little more care and thoughtful play that goes on" (Michelle, Interview Two. November 1999).

And Diane explains that there is less adversity and fewer conflicts in the park area:

And the fact is they congregate to that particular area rather than, you know, going out by themselves in a little huddle and running around and fighting each other and stuff. Like there's no, virtually no fighting that goes on in there. There are other kinds of play and other kinds of games that happen in that area. Whereas the fighting games and the karate and

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61 Jackie also teaches Physical Education to a number of the classes in the school.
all that stuff usually happens out in the field rather than in that space (Diane. Interview Three. November 1999).

Jackie makes a similar observation:

Their play is cooperative play, like their interaction. I’m not noticing fights, problems particularly. There’s a little bit of ownership of space, but that doesn’t seem to cause any big kind of problems. There’ll be a group of typically older kids sitting in a space that somebody else wants to travel through and they won’t move, so that kind of ownership of space. I don’t see the kids being particularly upset about it. Either they just go around them or they just figure it out or they come for some help to figure it out (Jackie. Interview Three. November 1999).

I was particularly interested in their comments about this being a space that promotes cooperative play because in another study conducted by Robin Moore (1986a), he discovers that naturalized play areas in the schoolyard reduce conflict by breaking down traditional gender barriers. He was involved in the re-design of an elementary school playground in Berkeley, California, replacing an acre and a half of bare asphalt with swings and bars, a fishing pond, woods, and meadows (p. 66). Stephen Trimble (1994), in his excellent essay on the role of the natural world in forming gender identity, *A Land of One’s Own*, summarizes the results of Moore’s study:

He found that girls preferred “games” and “being together,” activities that led to social interaction on the play equipment (especially the monkey bars) and in small structures in the “natural resource area.” Boys favored competitive ball-playing on the remaining asphalt. Moore’s conclusion: “Conventional urban schoolyards are one of the most severely sex-differentiating environments in which children grow up in the U.S.” The natural area of the playground saw wider ranges of activities and more mixing of genders. The bare asphalt “generated more conflict and stress (particularly between the sexes), compared to biotic settings which...engendered a more harmonious relationship between children of all types.” Children of both sexes described what they called ‘the dirt area’: “It’s more like a forest than a playground.” “It’s a very good place. Really quiet. Lots of kids just sit around and talk.” “It’s just perfect” (Nabhan and Trimble, 1994, p. 66).
Referring to Moore’s (1986a) findings,62 I asked the teachers if they have noticed any differences in gender relations since the park has been built. Diane confirms Moore’s findings, agreeing that there “are always more girls on the swings” and that in the field there “are almost always boys.” But in the naturalized area—the park—the children “mix—the boys and girls are in there together and nobody seems to have marked their own territory specifically for themselves, especially when it comes to that tree. I mean both the girls and boys climb on that tree” (Diane. Interview Three. November 1999). When I asked Jackie the same question, she wasn’t sure if the children play more together “gender wise”, but notes that “they do more similar things.” “The girls are hopping around and the boys are hopping around. I still think that for the most part if you took all the boys and all the girls that the boys are more physically active. But, they’re just more physically active: they’re not the only ones who are physically active. There’s little girls going up and down that perimeter...” (Jackie. Interview Three. November 1999). In even bringing up the issue of gender distinction, Trimble (1994) confesses that he might be accused of “maintaining old stereotypes and perpetuating marginalization” (p. 69). But he cites an alarming statistic—that from each group of two thousand ninth-grade girls in the U.S. came a single doctorate in science or engineering. Trimble (1994) explains that testing has shown that “such statistics reflect differences in education and experience, rather than in innate skill” (p. 67). As parents and educators we have to be concerned about these kinds of statistics and have to become more aware of the opportunities and

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experiences we are providing our children. Perhaps as Trimble suggests, this will require a fundamental change in our cultural attitudes about how young boys and young girls experience the natural world. Trimble cites a study in New England conducted by Roger Hart (1979), *A Child's Experience of Place*, which notes that boys were allowed to range freely more than twice as far away from home than girls (p. 71). “Hart perceived an implicit message in the parent’s behavior: ‘Boys will be boys, meaning that we must expect them to explore more, engage in more rough play, be more physically active, and even get into trouble more, but that they must expect punishment when caught. Such are the attitudes toward the making of a man.’” Hart and his co-researcher Susan Saegert summarize the depressing and inevitable result of such control of girls: “Not only is environmental exploration and freedom denied to them, but also their confidence and ability to cope with environmental matters are likely to be undermined.” They liken the boy’s experience to the ‘experimentation and self-directed learning’ of the driver of a car, the girl’s to the passenger’s, who can only ‘suggest and observe.’” (Nabhan and Trimble, 1994, p. 72).

I have two boys and one very active daughter who loves to climb trees and dig in the earth for worms with her brothers. But already at six years old I can see that she is becoming more aware of gender stereotypes and that she is desperately trying to resist them. Certainly, the pressure to conform and behave a certain way comes primarily from her own peer group which she now has day to day contact with at school. However, I must confess that, as Hart suggests, my standards for her are different than for my eldest son. I fear more for her safety and, therefore, she experiences more restrictions than he
does. Perhaps this realization will help me to pay more attention to the source of my attitudes and more to her needs. It will be difficult, and as a woman myself, I know she will need extra strength to surpass these gender barriers, but I feel hopeful that with the continuation of hands on experiences in nature, such as the kind she now experiences every school day in Riverstone Park, that it is possible for not only her but also for my sons to reach beyond and overcome these gender stereotypes. Trimble (1994) notes that opportunities need to be created for children to "pursue whatever their dreams might be...lots of opportunities, safe ones, programmed for success—and then stand back and let the earth do its work" (p. 75). I believe, and I'm sure I can speak on behalf of the teachers in this inquiry that Riverstone Park is one such opportunity.

The advantages of strong people, strong women, in wild places as well as in cities, seep into every corner of our lives. For ourselves, and for our planet, we must be both strong and strongly connected—with each other, with the earth. As children, we need time to wander, to be outside, to nibble on icicles and watch ants, to build with dirt and sticks in a hollow of the earth, to lie back and contemplate clouds and chickadees. These simple acts forge the connections that define a land of one's own—home and refuge for both boys and girls. Mentors help, answering the questions we bring back from the land. With these childhood experiences we begin. They form the secure foundation to which return again and again in our struggle to be strong and connected, to be complete (Nabhan and Trimble, 1994, p. 75).

One of the final questions I asked the teachers about the uses of this new space is if it is fulfilling their curriculum objectives. Certainly, as this thesis has shown, the park is being realized as a creative and imaginative play space. Similar to Diane's comments, Jackie remarks, "They're playing more imaginative games like they're using that one big tree stump that's in the middle that comes up and reaches out a bit—they use that for
things like a pirate ship and they use all their imaginations to create all kinds of things” (Interview Three, November 1999). But what about other curricular activities such as writing, sketching, and science? I know from when I was out interviewing the children in the park that it was nearly impossible to get the children to sit still and to talk into my recorder: indeed, in several instances, I had to bring the children inside to complete the interviews. So, I was wondering if the teachers were having any success in getting the children to sit outside and work on activities such as writing in their journals. When I asked Michelle, she comments that she doesn’t think the park is being used “to its full potential” (Interview Two, November 1999). She explains that in order to get the children to work outdoors, she is going to have to set up a different expectation so that the children will perceive this space as a work space: “I think that if they know it’s an activity for class, that it’s an enjoyable time, however there is an expectation that there is some work to be done. It does have a slightly different feel to it with the whole class going out, when there aren’t any other children, so it isn’t a playtime necessarily. I think if there is some continuity...then it won’t seem like just one new experience. It’ll be something they’re used to doing and then they’ll get quickly settled into a routine” (Michelle, Interview Two, November 1999). When I asked Jackie, she explains that the heavy emphasis on writing and sketching reflects different teaching styles and that for her the park is a space for the children to be physical: "I would rather not be trying to stop the children from being physical because I’m physical. I would be inclined to give them the opportunity to be physical and when I want them to sketch would be a small part of the whole thing or I would bring something—if I want the children contained I would bring them into the classroom. I bring things into the classroom, and that’s what I’ve
actually done” (Jackie. Interview Three. November 1999). Diane, on the other hand, gives a more detailed description of how she has been incorporating the park into the curriculum. But even in her comments I detect certain flexibility towards the curriculum and see that she too embraces the attitude of learning through exploration and play:

I’ve used it for art. I’ve used it for drama. We’ve used that space as a kind of theatre and we’ve used it for science, for the seasonal changes. We were able to look at the aphids on the underside of the rose leaf at the different stages like at the larval stage and the pre-mature adult stage, and so on. And certainly, they were just fascinated with that stuff. And I watched. I watched three little boys, and we were suppose to be drawing leaves for science and art, drawing things that you could see. Well, they decided that they weren’t going to draw. Instead, what they did was they had cleaned out all the debris from around one of the trees and then had kind of gouged out a trough all the way around it so that when it was watered, it would form a well around the tree and the tree would get watered properly. And it was absolutely fascinating watching them because they had no idea I was watching them. They had no idea I was listening to them, and there they were talking about what they were doing to ‘get that stuff out.’ And here were three of them and they just worked away for about a half hour just clearing this stuff out and digging around and using sticks and so on and just for this one purpose and that was to protect this one tree and make sure this one tree got watered. I just watched in amazement. It was fabulous! (Diane. Interview Three. November 1999).

Diane says that the park provides a place for “authentic” and “meaningful” learning (Interview Two. June 1999). An example of this would be the ‘mulch moving’ event.

Not all the mulch was spread in the park on construction day. A big pile of it was left for some time sitting on the warm pavement beside the school. After a week or so the mulch in this pile began rotting, so it had to be moved and spread in the park. The principal turned the mulch moving into a math game. The children from each class were given different size pails to load up with mulch. Each class had to keep track of how many pails of mulch were moved. Some children ran back and forth with ice cream pails
others were carrying twenty litre buckets and so on. Someone recorded the information as the children ran past with buckets and later the children recorded this information on a graph in their classrooms. The objective was to see which class moved the most mulch and how many liters of mulch were moved overall. This took several laborious days with thousands of trips back and forth between the mulch pile and the park. The children were very innovative. I remember seeing, for example, two children carrying six pails of mulch on a stick which they rested on their shoulders, one child at each end of the stick. Now, this scene really did remind me of ants marching back and forth over an anthill. One of the most exciting parts of this event, certainly from the children's perspective, was that the mulch deep down in the pile had begun to rot and smolder. So the children dug furiously to get the blackened ashy mulch, while streams of smoke surfaced from the pile.

Diane enthusiastically describes the teaching and learning that took place during this event:

...And the fact that there was also some teaching that went on with this as well about why we use the mulch and how important it is and how it will rot, and how we saw examples of it rotting with the moulding and stuff that was happening in the piles over there by the school. You know, explaining that mould and heat came out of it. I mean there was so much science that came out of that program. It was wonderful. Although they didn’t realize that it was science...It was such a great experience and then the math as well, trucking all the litres and all the estimations we had to do...You know there’s a real context, there’s a real reason to learn this stuff. There’s real meaning attached to the learning they are doing around the park (Diane, Interview Two, June 1999).

Most certainly, the teachers are thoughtfully observing how the children are using the space and are doing their best to adapt their curriculum objectives to the children’s interests and needs. As this thesis has shown, there is much merit in creative play, and children need opportunities and the freedom to play in enriched environments. Recently,
this April 2000, I was at a planning meeting where the zoo representative was outlining several different educational programs the teachers could implement using the park, such as a ladybug program. She made several excellent suggestions, but as I sat there listening, I thought to myself that this park does not seem to be about environmental education, not yet anyway, and not with the children I have spoken to (It might be different with the children from Grades Four to Six). Just then, Diane spoke up, she told the zoo representative how the children own this space and that she would not feel right about “imposing curriculum” on them. I have no doubt that there has been and will continue to be much teaching and learning associated with Riverstone Park. but I think it is critical that the teachers have recognized that the curriculum must be meaningful and must come from the children’s experiences of the park.
CHAPTER FOUR
TENDING

There are a number of important social-ecological factors that influence a child’s relationship with his or her natural surroundings including relationships with parents, family and friends, the influences of school and other community organizations, cultural attitudes, and the genetic inheritance and personality of each individual child (Moore, 1986b). Acknowledging the importance of all these factors, the two influences that came up repeatedly in my interviews and in associated readings as having a direct impact on today’s children in terms of their relationship with nature were urbanization and television. For instance, when I ask Michelle what she thinks the current trend in education to naturalize schoolyards is a response to, she replies, “It could be in response to the way our city is growing; perhaps the threat that there is so little green space. And, you know, we don’t want our children to be in schools where they are removed from nature” (Michelle, Interview Two, November 1999). And when I ask Diane the same question, she exclaims adamantly, “Growing urbanization. I’m sure of it!” (Interview Three, November 1999). Diane continues with a description of how much growth the city has experienced in the twenty-six years she has lived here. She expresses a profound sense of loss in the following lament:

...I see it and I see this (green space on the edge of the city borders) being swallowed up daily, you know, earth movers coming in and scraping off the topsoil and stacking the topsoil up and being down to clay. And all of this is disappearing and I think people like me and probably like you, too, see that happening and think, “We’re robbing our children of experiences—that they should have something like we had. Because we grew up when it was a kinder gentler place and there were places where children could play (Diane, Interview Three, November 1999).
As she continues, she complains that children today are constantly being “bombarded with information from satellites...that now we get so much information so fast.” She feels that naturalizing the schoolyard gives the children a “taste of what it was like,” or “what it could be like if it were a perfect world, which it isn’t” (Diane, Interview Three, November 1999). She explains:

Because in that park there is no television, there’s no CD player, there’s no telephone. There aren’t even any swings—it’s just totally natural stuff that you are going to go and play on, and find ways to invent your own games on. I’m sure that’s what it is (the trend towards naturalization). Because that’s how I feel anyway. I feel that we’re getting back a little piece of ground we can do these things with” (Diane, Interview Three, November 1999).

This longing to return to a kinder, gentler way of life is a somewhat idealistic notion as even Diane recognizes with the comment she makes about it not being a perfect world.

But when was it ever a perfect world, unless, of course, this is an indirect reference to the Biblical Garden. And even then, one needs to ask oneself how perfect such a world would be—a world without knowledge of good and evil, a world without freedom of choice?63 Nonetheless, both Michelle’s comments and Diane’s laments express a strong

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63 Interestingly, Milton’s Paradise Lost, a poem which tells the story of man’s ‘Fall’ and expulsion from the Garden, tackles the question of ‘knowledge’ and ‘freedom of choice’. Although, in this interpretation, Adam is portrayed as experiencing a profound sense of loss and grief after the Fall, the source of his grief is his separation from God, not his expulsion from the Garden. Milton expresses the view that the knowledge and freedom Adam obtains in the Fall offers him and future mankind the possibility of an inward paradise, suggesting that Adam’s fall was fortunate. The following passage is spoken by the Arch-angel Michael as he leads Adam towards the gates of Eden:

To whom thus also th’ Angel last repli’d:
This having learnt, thou hast attain’d the sum
Of wisdom: hope is no higher, though all the Stars
Thou knew’st by name, and all th’ethereal Powers,
All secrets of the deep, all nature’s works,
Or works of God in Heav’n, Air, Earth, or Sea,
And all the riches of this World enjoy’dst,
And all the rule, one Empire; only add
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith,
Add Virtue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,
desire to preserve something that is rapidly disappearing—nature, or at least the common conception of it. Nabhan and Trimble (1994) provide some very concrete examples of how urbanization and television are eroding the relationship between children and their natural surroundings. However, I feel that before I proceed any further with this line of inquiry, it is necessary to take up what is meant by the term ‘nature’ in this thesis.

Throughout this thesis, I have used the terms ‘nature’ and ‘natural’ with the assumption that the reader and I have a commonly held understanding of what these words mean and what they represent. For example, these terms appear in the following passage from the Calgary Zoo’s handout on the benefits of schoolyard naturalization. And although, as the passage suggests, these notions are often an abstraction, I have, and I would expect most adult English speakers have a general sense of what is meant when these terms are used in this way:

With Calgary’s population nearing a million, the “nature” that young people know is often an abstraction. If the natural world is a remote place “out there” and not in a child’s daily surroundings, it is unlikely to be understood, and ultimately, protected. By restoring native habitats, seeds of hope are sown reminding people that they can work together with natural systems (Calgary Zoological Society, Grounds For Change—Schoolyard Naturalization Project, 1999).

But what exactly does one mean by nature and the natural world? Throughout the course of this inquiry, I have become acutely aware that, as adults, we may have different

By name to come call’d Charity, the soul
Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath
To leave this Paradise, but shalt posses
A paradise within thee, happier far (Book XII: Lines 575-587).


64 This information hand-out on schoolyard naturalization can be obtained from the Calgary Zoological Society, P.O. Box 3036, Station B, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2M 4R8
conceptions of these notions based upon our own histories, belief systems and experiences and that, most certainly, the children share different understandings of these concepts based upon their own experiences of nature, or lack thereof. Thus, I would like to examine, briefly, several commonly held attitudes towards nature in Western Culture.

**DEFINING MOMENTS OF NATURE**

One of the more typical responses the children gave when asked what they would study or learn about in the park was, as one child puts it, “We’ll learn about nature a bit” (Mark, Grade One, Interview Three). Most of the children agreed that the park would be a good place to learn about nature because, for instance, “You can study about trees, or about mulch and plants” (Dylan, Grade Two, Interview One). Only one child disagreed, again Hillary, because, likening the park to a cultured flower garden, she explains emphatically. “There’s no nature. All there is, is trees, flowers and mulch!” (Hillary, Grade Two, Interview Two). Given these responses, I was prompted to ask the children to describe nature—what they think it is like. The typical response was that nature is something “out there” and something that isn’t “man-made”. Moreover, their descriptions of nature generally included some aspect of wildlife:

- It’s like where there’s like no traffic, no buildings, no houses. It’s just like trees, plants, dirt, forest (Dylan, Grade Two, Interview Two).

- Nature means things that isn’t plastic. Nature is, um, frogs and plants (Hillary, Grade Two, Interview Two).

- Nature is in the forest. cause there’s owls in the forest and there’s squirrels and raccoons (Regan, Kindergarten, Interview One, May 1999).

- Jungles, seas, fields, woods (Stephen and Hillary, Grade Two, Interview Two).
It's like plants and all the animals and stuff that can grow, um, in like a tropical place (Mark, Grade One, Interview Three, May 1999).

Interestingly, Jackie’s description of nature is similar to the children’s (Interview Two, June 1999). However, she draws an important distinction between nature as we encounter it in the city and “wilderness”. As we see in the following passage, her experiences of nature in the wilderness are invaluable to her, so much so, they have made her who she is:

I had so much of it as a child and it’s made me who I am. It’s the most important thing about me. And it’s the most vivid memories I have and my connection to all the things about the wilderness and being in the wild is the most important thing in my life next to my children...Whenever I get a holiday...we go out in the canoe and go as far as we can get and live with the wolves and the bears right around us, and otters... (Jackie, Interview Two, June 1999).

As we continue with this conversation, Jackie explains that she wants the children “to be able to be with nature, and that the park is important,” but that is “very naive to think that this park is actually wilderness” (Interview Two, June 1999). She provides a rich description of the nature in her “wild and crazy yard”, complete with squirrels and birds, and overgrown bushes and trees, but remarks, “I still have to go to the wilderness...I have to get out of the city!” (Jackie, Interview two, June 1999).

The children’s visions of nature also suggest a strong association with the wilderness, especially as Jackie has described it. So, where do people get this attitude that nature is “out there”, that nature is some sort of autonomous realm? As theorist, Gary Alan Fine (1992) puts it. “The claim that there exists an autonomous realm of nature is taught by parents from infancy and bolstered by the ideology of schooling and children’s books. We learn to treat natural settings different than cultural settings. Those realms that are (or appear) unsusceptible to human shaping have been lumped into the
category of nature” (p. 161). In his essay, “Wild Life: Authenticity and the Human Experience of ‘Natural Places’”. Fine examines the sources of our attitudes towards nature and argues that nature is a social construction—that is the natural world does not actually exist as a separate reality, but that human beings treat it as an “authentic” reality, separate from culture, and, so it is separate from culture. “Most people,” says Fine (1992). “believe cognitively and feel in their ‘gut’ that nature and culture are different kinds of things, separate realms” (p. 157). Fine (1992) continues. “People attempt to make sense of the world of nature not in its own terms but as an extension of human society. Culture is a template to understand the environment...all meaning is generated through social interaction, not through the qualities inherent in the objects themselves” (p. 162). Basically, I agree with the claim that many of our attitudes towards nature are learned: but, does it explain those incredible rare moments one now and again finds oneself in? Once when I was scuba diving off the shore of Gabriola Island, I experienced one of these rare moments. I was about 30ft below the surface of the water when I heard a strange whistling sound. I was accompanying two student divers, so I checked their tanks for leakage. Their equipment appeared fine, but the whistling sound was growing stronger. All of a sudden, I noticed that there was an enormous quantity of fish life swimming past us into the reef at our side. The water was becoming murkier. I didn’t know what was happening. Alarmed, I signaled to the students to go up. We surfaced about 25ft from the shoreline and found ourselves in the middle of a pod of killer whales. It could have been moments, it might have been years, time stood still, water bursting in large sprays over us out of the spouts of the whales, calves leaping all around us into the air. We couldn’t swim, but somehow the force of the waves pushed us in the direction of
the beach. When we were almost to the beach a huge black fin suddenly appeared about
10ft away and then it jumped straight up into the air, the largest sea creature I had ever
seen. It was the killer whale bull. Smash! It came down—we were thrown violently
onto the beach, equipment and all. I tore off my gear and ran to the top of a hill next to
the beach. As I stood there in awe, I counted over forty killer whales. The feeling one
experiences in such moments strikes to the heart of our being. I believe this distinction
between nature and culture is a primordial distinction between “us” and “not-us”, a
distinction that many theorists⁶⁵ believe is inherent in being human and then located in
human thought. This us or not-us distinction is often recognized and most powerfully
experienced in a space we have come to call nature.

Nonetheless, Fine’s (1992) essay is helpful, because in it he outlines three common
historical visions of nature: the imperial vision, the protectionist vision, and the organic
vision. Aspects of these visions are expressed in the interviews with my participants.
The imperial vision is a “preenvironmentalist” view which “sees a sharp differentiation
between culture and nature, suggesting that nature is to be used for human purposes”
(Fine, 1992, p. 157). Fine (1992) notes that this view was popular at the turn of the
century when humans felt they had the “right to dominate nature and to make choices as
to its place and boundaries” (p. 157).

Popular today are the protectionist and organic visions which offer more
environmental perspectives. In the protectionist vision Fine (1992) argues that, “nature is

⁶⁵ Gary Alan Fine (1992) makes several references to theorist Levi-Strauss (1962) The Savage Mind in his
discussion of human subjectivity (p. 161). Also, Jacques Lacan writes about the conception of the “Mirror
Toronto: University of Toronto Press. pp. 71-76
a special realm—authentic and uncontaminated, fundamentally distinct from a built environment. Such a view holds that nature is a preserve that humans could easily spoil” (p. 158). Furthermore, this view holds that human activity differs from the activities of other creatures. For example, the human dam has a different moral valuation than a beaver dam; this attitude, explains Fine (1992) may be based on the fact that “human activities are more complex (depending on a greater array of tools)” (p. 158).

The organic vision differs in that it denies human beings are separate from nature (Fine, 1992, p. 158). Proponents of this view hold that humans have just as much right to build a dam as the beaver. “each is operating on the basis of genetic and material capabilities and on some sense of what is in its interest” (Fine, 1992, p. 159). The organic view maintains, however, that although we live in a community of equals, some classes within this community experience powerlessness. Fine (1992) explains “Rights are structured to protect the powerless while demanding that the powerful mitigate the full extent of their control. On the surface, humans have extensive power to alter nature, but the powerlessness of nature with regard to human expansiveness is a moral virtue. From the standpoint of the human actors, nature is among the ‘oppressed’” (p. 159). In other words, this view likens environmental movements that protect nature to social movements that “question the established power structure on behalf of minorities, women, children, and animals” (Fine, 1992, p. 159). I have taken some effort to outline these different perspectives of nature in detail because, as I have already mentioned, there is evidence of those visions of nature expressed in the interviews.

For example, in a taped conversation I had one evening (May 1999) with my husband about his involvement in the park project, we got into a discussion about what
‘nature’ was and what ‘natural’ was. To my surprise, he expressed the view that humans are not a part of nature:

> See, we have too much power now. We aren’t part of the food chain anymore. We aren’t part of the system; we’re running the system. We are no longer natural at least we don’t see ourselves as natural...we’re different right? We break the rules. We say if you want to go to space, fine, put him in a space suit. There’s us and everything else. Our intelligence, our consciousness separates us from the world (Shaun, May 1999).

As we continued the conversation, it became perfectly clear that we do not share the same view on this subject (Shaun, Taped Conversation, May 1999):

**Shaun:** We view anything we build as not natural.

**Me:** Why? When the kids saw the otters at the zoo changing their environment, moving the rocks on their heads from one side to another to change their environment, how is that any different than humans changing their environments to suit them?

**Shaun:** When we talk about Stonehenge or the Pyramids, you know, these things that seem impossible to build. These things use all kinds of techniques like levers, fulcrums, inclines, pulley systems, mathematical things, all kinds of things that are unnatural.

**Me:** What about a bee? A bee hive? Can’t get much more sophisticated than that?

**Shaun:** No, it’s the tool use thing. It’s all about tools. We can do things beyond us, like beyond our physical capabilities; now we can move mountains.

The reason I have reproduced excerpts from our conversation is because my husband and I have spent much time in wilderness parks and after fifteen years of being together it never occurred to me that we might have different conceptions of nature; the topic just never came up. And this is the point. One cannot assume that just because people live in the same geographical surroundings and have a similar cultural grounding, that they have the same understanding of the notions ‘nature’ and ‘natural’. One could easily attribute Shaun’s understanding of nature to his educational background in science
and perhaps mine to my background in English Literature. But that would be an oversimplification. Our attitudes about nature, apparently, are formed much earlier in life. Imagine my surprise the very next day when I interviewed two kindergarten children, my daughter, Sarah, and her classmate, Heather, to find them wrestling, in their own way, with the same metaphysical questions about what is real in terms of nature:

Me: I want to ask you a question. Can you tell me what nature is?
Both: Um, um it's...
Me: Oh, hold on Sarah, Heather is going to tell me first.
Heather: It's, um, it's all plants, all bugs, and all trees, and all everything is part of nature except for people. They are just grown by other people.
Me: People aren't a part of nature?
Heather: Yeah. Nature thinks that we are very nice to other people, and we are nice to other people.
Me: Okay Sarah, what do you think nature is?
Sarah: Well, we are nature too because we grow like plants so big and strong.
Heather: Big like a truck?
Me: So you think people are a part of nature?
Sarah: Yes, we are!
Heather: Yeah. Well maybe we are a part of nature but...
Sarah: The same, but not as the rocks, but we are the same. We grow so tall...
Heather: Well, we're nature because nature loves God and God loves nature because...
Sarah: God is nature!
Heather: I know, I know. But I'm telling Susan, and then God just made people because he didn't want the dinosaurs...(this goes on with a long discussion about dinosaurs and the creation myth, the gist of which is if God hadn't created man, the dinosaurs would have destroyed all the land and there would not be any nature, there wouldn't be anything). (Heather and Sarah, Kindergarten, Interview Two).
It was a fairly heated debate for a couple of five-year-olds. Heather believes humans are not a part of nature. She introduces spirituality to the conversation, equating man with God and personifying nature as the Other (perhaps mother nature, Gaia). A frustrated Sarah tries to argue that humans are a part of nature and that God and nature are one. These, of course, are the huge philosophical and theological questions of scholar activity. Indeed, when I told Jackie about this conversation and the conversation I had with Shaun, she expressed her belief that humans are a part of nature, but that we have "this meta-cognitive way of thinking that we separate ourselves from it" (Jackie. Interview Two. June 1999). "But," she explains. "I don’t think it has to be. I think we have chosen to separate and I think it has to do with religion and the way religion and philosophy have evolved...So I think that we may perceive it that way, but many people around the world don’t" (Jackie. Interview Two. June 1999). Diane also feels we are part of nature but as human beings we hold the power of destruction within our hands and, therefore, we have the responsibility to take care of the environment:

So we have this control, but we also have this responsibility because we do have all this knowledge we have a responsibility to not tip the balance, to not do those things even though we are capable of doing them. But if we are to survive, if our children are to survive, we have a responsibility not to...(Diane. Interview Two. June 1999).

It wouldn’t be difficult to classify these views as organic or protectionist, but it really is not necessary to do so. These terms just helped me to recognize that people do have different attitudes towards nature and helped me to understand a little more about these attitudes and how these attitudes make the park a contested space. The point I am trying to make is that when people talk about nature, or teach about nature, or construct a space where children can learn about and experience nature, they really need to be aware
that each and every one of us has a slightly or perhaps enormously different understanding of what nature is. This fact became all the more apparent to me when I asked the children if the park was a good place to learn about the ‘natural’ environment. Most of the children did not even understand the term used in this verbal sense. As Hillary expressed, “I don’t even know what natural means?” (Grade Two, Interview Two). Those of us who have been involved in this project often refer to natural habitats, natural surroundings, and the natural world. The term used in this way has come to mean genuine, authentic and pure, not man-made or artificial (Fine 1992, Hillman 1985). This understanding of what constitutes natural, of course, has also been reached through mediated experience. Only two children were able to explain the term natural, and each of them defined it as something that occurs habitually. In other words, something that is natural is “normal.”

Natural means that there would be mostly a school, cars, houses, playgrounds, people (Christina, Grade Two, Interview Two).

Something that is usually happening, like we usually go to school—that’s natural. I usually walk our dog—that’s natural (Stephen, Grade Two, Interview Two).

As one can see, nature is not necessarily natural. Going to school, walking the dog, playing video games, watching TV, these are natural activities to children growing up in an urban setting because, of course, the city, if one is to use their definition of the term, is their natural environment. To some of these children it may seem perfectly unnatural to have a park in their playground. And again I refer to the comment Hillary made. “We don’t usually build a park, do we?” (Grade Two, Interview Two). But perhaps this is the whole point of building the park and the purpose of schoolyard naturalization projects—to familiarize children with versions of nature, whatever that odd construct is, so it will
be natural to them. And again I am reminded of Jackie’s words. “I think it’s unbelievably important to give our children a sense of who they are in nature. They don’t have it and it’s natural to them. But if they don’t get the experience, how can they develop it? How can it be nurtured?” (Interview Two. June 1999).

THE INFLUENCE OF TELEVISION

*If nature is conceived as objectively pure, without subjective artifice, genuine and therefore the one remaining place where truth, beauty, and goodness abide, then what is here becomes desolate, uncultivated, waste—exactly what was meant by the ancient idea of wilderness, the place of Cain and the scapegoat.*

*James Hillman, “Natural Beauty without Nature”*

As Hillman (1985) suggests, if nature is seen as the ultimate good, then culture is seen as the ultimate evil. And as I have already mentioned, urbanization is considered one of the greatest influences concerning our evolving relationship with nature. As Moore (1986b) notes, the children he interviewed felt a sense of helplessness and resignation towards increasing urbanization:

Chris remarked that “all the places I like to play are disappearing...the camps...the old houses...the ponds up the Brickers.” He seemed acutely

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66 In *Emile*, Rousseau (1956) makes a distinction between original nature and nature that is only habit (p. 12). He argues that humans have an original nature that is altered by habit and that when “the habit vanishes the [original] nature reasserts itself” (p. 12). He gives the example of a plant that has been forced away from the upright direction. He says, “When set free, the plant retains the bent forced upon it; but the sap has not changed its first direction and any new growth the plant makes returns to the vertical. It is the same with human inclinations.” (p. 12). Rousseau’s experiment in *Emile* is to educate a man in his original nature. Rousseau’s comments are interesting because basically he is saying that habit is natural but it is not (original) nature. So, using Rousseau’s definition, perhaps what Jackie is saying is that nature (i.e. wilderness) is a part of a child’s original nature, but unless the child gains experience of it, it will not be natural (habit) to him. Rousseau’s chapter entitled, “Infancy”, explores the notions of ‘nature’ and ‘natural’ in great depth. See *The Emile of Jean Jacques Rousseau* William Boyd (Ed.). New York: Bureau of Publications, Columbia University
aware of what was happening literally before his eyes. His attitude conveyed resigned acceptance of the all-powerful "they," who were taking his territory "piece by piece" (p. 226).

But perhaps more than anything else, technology, especially information technology and specifically television, is perceived by many today as the virtual Serpent in the modern Garden. In the chapter entitled "Children in Touch, Creatures in Story," Gary Paul Nabhan (1994) examines the serious extent to which television has broken off the relationship between indigenous children and their natural surroundings. For example, he explains how several Inuit communities in the north of Canada are no longer able to hunt as their ancestors did and one of the reasons for this is because of a vision impairment brought on by "staring at books and TV sets":

In certain Inuit communities, the impairment to vision known as myopia became commonplace within the first generation exposed to books and audiovisual media in the schools. Inuit children were seldom diagnosed for myopia earlier in this century, even though it is now suspected that they have a genetic predisposition to this eye condition. And yet, when Inuit children took to staring at books and TV sets, myopia increased to affect more than half of school-age children. No longer exercising their eyesight to read the rich and subtle landscapes of the north country, they did not receive the visual stimuli required to fully develop their eyes during the critical stages in their early development...Today's Inuit children may not only have less access to the wild animals which sustained their forbears; they may actually be losing their very ability to see them (p. 89).

Nabhan (1994) conducted his own study where he interviewed children of rural indigenous communities in the South Western United States who lived in or near wild places. He found that in this region, too, children who had once gained knowledge of the land from ancient stories and songs passed down from their elders now turn to the television as their main source of information about the natural environment:

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67 Nabhan does not give the exact names of these Inuit communities in his essay.
The vast majority of the children we interviewed were now gaining most of their knowledge about other organisms vicariously. The trends were staggering: 77 percent of the Mexican kids, 61 percent of the Anglo, 60 percent of the Yaqui, and 35 percent of the O'odham kids felt they had seen more animals on television and in movies than they had personally seen in the wild. These local trends mirror results from a 1992 survey of fifth and sixth graders in the United States, in which 53 percent of the children listed the media as their primary teacher about the environment...Roughly half the children we interviewed felt that they now learn more about the desert flora and wildlife from books than from their elders. But Alvron, a Mexican boy from a small Arizona town, epitomizes the modern dilemma. When asked whether his family or his books were the primary source of what he knew about animals, his answer was immediate: “Neither. The Discover Channel!” (p. 88)

The combined loss of hands-on experience with nature, proximity to what could be considered ‘wilderness’, and traditional intergenerational story-telling has had a devastating affect on indigenous communities such as the O’odham. The consequences of which, suggests Nabhan (1994), are even more dire:

The very plants and animals upon which the O’odham once depended are now increasingly out of sight and out of mind...If fables about animals are forgotten, it does not necessarily follow that the animals themselves cease to exist. Nevertheless, as floral and faunal narratives play less of a role in keeping us alert to the fate of other biota, we are more likely to let their existence slip through our fingers without ever noticing this loss (p. 97).

In other words, without the words to talk about nature, without opportunities to see it, feel it, and be in it, it may cease to exist.

I am reminded of a passage from Bruce Chatwin’s (1987) *The Songlines* where the author is in conversation with his friend and companion, Wendy, an ethnobotanist:

She had never had any training in linguistics. Yet her work on the dictionary had given her an interest in the myth of Babel. Why, when Aboriginal life had been so uniform, had there been 200 languages in Australia? Could you really explain this in terms of tribalism or isolation? Surely not! She was beginning to wonder whether language itself
might not relate to the distribution of the human species over the land.

'Sometimes,' she said, 'I'll ask Old Stephen to name a plant and he'll answer "No name", meaning, "The plant doesn't grow in my country."'

She'd then look for an informant who had, as a child, lived where the plant grew—and find it did have a name after all.

The 'dry heart' of Australia, she said, was a jigsaw of microclimates, of different minerals in the soil and different plants and animals. A man raised in one part of the desert would know its flora and fauna backwards. He knew which plant attracted game. He knew his water. He knew where there were tubers underground. In other words, by naming all the 'things' in his territory, he could always count on survival.

'But if you took him blindfold to another country,' she said, 'he might end up lost and starving.'

'Because he'd lost his bearings?'

'Yes.'

'You're saying that man "makes" his territory by naming the "things" in it?'

'Yes, I am!' Her face lit up.

'So the basis for a universal language can never have existed?'

'Yes. Yes.'

Wendy said that, even today, when an Aboriginal mother notices the first stirrings of speech in her child, she lets it handle the 'things' of that particular country: leaves, fruit, insects and so forth.

The child, at its mother's breast, will toy with the 'thing', talk to it, test its teeth on it, learn its name, repeat its name—and finally chuck it aside.

'We give our children guns and computer games,' Wendy said. 'They gave their children the land.'

— Bruce Chatwin. *The Songlines*

The landscape and the language are the same
And we ourselves are language and are land.

— Conrad Aiken, in *The Ecology of Imagination*
The teachers and I discussed how television as a technological mediation of experience is impacting the school children's lives. The teachers talked about how children are viewing too much violence on television and are often exposed to inappropriate adult content in television programming:

I think a lot of children are having to grow up pretty fast. it seems like. And. you know. TV being one factor contributing to that because of the fact that—I think sometimes the content of what is in programming that's geared for children is set at a very adult level or adult tone. For example. on Saturday. I watched a few cartoons on TV and there were things mentioned about scientific experiments and mutations and things like that. But the humor. like the dialogue. and what they were expecting the children to know and learn from that seemed to be very much at an adult level. Not to say that children cannot handle certain things that we perceive to be. you know. typically adult. but I think that we're kind of pushing these children to think about the world in very strange ways instead of being more natural to what they would be more inclined to think about (Michelle. Interview Two. November 1999).

...It breaks my heart when I hear that children are watching R-rated movies. We're stealing—their childhoods are being stolen from them. You know. they're being forced to grow up so much faster than they ever did (Diane. Interview Three. November 1999).

All this over stimulation of hours and hours and hours of second rate television! (Jackie. Interview Three. November 1999).

As discussed earlier in this chapter. theorist Alan Fine (1992) argues that nature is a socially constructed concept. Similarly. there are a number of theorists who argue that childhood. like nature. is a social construction. Most notable amongst these theorists is Phillipe Aries (1962). In his book. *Centuries of Childhood*. Aries provides a historical account of the invention of childhood. which he believes emerged from the medieval period and became firmly embraced in human thought during the seventeenth and

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eighteenth centuries. Indeed, the period from which many of our romanticized notions about nature also originate. Contemporary theorist Neil Postman (1982), *The Disappearance of Childhood*, expands on Aries’ theory of constructed childhood arguing that the stage in life between infancy and the onset of puberty, commonly known as childhood, is now rapidly disappearing. Postman’s culprit is television. I will briefly outline some of the key points of Aries’ and Postman’s theories as they relate to this inquiry. Aries (1962) explains how during the medieval period in Europe, there were two distinct and recognized stages in human development—infancy, which ended at approximately seven years old, and adulthood (p. 128). The reason for this, as Aries (1962) explains, was largely due to the fact that medieval civilization practiced an oral tradition and had no concept of our understanding of education (p. 411). Thus, once a child had reached seven years old, and had full command of the language, there was nothing to differentiate him from being an adult. At seven, children were removed from the care of their mothers, grandmothers, or nannies and “went straight into the great community of men, sharing in the work and play of their companions, old and young alike (Aries. 1962, p. 411). One of the marked features of this medieval world was that all information and knowledge was public knowledge. There were no secrets between the

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The Romantic Movement took place in Britain and Europe roughly between 1770 and 1848. The works of Coleridge (*Lyrical Ballads, 1798*), Wordsworth (*Prelude, 1798-99*), Rousseau (*Julie, ou la nouvelle Heloise, 1761*), the poetry of Blake, Byron, Shelley and Keats, and later the novels of the Bronte sisters mark this period. The works of these writers express a violent reaction against enlightenment philosophy and industrialization. According to contemporary writer, Margaret Drabble, the Romantics “virtually invented certain landscapes—the Lakes, the Alps, the bays of Italy...They had a new intuition for the primal power of the wild landscape and the spiritual correspondence between man and nature” (Drabble, 1985, p. 842). They discussed dreams, the process of creativity, and ‘the dynamic nature of the imagination’. Remembered childhood, along with unrequited love and the exiled hero were constant themes (Drabble, 1985, *The Oxford Companion To English Literature*), pp. 842-843. One of the most famous works of the Romantic Period, which explores the themes and connections between childhood, nature, and the imagination, is Wordsworth’s autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*. 
young and the old. It was impossible for the concept of childhood, or for that matter, the concept of the modern family to exist in such a public sphere. Aries (1962), in a passage describing typical medieval marriage practices and living arrangements, explains:

Life in the past, until the seventeenth century, was lived in the public... The traditional ceremonies which accompanied marriage and which were regarded as more important than the religious ceremonies (which for a long time were entirely lacking in solemnity), the blessing of the marriage bed; the visit paid by the guests to the newly married couple when they were already in bed; the rowdyism during the wedding night, and so on—afford proof of the society's rights over the privacy of the couple. What objection could there be when in fact privacy scarcely ever existed, when people lived on top of one another, masters and servants, children and adults, in houses open at all hours to the indiscretion of callers? The density of society left no room for the family (p. 405).

In such a medieval society, notions of childhood innocence and shame simply did not exist. Indeed, some of the language and behavior exchanged between what we would consider children and the adults of that society would be shocking to people today. For example, Aries (1962) describes how it would not be uncommon for the young and the old to speak of sexual practices openly or to fondle each other's private parts:

The respect due to children was then [in the sixteenth century] completely unknown. Everything was permitted in their presence: coarse language, scabrous action and situations; they had heard everything and seen everything... The practice of playing with children's privy parts formed part of a widespread tradition (p. 103).

Aries (1962) writes that towards the end of the sixteenth century and primarily in the seventeenth century there was a revival in the idea of formal education (p. 411). He uses the term, "Moralists", to describe churchmen, lawyers, and scholars who fought passionately against the "anarchy" of medieval society and began to recognize the importance of educating the young (Aries, 1962, p. 411). Religious orders founded at

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"Moralists" likely refers to churchmen, lawyers, and scholars who fought passionately against the "anarchy" of medieval society and began to recognize the importance of educating the young (Aries, 1962, p. 411). Religious orders founded at
that time, such as the Jesuits and the Oratorians, became teaching orders. "and their teaching." says Aries (1962), "was no longer addressed to adults like that of the preachers or mendicants of the Middle Ages, but was essentially meant for children" (p. 412).

These moralists taught parents that they were "the spiritual guardians, that they were responsible before God for the souls, and indeed the bodies too, of their children" (p. 412). This new interest parents took in their children led to the widespread development of schools in the seventeenth century and a new desire for privacy which culminated in the creation of the modern family. Aries (1962) explains that "the modern family satisfied a desire for privacy and also a craving for identity: the members of the family were united by feeling, habit, and their way of life. They shrank from the promiscuity imposed by the old sociability" (p. 413). Moreover, with the arrival of the printing press, and a wide availability of printed text, a boundary was introduced that would eventually allow for the emergence of childhood, a boundary between those who could read and those who could not. Postman (1982) summarizes these events as follows:

What happened, simply, was that Literate man had been created. And in his coming, he left behind the children. For in the medieval world neither the young nor the old could read, and their business was in the here and now, in the 'immediate and local,'...That is why there had been no need for the idea of childhood, for everyone shared the same information environment and therefore lived in the same social and intellectual world. But as the printing press played out its hand it became obvious that a new kind of adulthood had been invented. From print onward, adulthood had to be earned. It became symbolic, not a biological achievement. From print onward, the young would have to become adults, and they would have to do it by learning to read, by entering the world of typography. And in order to accomplish that they would require education. Therefore European civilization reinvented schools. And by doing so, it made childhood a necessity (p. 36).
Needless to say, with the arrival of this new text culture grounded in the mass production of the written word, it became possible to keep the secrets of adults’ lives from children. Postman (1982) writes:

...as the concept of childhood developed, society began to collect a rich content of secrets to be kept from the young: secrets about sexual relations, but also about money, about violence, about illness, about death, about social relations. There even developed language secrets—that is, a store of words not to be spoken in the presence of children...by restricting children to book learning, by subjecting them to the psychology of the book learner and the supervision of schoolmasters and parents, print closed off the world of everyday affairs with which the young had been so familiar in the Middle Ages. Eventually, knowledge of these cultural secrets became one of the distinguishing characteristics of adulthood, so that, until recent times, one of the important differences between the child and the adult has been that adults were in possession of information that was not considered suitable for children to know (p. 49).

It should now be, hopefully, clear to the reader where I am going with this present line of thinking. Essentially, the printed text named and then closed off the private world of adults to children: the invention of television as mediated text in the twentieth century may have re-opened it! As Postman (1982) notes, “In the Middle Ages there were no children because there existed no means for adults to know exclusive information. In the Age of Gutenburg, such a means developed. In the Age of television, it is dissolved” (p. 85). “The six-year-old and the sixty-year-old,” says Postman (1982), “are equally qualified to experience what television has to offer. Television, in this sense, is the consummate egalitarian medium of communication, surpassing oral language itself. For in speaking we may whisper so that the children will not hear. Or we may use words they may not understand. But television cannot whisper, and its pictures are both concrete and explanatory. The children see everything it shows” (p. 84). Postman, in the concluding chapters of his book, attempts to convince his reader that television is eroding
the dividing line between adulthood and childhood and indeed may actually be causing
the disappearance of childhood altogether. and of course, as it would stand to reason, the
disappearance of adulthood as it is currently known.

Now, by no means is Postman, nor am I, suggesting that childhood, as a biological
reality, is disappearing. I am not even sure if it is disappearing as a construct. What I am
sure of, if I am interpreting Postman correctly, is that the idea of childhood innocence is
currently under threat. To put it another way, without secrets, without the separation
between what is public and what is private can the concept of childhood survive? I
believe this question not only forms the subtext of my thesis. it may, in fact, lie at the
heart of this work. Everything I have discovered during the course of this inquiry would
lead me to believe that what is at stake as adults and children move into the 21st century is
the defining features of childhood itself.

Riverstone Park, in this inquiry, is about conceptions of childhood as a special time
and a special place. This inquiry is about a place where children are relatively free to
play. a place of personal and communal discovery, and a place of endless imaginary
possibilities. The park space described here does provide the necessary privacy for
children to develop a strong sense of selfhood. And, as I have written. private space and
the withholding of adult knowledge and experience are essential components in the
preservation of this conception of childhood. The problem parents and teachers face
today, however, is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to withhold information, any
information, from children. It might be a stretch to say that children today have lost
much of their childhood innocence. But the fact cannot be ignored that they are exposed
to a wide selection of media—especially the television and the Internet. Also, children
live in a time where the image is the dominant mode of communication. A mode of communication children seem to understand implicitly and are beginning to manipulate all too well. As I have already noted, in the medieval period, the dividing line between infancy and adulthood was at the age of approximately seven when the child had gained mastery of spoken language. If the dominant mode of communication today in Western culture is image based, then the language spoken by children and adults is the same and, as Postman (1982) has suggested, the line between childhood and adulthood all but disappears.

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I described how today's children are being brought up in very adult controlled environments. This hyper-vigilant control of children, I believe, not only reflects an adult desire to protect or safeguard children from the dangers of an adult world, it also may reflect a societal need to cherish and protect something that is currently under threat—childhood. Indeed, the two desires are the same. And, of course, much the same can be said of the natural environment. The ever increasing number of movements to protect the environment and the current trend to educate the young about the natural world reveal a public perception that nature, at least a conception of it, is under threat. And although it was not clear to me at the onset of this inquiry, the correlation between the ideas of nature and childhood seem all the more apparent if not obvious. This connection between the concept of childhood and the concept of the natural world does not go unnoticed by theorist Robin Moore (1986b), who also comments on the situation as it exists today. He writes, "Child abuse and environmental abuse are evidently different sides of the same 'bad' coin" (Moore, 1986b, p. 233). I believe, implicitly, that Riverstone Park and perhaps this trend towards naturalization in
school yards reveal a strong desire by many educators to uphold and perhaps even an attempt to preserve these two concepts—nature and childhood.
CHAPTER FIVE
GATHERING

In the introduction, I described how it was difficult for me to begin this inquiry. Needless to say, I am now finding it difficult to know how to end it. Fortunately, the end, in some sense, has been predetermined by the nature of the work and, indeed, nature itself. With the arrival of Winter 1999, Riverstone Park lay to rest blanketed under a protective layer of snow. And, I ended the active portion of my research at the school with the completion of my third interview session with the teachers. Since then, I have continued my research while writing. Indeed, I have experienced how the two are inseparable. There are, of course, and always will be, more things that can be said about the meaning of the park as a new space that has been created in the schoolyard. There are also many ideas and issues explored in this thesis that could be expanded upon. However, I feel the time has come to reflect upon the meaning and the significance of Riverstone Park as it has been laid out by this thesis’ participants.

The title of this concluding chapter is “Gathering”. Its meaning is twofold. In one sense the title means to gather around, as in a gathering. Students, teachers, and parents have literally gathered together in a space in the schoolyard to construct a park. And also, the participants, myself as the writer, and the readers of this thesis, have gathered, metaphorically speaking, around a schoolyard space in order to discover and explore its multiple meanings. Now, as I continue to write, I must gather, indeed re-collect the various strands of meaning, in the sense that one must gather the fruits of one’s labor. Thus, at this point, if I were to sum up what the park means or represents, I would likely
respond. "It is an in-between space." And by this I would mean this park is a space where the children can experience both the inner world of self and the outer communal world. And I believe this experience of between-ness is critical to the growth and development of children because Edith Cobb (1959, 1977) reminds us that children between the ages of approximately five and eleven are not only physically, but are psychologically "poised halfway between inner and outer worlds." (Nabhan and Trimble, 1994, p.28).

What follows is a summary of the ways in which meaning and significance is revealed as the park is understood by the participants and myself as an in-between space—a space between inside and outside, private and public, safe and unsafe, reality and fantasy, childhood and adulthood, nature and culture, and the future and the past.

The Park as In-between Space

From the very onset, in this inquiry, there has existed a tension between what the children consider inside and outside space to be. In the most literal sense, Riverstone Park is constructed in a space that is outside, indeed, out-of-doors. However, the addition of a rock wall surrounding the park with several openings in it, suggests that the park is a space that one must enter into, and that upon entering, one will be 'inside' the park. As I have already noted several times in this thesis. Heidegger (1977) defines space as that which has been freed within a boundary. Perhaps then, all space, whether that space is outdoors or even as the preposition 'in' suggests in the expression 'in outer-space', exists as a kind of inside space. Certainly, the children who participated in this inquiry were very clear about defining this park space in terms of in/out—the park walls create a boundary to keep children in, and to keep others, such as intruders, or in the one case,
insects. Thus, in this sense, the park is also an in-between space—a space between what is safe and what is not. And again, I return to the writings of Heidegger (1977) who claims that human beings dwell or exist in order to ‘cherish’, ‘protect’, ‘preserve’, and ‘safeguard’ space. However, I also stressed that children today are growing up within very adult imposed and adult controlled boundaries. This creates the perception, as Teitel (1999) writes, that children today do not have as much freedom to explore and to play as they once did. And, I offered the example of the little girl in kindergarten who believes that the fence surrounding the Bird Sanctuary is to keep the baby birds inside and safe while Mama and Papa birds are away. The walls surrounding Riverstone Park, seen in this light, reflect the children’s desire or perhaps more of a need to feel safe inside protective walls.

At the same time, the park is ‘unsafe’. The children are still outside and, therefore, exposed. The children, as I wrote, imagined that there might be bats, or scorpions, or insects crawling up from under the ground. This creates a sense of risk and danger that both terrifies and thrills the children. And as one teacher, Diane, emphasized, it is this sense of the unknown, the possibility that the park is unsafe, which excites the children and makes human beings feel alive.

The tension between inside/outside can perhaps be best understood, particularly in terms of this inquiry, as a tension between the inner/outer and private/public worlds of a child.

In Chapter Two, I wrote of how the imagined caves were very important to the children because they would provide a place where the children could rest and be alone—a peaceful place. I have discovered, in the course of this inquiry, that the experience of
alone-ness and privacy are critical in a child developing an inner sense of self. Both Langeveld (1983) and Arendt (1968) argue that privacy, alone-ness, and even darkness are, in fact, necessary conditions for not only human beings, but all living things to grow and thrive. As Langeveld (1983) writes, it is only in ‘standing apart from others’ that a child will experience growing self-awareness.

I learned, too, how exposure to a wide range of wildlife plays an important role in the development of a child’s inner self. Wildlife, especially a young child’s hands-on interaction with wildlife, is crucial to the formation of self-identity and the recognition of otherness—a distinction between ‘us’ and ‘not us’—the basic mode of differentiation. One reason these imagined animals are so important to young children is because they regard these creatures, as they regard all things, as living, thinking subjects. Piaget (1929) and Bettelheim (1977) write about how animalistic thinking is a part of a young child’s innate egocentricity. In other words, children treat these small creatures as extensions of themselves. And it is for this reason, writes Bettelheim (1977), children desire animal companions in their constructed play worlds. Finally, as Wilson (1984) and Nabhan (1994) write, wildlife not only helps children to recognize otherness, it helps them to recognize and understand the otherness within themselves—their own inner wild sides.

Riverstone Park is also understood by the participants and realized as a creative play space. Creative play spaces foster the imagination which is also essential in forming self-identity and a child’s inner self. I learn from Bettelheim (1977) that when children play fantasy games or read fairytales they identify with the figure of the isolated hero. These heroes usually encounter and overcome a number of obstacles in the course of their
journeys. The obstacles are often figured as evil characters or dangerous creatures—as in the example I noted where two boys I saw playing in the park identified themselves as the ‘good guys’ and the evil characters as the ‘bad guys’. Bettelheim (1977) explains that these evil figures or the ‘bad guys’ give form to a child’s inner monsters enabling him to cope with and overcome his own inner conflicts. This is an important step in a child achieving true independence and maturity. Bettelheim also writes that the kingdom in such stories represents the achievement of selfhood. Thus, in this sense, the park can be understood as a representation of a child’s journey towards and the achievement of selfhood. As the teachers in this inquiry pointed out, the children own that space. It is their kingdom. Figuratively speaking, with the rocks walls, the imagined flags, guards, and so on. Thus, the park is a space in-between the real world and imagined worlds. Both Chukovsky (1968) and Bettelheim (1977) also note that the imaginings of children help them to distinguish between these two worlds—between reality and fantasy. And when the children gave fantastical accounts of the park, they were engaging in a kind of self-deception in order to demonstrate their knowledge of things real in the world. Indeed, the fact that some of the structures that were so important to the children, such as the caves and ponds, were realized as miniatures and that the children actually began to construct imaginary play worlds reveals that the park is a bridge between what is real and what is not—external reality, a child’s outer world, and fantasy, a child’s inner world.

I have also written that the notions of inside/outside and a child’s inner/outer selves are very much related to conceptions of what is private and public. I reiterate, children need privacy in order to mature and become responsible adults. The teachers even recognized the need for children to have some time alone when they remarked that for
some of the children it is difficult for them to do their work in a crowded classroom and that these children feel more at ease in the park environment—away from others. Reading Arendt's (1968) work helped me to understand that one concern with modern educational systems and perhaps society as a whole, is that many children are thrust from infancy into a kind of public existence first in daycare's and then in schools, where they are removed from an adult community. Arendt wrote in the 1960's and Nabhan (1994) writes more recently that there are more and more children who cannot survive in this kind system and, as a result, are seeking out less desirable alternatives. Aries (1962) and Postman (1982), on the other hand, explain that childhood, as a concept, came into being as a result of children being removed from the adult public life of the medieval world and being placed into classrooms. Postman (1982), moreover, asserts that today's children also need to be isolated from an adult public world if childhood, as we have come to know it, shall survive. A similar dilemma exists with the concept of childhood freedom. Children need freedom in order to be children, but if given this freedom, they are exposed to a public world via television and the Internet, which in turn denies children the experience of childhood. These tensions, even conflicts, between the private and public worlds of a child, outlined in this manner, seem irresolvable, as perhaps they are in such an in-between place. However, the situation with Community School and Riverstone Park is different and not quite so bleak. Indeed, I believe, Riverstone Park provides the opportunity for the children to experience both private and public worlds in a very positive way.

I record that building Riverstone Park is a major community event which gives the children the opportunity to experience a more public world, allowing them to develop a
communal sense of self. In fact, in building the park a new kind of community is established, where children are not abandoned to the scrutiny of their peers, but rather are invited back into the world to work side by side with adults according to each his own ability. And in this case, I do not believe as Postman (1982) does, that we are returning to a fourteenth century situation where children acted as apprentices and were treated as miniature adults, where the line between what constitutes a child and what constitutes an adult is blurred. Instead, I see a community of adults, including teachers, parents, grandparents, and other community members, whose primary concern is the well being of childhood and this is expressed in their respect for each child's individuality and in their willingness and patience to give the children the freedom to play, to explore, and to make their own discoveries—freedom that is crucial to each child's personal development.

The park is also located both literally and metaphorically somewhere in-between nature and culture. In a literal sense, it is not out in the forest or in the Rocky Mountains, in quiet solitude, untouched by human hands. Nor is it inside a classroom, a library, an office, a shopping centre, or in a place bombarded with media. The park is neither here nor there, yet it could be if imagined so by the children. In all senses it is in-between nature and culture or, indeed, in another imagined place altogether. The park will continue to exist and can only exist as the children imagine it to be so. When the children play, learn, and teach in the park, they find themselves lost between constructions—nature/culture, childhood/adulthood, private/public, and inside/outside. The park is a pedagogic invitation for the children to construct their own meaningful path—a bridge between being this or that, here or there.
I believe, the most important discovery I have made in the course of this inquiry, is that the park is experienced as a place between future possibility and memory of the past. Even though the children play and learn in the park right now, it is imagined, even spoken of, as a place about tomorrow or back then. Edith Cobb (1959.1977) writes that the driving force in human creativity stems from the memory of childhood experience of the natural world—memory that taps into a child’s basic biological striving towards some undetermined future. If this is true, and both Cobb’s own work and the imaginings and memories of the participants in this inquiry provide ample evidence that would suggest it is, we not only owe it to our children to provide them with as many opportunities to experience nature, we owe it to ourselves as members of the human species.

Cultivating Space

In writing and re-writing the chapters of the thesis, the chapter headings have taken on a greater and new significance. The terms ‘sowing’, ‘germination’, ‘sprouting’, ‘tending’, and ‘gathering’ belong to horticulture—“The art of garden cultivation.” And the word cultivation, from the verb to cultivate, is derived from the Latin cultivare and the French cultus and colere to till, take care of. When I began writing this thesis, I considered using the idea of cultivation as a metaphor for this work. Indeed, as I began writing about the construction of Riverstone Park, I was reminded of an expression from Voltaire’s (1959), Candide: “...we must cultivate our garden” (p. 120). The tale of Candide is Voltaire’s most acrid and satirical attack on the regency and the ecclesiastical establishments of his time. In the story, the protagonist, Candide, sets out from his home

in search of the ‘best of all possible worlds’. In short, he comes into contact with theorists and powerful noblemen and rejects their “idle” lifestyles in favor of an old farmer who has found happiness and a satisfactory livelihood in ‘cultivating the fruits of his garden’. The insight one gains from this tale is that cultivation has something to do with *doing* and *becoming* rather than something one simply seeks out or gains from others.

Nevertheless, I put this thought about cultivation aside and rejected the term because I did not want it to be taken to mean that children are being cultivated in the park, in the sense that children are “wild” and “imperfect” and are in want of cultivation. Cultivation defined this way means to improve and develop by education, to refine, to *culture*. There is something very crass and colonial in this eighteenth century definition of *cultivate* as one can see in this use of the term: *To cultivate the wild licentious savage with wisdom, discipline, and liberal arts.* There still exists this negative quality to the word ‘cultivate’. And, as I believe modern educators are in the occupation of teaching and learning, not in the business of growing and colonizing children, I put the term to rest—until now. The notion of cultivating now not only seems important enough to recall and to take-up, it is important enough to use in the title of this thesis.

This inquiry is about cultivating a space—a space in a schoolyard, a space for children and childhood, and a space for me to work these meanings out into the world. I wish to explore another meaning of the verb *to cultivate*. Derived from the French *cultus*.

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73 Ibid., p. 1247
74 Ibid., p. 1246.
it means to devote one’s attention to and to cherish. I was surprised to see the word *cherish* used in this definition mainly because the term cherish also appears earlier in this thesis in Heidegger’s (1977) definition of ‘to dwell’. I shall reiterate Heidegger’s words: “The old word bauen, which says that man is insofar as he dwells, this word bauen, however, also means at the same time to cherish, to protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine” (p. 349). Here one can see a very clear connection between the notions of building, dwelling and cultivating. It is this sense of the word, cultivate, I wish to explore further. The word that struck me and seems to connect these ideas together was ‘cherish’. Interestingly, cherish is derived from the Latin *cärus*—‘hold dear’, and means: protect or tend (child, plant) lovingly; value, hold dear, cling to. This word cherish, then, captures the meaning of many of the themes and ideas explored in this thesis. Not only does this term join together notions of child, nature, care and protection, the use of the verb to cling suggests that when one cherishes or cultivates something, one holds onto that thing case it disappears. That something, in this inquiry, is space—childhood’s space.

In order to get a more complete understanding of the term to cultivate, I had to first return to the writings of Gadamer (1989) in *Truth and Method* and then to the work of Edith Cobb (1977) in *The Ecology of the Imagination*. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1989) writes about how the term cultivate is intimately associated with the German concept of ‘Bildung’. I must outline the multiple meanings of Bildung; for it is also this sense of the term cultivate, I hope to capture. First of all, Bildung does not mean

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76 Ibid., p. 158.
acquiring culture or refinement as in developing one's capacities or talents (Gadamer, 1989, p. 11). Bildung is about becoming—about formation—indeed, the ongoing formation of self. Gadamer writes, “the result of Bildung is not achieved in the manner of a technical construction, but grows out of an inner process of formation and cultivation, and therefore constantly remains in a state of continual Bildung” (p. 11). In other words, culture or cultivation is not something that can be sought after—something Candide learns in his travels—it has more to do with the continual formation of self—the ongoing process of becoming. In building Riverstone Park, indeed, in cultivating a space, children are being given room to experience this becoming. And although all human beings are always in the process of becoming, this fact is perhaps the most obvious during the time in middle-childhood.

Secondly, there is an element of between-ness in the concept of Bildung. Gadamer explains that Bildung involves a constant movement between self and other. Bildung is “learning to affirm what is different from oneself” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 14). It is a kind of movement where every individual reaches outside himself to learn the language, customs, and institutions of his people and then returns to himself to make them his own (Gadamer, 1989, p. 14). This idea of Bildung or cultivation then, has a sense of community in it. It is always about losing oneself amongst others and finding oneself again. And as I have emphasized over and over again, the park is a space where the children can experience this movement between self and other and between private and public worlds. It is for this reason using the term to cultivate becomes more appropriate and relevant.
But as I learn from Gadamer, cultivation, in terms of Bildung, has even more relevance to this inquiry. Gadamer (1989) notes the importance of forgetting and recalling in the process of Bildung (p.15). It is this quality of Bildung I wish to emphasize because it relates to the writings of Edith Cobb. Gadamer (1989) writes:

*Memory must be formed* (my italics); for memory is not memory of anything and everything...Only by forgetting does the mind have the possibility of total renewal the capacity to see everything with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fuses with new into a many leveled unity (p. 16).

Only in forgetting is there the possibility of renewal and, as Cobb (1977) would argue, the possibility to re-new creativity. The word cultivate then, not only possesses a receptivity to otherness, it embraces a sense of preservation and a sense of the past. Cultivation understood in terms of Bildung is a very useful term. It encompasses the process of formation and of becoming, the movement between inner and outer worlds, and it even involves the process of recollection—memory of the past. Seeing as I have already gathered and sorted through the meanings of the park in the first section of this chapter. I need not go over them again—except to stress, that the children, teachers, and parents are literally cultivating a space in the schoolyard, in the horticultural sense. But more importantly, a space is also being cultivated by children for children who are always in the process of becoming.

Finally. I feel that I must return to Edith Cobb (1977) who stresses that in recognizing this human need to cultivate, to nurture, to cherish, the creative urge in a child to become and, later in an adult, the desire to recall, “We are close to the biology of thought itself—close, in fact, to the ecology of imagination, in which the energies of the body and the mind as a unit, an ecosystem, and the energies of nature combine in a
natural endeavor to adopt to nature, to culture, and to the societies devised by man to embody culture” (Cobb, 1977, p. 109).

Ultimately, this unity of body and thought, nature and culture, described by Cobb, can only be achieved by first recognizing and then providing children with opportunities to actively explore and manipulate natural environments and to engage and participate in the experience of world-making—formation.

The common-plus-cosmic sense of the beginnings of the child’s thought establishes a basic need for outer expression of the power to model and mold his environment. This can be achieved through cooperation and mutual relations with his total environment, in which learning, imagination, and the process of evolution will be geared to one another in the child’s personal development. If cultural attitudes could be shifted toward a recognition of human desire to exercise a compassionate intelligence, not only as a tool and method but also as the chief human survival function, we would, I believe, find ourselves capitalizing on the human impulse to nurture, cultivate, and extend this vast potential (Edith Cobb, 1977, p. 111).

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

My main purpose in conducting this inquiry has been to illuminate the significance and meaning of Riverstone Park as experienced by my participants. If reading this thesis has in any way increased awareness and understanding of what this space, or for that matter, outdoor spaces in general, represent to young children and to teachers or parents, I feel as if I have accomplished my goal. It was not my intention to conduct an inquiry or to write a document with a proposed set of actions as its outcome. Nevertheless, I feel that Robin Moore’s (1986b) *Childhood’s Domain*, and Gary Paul Nabhan and Stephen Trimble’s (1994) *The Geography of Childhood*, do outline a number of useful suggestions and policy recommendations that could enhance children’s experiences of
outdoor environments and that are applicable or adaptable to most school's situations. The work of these authors, taken up by this thesis, may be of some interest to my participants or others interested or involved in schoolyard naturalization projects.

As I have written, factors such as growing urbanization and increased access to media including television, video games and the internet are having a direct impact on children's relationships with natural environments. Nabhan (1994), in the course of his research, identifies three strategies for "staving of the extinction of experience," (p. 97) as he puts it: "an intimate involvement with plants and animals: direct exposure to a variety of wild animals carrying out their routine behaviors in natural habitats; and teaching by community elders (indigenous or otherwise) about their knowledge of the local biota" (p. 97). As Nabhan (1994) emphasizes, some of these activities are easy for schools to carry out, others are not. It is my belief that these activities are already being carried out, or could be, in Community School. Naturalizing the schoolyard almost instantly gives the children access to plants and wildlife, even if that wildlife consists mainly of birds, rodents and insects. As I have learned, interaction with this kind of wildlife, even in an inner city schoolyard, provides the kind of "hands-on" experience Nabhan (1994) is referring to—the opportunity for children to dig in the dirt and to touch bugs in order to gain an understanding of the environment, of otherness, and of themselves.

Nabhan (1994) also emphasizes the importance of intergenerational storytelling. At Community School there is a grandparent reading program which is both extremely beneficial and well loved by the children in grades one to three. Some of the grandparents who read in the program were students themselves at the school some fifty odd years ago. These grandparents remember planting the enormous poplars that
surround the borders of the schoolyard and have shared these memories with the students. There are many ways volunteers in the community can share stories or information with the children at the school. For example, there are numerous stories and fables, written about nature and wildlife. Inviting local authors to the school to read their works is a way to pass on these stories and to preserve local traditions. Intergenerational storytelling is not only important because it creates a bridge between the past, the present and the future, it is important because this kind of activity is another way to involve the community in the park project and as Moore (1986b) explains, community involvement is necessary if changes to the space are going to continue to be accepted (p. 236).

Robin Moore (1986b) offers several excellent suggestions on the design of children's outdoor spaces. And although my particular inquiry has focused specifically on the space in the schoolyard, Moore argues that "nothing less than the whole urban environment should be under consideration" including, "multi-use community spaces, habitats around the home, commercial areas; and above all, neighborhood streets" (p. 237). The results of Moore's (1986b) study tell us that more than anything else children need private places and places to freely explore and manipulate the environment:

Children also need private places where they can escape to do what they please: places around the home, in the corner of parks, in abandoned structures and on wasteland. Ways must be found to accommodate the necessity for children to physically manipulate the environment. Places are needed where stuff can be picked up, thrown about, gathered, jumped on, eaten, kicked, rolled on, climbed into, broken down, dug up, burnt and taken away without causing offense. Such actions can be interpreted either as expressions of autonomy and proprietorship, or as malicious vandalism. The difference is sometimes obvious and sometimes subtle. If places where physical manipulation can legitimately occur continue to be

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77 The results of Robin Moore's (1986b) study are detailed in Tables on pp. 273-285 of Childhood's Domain (London: Croom Helm).
removed, manipulation will happen in less appropriate places, where the resulting damage will not be so readily tolerated (p. 237).

Educators and those involved in schoolyard naturalization projects need to carefully consider what Moore is actually saying. And again, I emphasize that he is, according to my research, the most widely recognized authority to date on the subject of children’s outdoor environments. He is saying that it is not by walking on carefully groomed paths of wilderness parks or places like the Bird Sanctuary that children are going to gain an awareness or long-lasting respect for nature. Indeed, children must wander off the path and touch the earth and the wildlife that dwells there. For encouraging a protectionist attitude in a child may, according to Moore (1986b), have an adverse affect as “a rich foundation of childhood experience is more likely to produce environmentally sensitive adults, who, in turn, are more likely to support conservation in the future” (p. 240). If one of the purposes of schoolyard naturalization is to create environmentally conscious adults as the following remark by this teacher suggests, “Later on when the children branch off and they become adults and responsible citizens of our city, they may because of that connection (to the park) be more inclined to have a deeper understanding or a deeper need to preserve some of the nature that is in our city or surrounding our city.” (Michelle, Interview Two, November 1999) then educators and project planners need to consider Moore’s recommendations seriously.

According to Moore (1986b), when building an outdoor space for children, designers should pay attention to the following details, all of which, I believe, the school in this study has. He recommends that a wide variety of vegetation should be used. Hedges and thickets and sturdy plants, shrubs and trees can be used to define spaces and to accommodate hide-and-seek and wildlife exploration (p. 237). There should be a
range of styles from 'rough' to 'manicured'. Again, rough ground might simply be a large pile of soil for the children to dig in. He strongly recommends this approach because he found that the behavior of children in rough ground areas "indicated much active use, but little willful damage. "A diverse environment." writes Moore (1986b). "Offers so many possibilities for positive activity that a desire to 'break the place up' never enters consideration" (p. 244). Structures that will act as strong visual markers should also be incorporated into the design to ensure that sharp visual identity is built into the environment to help children make connections between landscape and memory. "Identity, differentiation and diversity must be created by design and management to give a lasting sense of place. Otherwise there can be no stimulation, no use, no memory" (Moore, 1986b, p. 245). And as Edith Cobb (1959, 1977) writes, without childhood memory of natural environments, there can be no genius, no creativity. In order to attract wildlife, grass should be left unmown, trees should be left unpruned, and aquatic environments need to be created. Again, I realize there has been concern about incorporating a pond into the schoolyard, but Moore (1986b) explains the necessity:

The creation of aquatic environments such as ponds and marshes is a particularly important aspect of urban wildlife management. Through careful design, there is no reason why children's needs for exploration and interaction with such environments cannot be accommodated effectively. Fishing for minnows and larger fry is a classic childhood pastime—not to mention feeding ducks. The aim should not be to create protected 'nature reserves' with special entry requirements, this would defeat the purpose; but to work with the children, to improve habitat conditions throughout the city, wherever suitable opportunities arise (p. 246).

Lastly, Moore (1986b) stresses a point that is, undoubtedly, the reason behind the success of Riverstone Park—that children must be involved and participate in the planning and building of their own outdoor learning and play environments: "The only
way that special childhood places can be identified and conserved, and not forever tidied up...is through children’s genuine participation in the planning process” (p. 252).

I would just like to make one final comment about curriculum designed for outdoor environments. When I began this inquiry I had hoped that I would have the opportunity to look at curriculum for outdoor environments. My research did not take me in this direction. This is likely because the park has not been there long enough for this curriculum to be implemented. I think it is essential that the planners and teachers continue to look closely at how this space is being utilized by the children. Ultimately, this will determine what kind of teaching and learning goes on in that space. And, it might mean that pencils and paper will have to be left behind.

One can never know what possibilities exist until you go out with the children and look at what is actually important to them (Moore. 1986b. p. 240).

AFTERWORD

It has been exactly a year now since I conducted my first interviews with the children and teachers at Community School.78 Right now, the teachers, students and parents are preparing for the construction of Phase Two of Riverstone Park—The Prairie Patch. At a planning session, I attended two months ago, the group of children I was with described how they would like there to be a maze made of tall, wild grasses that they could hide in and a teepee and more rocks, bigger ones. Since then, I have learned that there will not be an actual teepee, probably for the same reason there are not any enclosed caves, but there will be an open teepee ring, and as I have learned this is all that is

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78 I began this inquiry April 1999. It is now May 2000
needed. and perhaps it is even better, because the structures the children imagine, no matter what their size, are always much grander than anything the project planners can actually build. The school is already facing new obstacles as the funding grant it applied for has been delayed and the construction date will have to be pushed back several weeks. Nonetheless, the project planners are optimistic that they will get the Prairie Patch in before the end of the school year.

The trees and shrubs that were planted last Spring are just beginning to leaf out for the first time, and the park is beginning to take on a bushier appearance. Everyday I see children playing in the park, skipping along the rocks, climbing on the logs, and running amongst the shrubs. And for the first time, my daughter has worn the knees from a pair of jeans and has scrapes on her knees from climbing on the rocks—a sure sign of a child at play.

With the arrival of Spring, I am feeling a certain urgency to finish this thesis and get back outdoors with my children and my two Labrador Retriever puppies to explore the unexplored. I have never had a dog, and interestingly, puppies like young children are interested in everything below knee level. I am also becoming more attentive to the kinds of restrictions and boundaries I place on my children outdoors and am beginning to notice the many boundaries my children and their friends impose upon themselves.

Finally, I am eager to get back to the school and to volunteering in my children’s classrooms. As well, I am looking forward to my continued involvement in The Riverstone Park Project. I believe, the knowledge I have acquired in the course of this inquiry will certainly serve me well in any future involvement with the park.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


I imagine sitting outside in Stone Park and doing my writing. I also wish that I could lay on a rock and dream. — Claire, Grade Two
APPENDIX B: Riverstone Park Phase One Diagram
APPENDIX C: Riverstone Park Phase Two: Prairie Garden

KEY: □ Rock  ▪ Conifer □ Deciduous  Mulch  Prairie Plants

Path  Wildflowers