



## COPYRIGHT AND USE OF THIS THESIS

This thesis must be used in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Reproduction of material protected by copyright may be an infringement of copyright and copyright owners may be entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.

Section 51 (2) of the Copyright Act permits an authorized officer of a university library or archives to provide a copy (by communication or otherwise) of an unpublished thesis kept in the library or archives, to a person who satisfies the authorized officer that he or she requires the reproduction for the purposes of research or study.

The Copyright Act grants the creator of a work a number of moral rights, specifically the right of attribution, the right against false attribution and the right of integrity.

You may infringe the author's moral rights if you:

- fail to acknowledge the author of this thesis if you quote sections from the work
- attribute this thesis to another author
- subject this thesis to derogatory treatment which may prejudice the author's reputation

For further information contact the University's Director of Copyright Services

[sydney.edu.au/copyright](https://sydney.edu.au/copyright)

**Parents' perceptions of risk and the influence on children's everyday activities**

Anita Nelson Niehues

Supervisor: Professor Anita Bundy

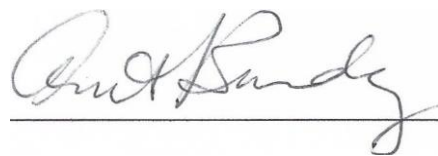
A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
Doctor of Philosophy

Discipline of Occupational Therapy  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
The University of Sydney

March, 2014

## SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Parents' perceptions of risk and the influence on children's everyday activities" submitted by Anita Nelson Niehues in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Occupational Therapy) is in a form ready for examination.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Anita Bundy", is written over a horizontal line.

Professor Anita Bundy

Discipline of Occupational Therapy

Faculty of Health Sciences

University of Sydney

March 2014

## CANDIDATE'S CERTIFICATE

I, Anita Nelson Niehues, hereby declare that the work contained within this thesis is my own and has not been submitted to any other university or institution as a part or a whole requirement for any higher degree.

*Anita Nelson Niehues*

---

Date: September, 2014

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my mother Harriett Anne Adams Nelson, a risk taker who demonstrated resilience in the face of the many uncertainties of her life. She taught me to persevere and look for the best in each person and every situation. She would have loved this Australian adventure I've been on and I thank her for her constant love and support.

Thanks to the strong women, Maurie George, Doris Neubauer, Nellie Stables, Dorothy Anne Penner, Joy Hammel, Deb Walens, Cheryl Kopecky, Lydia Larrabee, Martha Elafros, Debbie McGraw, Deb Walters and M.A.S., and the kindhearted men, S.R. Nelson, Kermit Petersen, Dale Allard, Bill Clark, Rob Kopecky, Hal Henrikson, Gerard Sullivan and Phillips Lau for their abilities to listen, encourage, and help me manage the practicalities of everyday life with joy and laughter.

I thank Peggy Short, Ph.D. for her organization and professional expertise in copy editing and formatting this thesis.

Thank you to the people of Pitt Street Uniting Church in Sydney for being a very caring community of believers.

The Participation in Everyday Life (PIEL) research group has offered a challenging environment for learning and reflection, problem-solving and celebration. Many members of this group have made my thesis journey meaningful and exciting: Elaine Tam, library liaison for the Discipline of Occupational Therapy, thank you for your expertise, cheerfulness and dedication to your work; Reinie Cordier, Nicola Hancock, Justin Scanlan, Yu-Wei Chen and Sara Wilkes-Gillan, thank you for your questions, rigor in research, kindness and good humour.

Special thanks to Jennie Brentnall, Glenda Jessup, Jo Ragen and Kim Bulkeley; you have become family as we've traveled the Ph.D. path together. Each of

you has introduced me to an aspect of the natural beauty of Australia, the Blue Mountains and Jenolan Caves, Coogee Beach and Manly Beach, the native trees, plants and wildlife and the generous hearts of the Australian people as we have attempted to balance our work with play. I thank you for your steadfast support, friendship, love and playfulness. What an adventure!

I thank Lynette Mackenzie, Lindy Clemson and family, You-Lin Hsieh, Steve Park and Ginny Deal for sharing stories, encouragement and opportunities to laugh and play. Also, thanks to fellow “gingers”, P.J., Sophie and Flinder, and also to that lovely boy, Riker!

I appreciate the fantastic members of The Sydney Playground Project research team, especially Anita Bundy, principal investigator, co-investigators Paul Tranter, Shirley Wyver, and Geraldine Naughton, Project Director Lina Engelen, Senior Research Associate Jo Ragen, and research assistants, Glenda Jessup and Gabi Perry and the health sciences students. It was a pleasure to work with a team that collaborated so well to conduct and publish excellent research for the benefit of children, families and educators.

I thank Anne Honey for her time and effort “in the interest of research” to host my pilot risk reframing session in a charming setting with parents, researchers and children who helped me practice the process. This group first piqued my interest in learning more about parents’ perceptions of risk.

Special thanks to my associate supervisor, Alex Broom, for assistance with methodology, writing style and delivery of qualitative research findings, for asking *very good* questions, and for checking my tendency to get up on a soapbox! And, Paul Tranter, my second associate supervisor, thank you for your suggestions of relevant research for risk reframing and for guiding me toward greater complexity in

my work. The question, “I wonder if . . .?” often helped me expand and strengthen the paper I was completing. Thank you for promoting joy and wonder in learning and in the beauty of the natural world.

Anita Bundy, words cannot convey my gratitude for this opportunity to work with you as my primary supervisor. (Perhaps a pink bubble machine will do?) My amazing Australian adventure started with you saying, “If you’re going to do a doctorate, why don’t you consider coming to the University of Sydney?” Little did I know when I risked saying, “Why not?” the twists and turns my life would take. My risk tolerance has increased immeasurably since I made the decision to study in Australia! Thank you for sharing your many gifts so generously. You are a “wise practitioner”, an excellent researcher, educator, author and human being. I continue to strive to approach the high bar you set. Observing your courage to teach, I have seen and benefited from your ability to lead by example and bring out the very best in each of your students, especially those of us called “non-standard” for whatever reason. By using each person’s strengths to frame the process, you offer exactly what is necessary to keep us on the journey resulting in thesis completion. Thank you for persevering with me, fostering ordinary magic, broadening and building positive appraisals, and offering autonomy support to help me make choices to achieve my best work in this doctoral research. I am forever grateful for your presence in my life.

And finally, I am so blessed to have a family that has supported my decision to take the risk to return to school for a doctoral degree and move from America to Australia to follow the dream. Each of you has made sacrifices for this goal, offering encouragement in the ways you could, transcribing, reading drafts again and again, listening, asking questions like, “What’s your elevator pitch?” and “Are you motivated telically or paratelically?” Thank you for focusing on all the positive

opportunities this choice brought to our family: travel, playful adventures and joy in the times we did have together. Zac and René, Katie and Paul, you are true blessings. I thank you for being the bright, capable, loving, and resilient people you are and I appreciate the way you are raising your children, Bennett and Joshua, two more stars in my universe! I look forward to spending much more time with you all!

David, you are my best friend. You are likely the most resilient person of all. Thank you for every encouraging word, each challenge we met together, each cup of coffee you brought to keep me going. Thank you for being there when I struggled with *so many* things, telling me, “You can do this!” Thank you not only for encouraging me, but for taking the challenge yourself to come along to Australia, start another career and participate in this adventure meaningfully. Thank you for being my life partner and we will continue to learn and grow together, right, Mate? Cheers!



## Abstract

Parents say they just want their children to be happy but there is evidence and growing concern across disciplines that children in Western countries are experiencing *unhappiness* (e.g., anxiety, depression) in increasing numbers. In a society that is increasingly risk-averse, parents' perceptions of risk can have an impact on the everyday activities they offer children. The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a detailed understanding of parents' perceptions of risk gathered from 47 parents and teachers. Some of the children they discussed were typically developing; others lived with disability. I asked the adults about their perceptions of risk and the frames they used for viewing it: as a barrier to or a catalyst for developing practical skills to achieve health, happiness and well-being and resilience.

Participants' narratives were subjected to constant comparative analysis using an adaptation of Charmaz's approach to social analysis and Packer's perspectives on qualitative methods of analysis.

The first two chapters of this thesis comprise an introduction and an extended review of literature related to happiness and well-being. These are followed by two journal articles (Chapters 3 and 4) that include detailed accounts of (a) parents' perceptions of everyday risks, the costs and benefits, and (b) their struggles and the strategies they used to offer children age-appropriate risk taking opportunities. Risk reframing is described in a third journal article (Chapter 5) as a process used to help educators and parents shift their perspective of everyday risk as danger and threat to one of challenge, uncertainty and opportunity by helping them to disrupt their automatic protective responses. I conclude (Chapter 6) by discussing the costs and

benefits of offering children opportunities for age-appropriate risk taking to achieve common goals for children: health, happiness and well-being and resilience.

## CONTENTS

SUPERVISOR’S CERTIFICATE .....	ii
CANDIDATE’S CERTIFICATE.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	x
LIST OF ACRONYMS .....	xiii

### Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background.....	1
Drawn into Risk Reframing .....	1
Risk in the playground.....	2
Resilience: Ordinary magic or adaptation.....	4
Framing risk in children’s lives .....	6
Planning the Study .....	8
Significance of the Study .....	10
Aims of the Study .....	10
Overview of the Thesis .....	11
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	12
The Context .....	12
Definitions and Theories of Happiness and Well-being.....	14
Defining Well-being from Hedonic and Eudaimonic Traditions .....	15
Hedonic Happiness, Subjective Well-being, and Emotions... ..	16
The emotions of happiness and well-being.....	18
The positivity ratio.....	22
Building happiness and well-being.....	25
Timing, commitment and choice .....	26
Positive psychology interventions.....	27
Person-activity “fit” .....	28
Eudaimonia and the Life Well-lived .....	30
Linking eudaimonia and self-determination theory.....	32
Core elements of happiness and well-being.....	34
New Contributions to the Understanding of Happiness.....	35
Framing, Understanding and Building Young Children’s Happiness and Well-being.....	38
Conceptual frameworks underpinning children’s happiness.....	39
Children’s perceptions of happiness and well-being.....	41
Outdoor free play: risks, uncertainties, safety .....	46
Creating ordinary magic in school settings.....	49
Summary and Conclusion.....	57

3. JOURNAL ARTICLE .....	59
Parents' perceptions of risk and their desires for their children's well-being.....	60
Faculty of Health Sciences Publication Statement.....	60
Abstract.....	61
Introduction.....	62
Methods .....	65
Participants.....	65
Procedures.....	66
Analysis of naturalistic inquiry.....	67
Results.....	68
Nothing to fear but fear itself.....	68
Resilience in the face of fear.....	72
Risk as opportunity.....	75
Everyday risk taking: The benefits.....	81
Discussion .....	85
References .....	90
4. JOURNAL ARTICLE.....	96
Reframing healthy risk taking: The struggle to implement strategies that promote well-being in children of all abilities .....	96
Faculty of Health Sciences Publication Statement .....	97
Abstract.....	98
Introduction .....	99
Methods .....	101
Procedures.....	102
Analysis of naturalistic inquiry .....	103
Results .....	104
Controlling risk and taking time to reflect .....	107
Time, trust and taking a chance .....	111
Positive appraisals .....	112
A most difficult strategy: letting go .....	115
Discussion .....	119
Conclusion.....	122
References.....	123
5. JOURNAL ARTICLE .....	129
Everyday uncertainties: Reframing perceptions of risk in outdoor free play .....	130
Abstract .....	131
Faculty of Health Sciences Publication Statement .....	131
Introduction .....	132
Children's response to play .....	133
Adults' responses to risky play.....	134
Methods .....	137
Participants .....	138
Procedures .....	138
Data analysis .....	140

Results and Discussion .....	140
What do parents and educators want for children? .....	141
The first “Aha!” moments .....	141
Fears of negative evaluation .....	142
Ambiguities of risk .....	143
A context for responding to risk and uncertainty .....	143
References .....	147
6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .....	155
Overview of the Study .....	155
Parents’ Choices .....	156
Intentional Activities for Building Happiness, Well-being, and Resilience .....	157
Struggles and Strategies .....	157
Risk-Reframing: A Process for Constructing New Risk Frames.....	158
Conclusions .....	158
Implications for Occupational Therapy Practice .....	158
Limitations of the Study.....	159
Recommendations for Future Study .....	160
Personal Reflections on my PhD Journey.....	161
7. REFERENCES .....	162
8. APPENDIX 1--- Card Sort Attributes.....	174
9. APPENDIX 2—Questions used to initiate parent interviews.....	175
10. APPENDIX 3—Methodology .....	176

## ACRONYMS

ARACY	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
ASPECT	Autism Spectrum Australia
ATC	Ask the Children Report
BBTPE	Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions
DRM	Day Reconstruction Method
ESM	Experience Sampling Method
EHHI	Eudaimonic and Hedonic Happiness Investigation
HRQoL	Health Related Quality of Life
LKM	Loving Kindness Meditation
LS	Life Satisfaction
PANAS-C	Positive and Negative Affect Schedule - Children
PE	Personal Expressiveness
PERMA	Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement
PPIs	Positive Psychology Interventions
PQoL	Perceived Quality of Life
PWB	Psychological Well-being
QoL	Quality of Life
RTM	Reversal Theory of Motivation
SDT	Self Determination Theory
SEI	Student Engagement Instrument
SRCS	Self-Report Coping Scale
SPP	Sydney Playground Project
SWB	Subjective Well-being

VIA Values in Action Character Strengths

WHO World Health Organization

## CHAPTER 1

### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

“Risk has become a pervasive part of contemporary Western society” (Dennhardt & Rudman, 2012, p. 117). It is “a dynamic phenomenon that is constantly being cast and recast within the rhythms of everyday life” (Mythen & Walklate, 2006). No longer a neutral term or simply the probability of an occurrence, risk is now most often perceived as danger or threat, something to manage or defend against. Framed in this way, risk elicits fear, a negative emotion that prompts quick, automatic and protective responses, especially from parents whose first responsibility to young children is to protect them from harm and ensure their survival. When asked what they most want for their children, parents often say, “I just want them to be happy!” (Lyubomirsky, 2009; Seligman, 2008). Risk and happiness and well-being are connected in complex ways; and this research aims to shed light on how parents’ perceptions of risk influence the activities they offer children within the rhythms of everyday life and the ways in which these, in turn, may influence happiness and well-being.

#### **Drawn into Risk Reframing**

I am a parent, and I, too, want my family to be happy; as a wife, mother and grandmother of two young grandsons, I recognise the need for balancing the competing interests and responsibilities that family life demands. As an occupational therapist I know that everyday activities provide opportunities for building routines and shaping habits that support optimal functioning. Having worked with scores of young children living with disabilities and their families during my clinical practice in public schools, I have observed and collaborated with parents, teachers and healthcare



providers as, together, we endeavored to support children in meeting goals that enabled them to do activities they needed and wanted to do as happy, healthy, participating members of their families, schools and communities.

When I arrived in Australia, from America, I looked forward to continuing a study I had begun with my master's degree in occupational therapy. I conducted a small qualitative study with expert occupational therapists (OTs) practicing in public schools. I asked these OTs to reflect on their practice and share a story of a time they felt they had made a significant difference in the life of a student and why they thought this was so. Reframing (Schön, 1987) was one of the themes that emerged from this study (Niehues, Bundy, Mattingly, & Lawlor, 1991). These expert practitioners effected positive changes for children with disabilities by employing OT theories to frame children's problematic behaviours differently. For my master's research, I only interviewed practitioners. In my doctoral research I hoped to pursue the theme of reframing further, exploring it with special education teachers and parents as well as occupational therapists. However, an intriguing opportunity presented itself for me to study reframing in a different way.

### **Risk in the playground.**

The Sydney Playground Project (SPP) is a program of research into the benefits of children's outdoor free play (Bundy et al., 2011). Funding for this research from the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia (NHMRC) and the Australian Research Council (ARC) supported a postgraduate research scholarship for a student to participate as a member of the research team, and I was fortunate to be awarded this scholarship. Two interventions comprised the study: (1) a child-centered, novel playground intervention designed to increase children's physical activity and promote social interactions, and (2) an adult-centered

intervention intended to help parents and educators construct new frames for risk -- to shift the emphasis from danger and threat to uncertainty, opportunity and challenge. This intervention was designed to support the sustainability of the playground activities throughout the life of the research and beyond the length of the study (Bundy, et al., 2011). Teachers in a pilot study had expressed concern about the risks involved with the new playground materials consisting of loose parts and recycled materials with no particular play purpose (e.g., milk and bread crates; cardboard boxes; tyres) (Bundy et al., 2009). In the pilot research, the team included sessions with parents regarding the benefits of outdoor free play. They had planned to offer separate sessions for the teachers but their experiences taught them the importance of offering *joint* sessions with both parents and educators (teachers, administrators, playground supervisors) in the funded study. Together with the entire SPP team, I adapted the risk reframing intervention and facilitated a two-hour session in nine schools and one community agency (Niehues et al., 2013).

The risk reframing interventions brought me into contact with parents and teachers whose children were typically-developing (in contrast with children with disabilities, the population with which I was more familiar), working within the relatively familiar setting of primary schools. In that context, I pursued my study of the reflective process of reframing, specifically, risk reframing. In my previous research I found that when expert occupational therapy practitioners reframed children's difficulties for team members, adults were able to view children differently and devise strategies that led to more positive outcomes for children in school and at home. While facilitating risk reframing groups with parents and educators of children in the SPP and encouraging these adults to think differently about risk and explore the benefits of age-appropriate risk taking, I discovered the possibilities for research into

parents' and teachers' concerns regarding risk. I found the idea of risk in children's everyday lives fascinating and determined to learn more about parents' perceptions of risk and the impact these have on children's everyday activities. Parents' perceptions of risk and the influence of these on the development of happiness and fearlessness, qualities parents' desire for children (M. Diener & Lucas, 2004), were the focus of this study.

### **Resilience: Ordinary magic or adaptation to adversity?**

Masten (2001) described resilience as "ordinary magic," a capacity that is not exceptional but rather, one that *every* child can develop. Happiness is also an ordinary capacity that human beings possess. Researchers (Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway, 2009; Fredrickson, 2009; Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2011; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005) are demonstrating that positive emotions and happiness can be cultivated intentionally to prevent *unhappiness* from developing in the first place. When children engage in age-appropriate risk taking within everyday activities, such as outdoor free play, they have opportunities to build physical and social skills and develop resilience in relatively safe environments (e.g., school playgrounds). Both the sense of competence that proceeds from mastery and the resilience that develops out of minor defeats contribute to happiness and well-being. In short, children *need* age-appropriate risk taking activities in order to build skills (Gill, 2007; Madge & Barker, 2007; Sandseter & Kennair, 2011) and develop resilience. However, the opportunities children are offered for risk-taking depend on the way the adults in their lives perceive and frame risk.

Resilience is a complex concept that has a somewhat different meaning to parents who simply want children to be happy and resilient than to researchers and theorists who study resilience. In an editorial introducing a journal dedicated to current resilience research, Panter-Brick and Leckman (2013) offered a professional's definition of resilience: "the process of harnessing biological, psychosocial, structural, and cultural resources to sustain wellbeing" (p. 333). However, parents in the SPP risk reframing groups thought of resilience simply as the ability to bounce back from disappointment or minor injury and to persevere when a task is hard or takes practice to achieve. This conceptualization of resilience, captured in everyday language and experiences, is what they wanted for their children.

Fostering resilience requires parents, and society at large, to provide not only supports and resources but also age-appropriate challenges that encourage each individual to flourish in ways that are significant to the child, his or her family, and the community (Ungar, 2013). Risks (dangers, threats, uncertainties, opportunities and challenges) trigger a child's capacity to respond adaptively in the moment. Over time, as they engage in age-appropriate activities that offer "just right challenges" (e.g., those encountered when learning to walk or ride a bicycle), children accumulate a bank of adaptive responses and resources (Fredrickson, 2004; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Some challenges are to social and emotional development, (e.g., first overnight stay at a friend's house or negotiating disagreements without adults stepping in). The resilience that parents involved in the SPP sought for their children *depends on* taking age-appropriate risks. But, in practice, parents often sought to prevent their children from facing *any* risk, thereby

unintentionally and unknowingly interfering with the development of resilience.

### **Framing risk in children's lives.**

Like resilience, risk is also a complex concept with different meanings for different people. One way to understand risk is from theoretical perspectives. Drawing on a wide range of literature, Lupton (1999) described four perspectives (i.e., rhetorics) of risk: (1) technico-scientific, that is, risk as something outside of themselves that people learn to manage; (2) a perceived “risk society” (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990a) that emphasises the uncertainty that postmodernity has created in everyone’s lives; (3) a sociocultural view of risk and blame (Douglas, 1992); and (4) a view of risk shaped by Foucault’s concept of governmentality that places responsibility on individuals to care for themselves rather than relying on governmental resources. Lupton (1999) suggested that these rhetorics are based on risk as danger and threat.

Occupational scientists Dennhardt and Rudman (2012) suggested that occupational science researchers could use the rhetorics that Lupton (1999) described to frame their study of human beings, their everyday occupations and the environments within which they perform these occupations. In this study, I have been influenced by all of those rhetorics but particularly by technico-scientific belief that risk is a part of life.

Numerous researchers and theorists (Alaszewski & Coxon, 2008, 2009; Dennhardt & Rudman, 2012; Gardner, 2008; Lupton, 1999, 2006; Slovic, 2000) have suggested, in a technico-scientific way, that lay people tend to view risk as uncertainty (i.e., the worries and concerns that are part of the daily lives of their families and close others). However, Tversky and

Kahneman (1974) asserted that when people make decisions under conditions of uncertainty, they are more likely to protect against a loss than risk the uncertainty of a potentially positive gain. They employ biases and heuristics for responding to risk based on their experiences of risk, what they see and hear from their own parents, the media and those with whom they come into contact in their everyday lives. Their choices about children's risk taking may be based on perceptions of risk as danger and threat because these are the frames that are frequently the focus of media attention and daily conversations, (e.g., "What happened?", "What went wrong?", "Who's to blame?" and "How do we fix this?").

Kahneman (2011) suggested there are two systems of thinking, a quick automatic system that allows people to answer easy questions quickly and a second system that is slower and reserved for more complex questions. When something unexpected happens or goes wrong, people respond automatically, without much thought, just to manage the problem quickly. They want to keep their child safe. If adults slow down their responses to risk to engage in the process of making a conscious decision to frame risk more positively, they may ask more complex questions, "What can be learned here?" or, "What is the benefit to my children if they manage this uncertainty or challenge themselves?"

Lupton (2006; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003) suggested that the study of the risk experiences and perceptions of lay populations (e.g., parents, educators) might yield broadened understandings of risk, grounded in empirical data. New understandings of risk might emerge. Toward that end, Tulloch and Lupton (2003) interviewed 131 adults: 74 Australians and 60 Britons. They

used a semi-structured approach that encouraged participants to share what “risk” meant to them and to identify kinds of risks they chose to experience or avoid: the thrill or exhilaration of risky activities; feelings of competence associated with taking a chance; or, a sense of challenge and belonging that comes from participating in extreme sports. Risk offered pleasure, engagement, and the chance to participate in something larger than the routines of everyday life. Many of Tulloch’s and Lupton’s participants perceived risk taking as allowing them to be self-determining; that is, they experienced autonomy, competence and belonging -- basic psychological needs that Deci and Ryan (2008a, b) and Ryan, Huta and Deci (2008) asserted are necessary for well-being and a life well-lived.

Tulloch’s and Lupton’s (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003) research demonstrated that some people believe there are benefits to risk and voluntary risk taking. When people balance perceptions and experiences of risk as danger with those of risk as uncertainty, opportunity or challenge, they may broaden their perceptions to reframe risk as something positive. Risk may even be viewed as contributing to happiness and well-being, resilience and quality of life.

### **Planning the Study**

With happiness and well-being, risk and resilience in mind, I determined to conduct a naturalistic inquiry into parents’ perceptions of risk using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individual parents and teachers. I used a sample of convenience including parents whose children participated in the SPP, most of whom had been part of a risk reframing session, and educators of these children. Because I was curious as to whether the perceptions of risk might differ between parents of

children living with disabilities and parents of typically developing children, I also recruited 10 parents of children living with disabilities: five parents of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) whose children attended a school where the SPP playground materials were available; and five parents of young people living with physical disabilities who had participated in a study regarding advice they had been given about raising their children and adolescents. I used an informal interview guide to introduce the concept of risk as it had been defined in the risk reframing groups: an uncertain outcome of a decision or action (Andrew, 2003; Hillson & Murray-Webster, 2007). Using constant comparative analysis, I reached saturation long before I conducted interviews in each of the six intervention schools. That is, I gained no new insights and identified no new themes or categories of data as described by Strauss and Corbin (Bowen, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, I decided to offer the opportunity for parents and teachers to participate in an interview if they chose and accumulated 37 parent interviews and 10 teacher interviews.

I transcribed the first interviews and also used paid transcribers to create textual data, subjecting these to constant comparative analysis according to Broom's adaptation of Charmaz's approach to qualitative analysis (Broom, 2009; Kathy Charmaz, 1990). I adopted Packer's (Packer, 2011) view that large sections of transcripts reflect the rich stories and understandings that develop within the conversational interactions of the interviews.

After completing an initial 10 interviews with teachers and parents, I decided to limit additional interviews to parents. I also introduced a card sort that preceded each interview as a reflective activity that helped set the stage by asking parents to consider one of their children in particular and select the attributes they most wanted for that specific child as he or she grew up.



## **Significance of the Study**

Parents say they just want their children to be happy, but there is evidence and growing concern across disciplines (e.g., allied health, psychology, medicine, education) that children in Western countries are experiencing *unhappiness* (e.g., anxiety, depression) in increasing numbers (Eckersley, 2011; P. Gray, 2011). Burdette and Whitaker (2005) suggested that changes in children's opportunities for outdoor free play may be a factor in this trend. Decreased opportunities to play outdoors unsupervised likely reflect parents' increased concerns with risk. Therefore, in this study, I sought to gain an in-depth understanding of parents' perceptions of risk and reframe their perceptions to include risk as a facilitator of resilience, happiness and well-being.

## **Aims of the Study**

The aims of the study were to:

- (1) Develop a detailed understanding of parents' perceptions of risk;
- (2) Identify struggles parents experience and strategies they use to manage their own uncertainties in offering children access to age-appropriate risk taking in everyday activities such as free play; and
- (3) Contribute to the construction of risk as more than simply danger or threat to develop a more complex frame that includes uncertainty, opportunity and challenge.

## Overview of the Thesis

In CHAPTER 2, I present a comprehensive review of literature covering definitions and theories of happiness and well-being and the research that led to and proceeded from those theories, particularly in school settings.

The ensuing three chapters comprise journal articles that address the aims of the study. They are as follows:

CHAPTER 3: “Parents’ Perceptions of Risk and the Influence on Children’s Everyday Activities”, published in the *Journal of Child and Family Studies*.

CHAPTER 4: “Reframing Healthy Risk Taking: The Struggle to Implement Strategies that Promote Well-being in Children of All Abilities”, in revision for publication.

CHAPTER 5: “Everyday Uncertainties: reframing perceptions of risk in outdoor free play”, published in the *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*.

Finally, in CHAPTER 6, I present a general discussion of the findings, conclusions, implications for practice and future research and personal reflections.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

When parents are asked, “What do you want for your child?” their first response is often, “I just want them to be happy!” (M. Diener & Lucas, 2004; Lyubomirsky, 2009; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). Happiness and well-being are complex constructs and while parents want their children to be happy, they also want them to be safe and comfortable. Sometimes these desires come into conflict. Surprisingly, risk also contributes to children’s happiness and well-being as it is necessary to foster the resilience that is essential for well-being and happiness (M. Diener & Lucas, 2004).

Following a short section setting the context in policy and practice, I review literature in two main sections. These are entitled (1) definitions and theories of happiness and well-being; and (2) framing, understanding and building young children’s happiness and well-being. In the former, I discuss research that contributed, directly or indirectly, to the development of the theories. In the latter, I describe research in which the theories have been applied.

### **The Context**

Changes brought about by the modernization and globalisation of society are establishing new directions for building and sustaining children’s well-being. In the current climate, national and international organizations, researchers and educators are shifting from a focus on the problems that interfere with well-being to the identification of solutions to support health, happiness, well-being and resilience (Eckersley, 2006a, 2006b, 2011; Panter-Brick & Leckman, 2013; Seligman, et al., 2009). Ben-Arieh and Frønes, experts on international social indicators of child well-being, suggested “the

complexity of children's well-being produces a variety of perspectives, dimensions and a corresponding variety of indicators [creating] the need for a common ground of understanding" (2011, p. 461). Organizations including The World Health Organization (WHO), Child Trends, a non-profit research center in the U.S., and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) are among international, national and local agencies that seek to enhance children's well-being by supporting physical, psychological and social well-being and aspects of the environment beyond simple standards of living (Harding, 2001; The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion; WHO). The need for continuing research into positive indicators of children's well-being is supported by Child Trends (Lippman, Moore, & McIntosh, 2009). ARACY (2014) supports evidence-based programs and strategies to improve the wellbeing of children acknowledging the impact that complex, and interrelated social, environmental, economic, political and cultural factors have on children's well-being.

Noddings, an educator and academic, suggested that, "Happiness should be an aim of education, and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness" (2003). The new National Curriculum in Australia (Australian Curriculum, 2014) and the Common Core State Standards in the United States (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014) both emphasize the need for students to develop a broad range of personal and social skills in addition to academic skills, to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and support individual as well as collective well-being. For example, the Health and Physical Education strand of the new Australian National Curriculum is built on a strengths-based, preventative health

approach for developing students' well-being (McCuaig, Quennerstedt, & Macdonald, 2013).

Many researchers and agencies world-wide are in the process of determining interventions and strategies that enable children to be resilient and flourish (Eckersley, 2011; Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2009; Keyes, 2010a, 2010b; Panter-Brick & Leckman, 2013; Seligman, 2011; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013). While it is well known that positive phenomena contribute to happiness and well-being, mediate the impact of negative experiences and emotions, and build resilience (Aspinwall & Tedeschi, 2010; Fredrickson, 2004; Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000; Seligman, 2008; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, et al., 2009), there is less information about how to apply this knowledge in ways that enhance young children's happiness and well-being. A strengths-based approach to preventing unhappiness and poor physical and mental health from developing in the first place, while simultaneously building and sustaining children's happiness and well-being is the challenge. Under a strengths-based approach, adults are encouraged to balance children's needs for safety and comfort with age-appropriate challenges that help children develop skills for beginning to manage their own health, happiness and well-being (Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012).

### **Definitions and Theories of Happiness and Well-being**

In this section, I present definitions and theories of happiness and well-being and research that has examined these theories, directly or indirectly. This section has three aims: (1) to define well-being from hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives; (2) to examine theories of happiness and well-being and research that has contributed to the development of these theories; and (3) present core elements of well-being, including a new element that

hypothesizes a link between individual and collective well-being and sustainability.

### **Defining Well-being from Hedonic and Eudaimonic Perspectives**

Research to define and develop measures of happiness and well-being and determine effective interventions for increasing and sustaining high levels of well-being has taken two primary approaches: hedonic and eudaimonic. These research traditions are derived from understandings of happiness based on teachings of the ancient Greek philosophers, Aristippus and Aristotle. The hedonic tradition relates to Aristippus' view of happiness as the experience of pleasure, the experience of more positive than negative emotions and life satisfaction. This tradition has a longer history than the eudaimonic research tradition that is derived from Aristotle's view of happiness as the good life or the "life well-lived". Eudaimonia is based on identifying one's "daimon" or true self and using one's talents to contribute to a higher purpose, something beyond one's self (Crisp, 2000).

Many terms are used to describe the complex construct of happiness and well-being including authentic happiness, subjective and psychological well-being, quality of life, life satisfaction and flourishing, to name a few. Debate continues within the research community regarding clear and consistent definitions of happiness and well-being, with Kashdan, Biswas-Diener and King (2008) expressing concern about the potential for people to misinterpret hedonia and eudaimonia as distinctly different forms of happiness, rather than simply different research traditions in the study of happiness and well-being. (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & King, 2009; Kashdan, et al., 2008). In response, Delle Fave and Bassi (2009) supported the ongoing

need to clarify perceptions of happiness and well-being as research evolves, especially because new findings must be integrated with previous work. Ryan and Huta (2009) made the point that because hedonists and eudaimonists ask different research questions, it may be wise for scholars to clarify terminology and stay open to emerging complexities of happiness and well-being that may be useful to both research approaches.

### **Hedonic Happiness, Subjective Well-being, and Emotions**

Diener (1984; 2000) defined happiness as subjective well-being (SWB), comprising three distinct components: high positive affect (the presence of pleasant emotions such as joy, contentment and affection); low negative affect (few experiences of emotions such as fear, anger and sadness); and life satisfaction (LS), a global judgment made about one's own life based on specific self-determined criteria. From the hedonic perspective, happiness (or SWB) is an *outcome* of experiences in the moment together with remembrance and judgment of those experiences as they accumulate over time and contribute to one's perception of overall LS (Deci & Ryan, 2008a) or perceived quality of life [PQoL].

A leading researcher in hedonic psychology, Diener has focused on such outcomes of subjective well-being as health and longevity, citizenship, quality social relationships and work productivity. He and his colleagues conducted large-scale, multi-national surveys to explore subjective well-being. Diener's work includes the development of measurements of SWB, (e.g., the Satisfaction with Life Scales and the Satisfaction with Life Scale for Children [ages 10 and above]). His cross-cultural work using large national and international surveys and experimental investigations continues to contribute

to the understanding of well-being throughout the world (E. Diener, 2006, 2012; E. Diener, Helliwell, & Kahneman, 2010; E. Diener & Ryan, 2009).

Kahneman, a psychologist and the recipient of a 2002 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his work with Amos Tversky on decision making, prospect theory and framing effects, is also a major contributor to the definition and understanding of hedonic well-being (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Kahneman (1999) noted that objective happiness is simply the experience of pleasure more often than pain. SWB includes seeking and experiencing pleasure, calm or comfort in the moment, avoiding pain and negative emotions, and assessing these experiences over time through reflection; it requires people to make judgments of affective experiences to determine their satisfaction with life. Kahneman has used observations, experiments and surveys to understand the experience of well-being and the role emotions play in decision-making. For example, Kahneman and his research associates conducted studies of several thousand women in the United States, France and Denmark using the Day Reconstruction Method to study determinants of emotional well-being and LS (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, N., & Stone, 2004; Krueger et al., 2009). He identified human biases and heuristics as they relate to automatic, rational and intuitive decision making and distinguished two systems of thinking, “fast thinking” and “slow thinking”. Fast thinking is automatic and often based on emotions, unconscious biases and heuristics (rules of thumb); slow thinking requires time and effort and is often reserved for complex decision-making (Kahneman, 2011). Kahneman’s contributions to the psychology of hedonic well-being also include his work on the judgments and choices people make,



especially under conditions of uncertainty; he asserted that under uncertain conditions people often choose to answer a simpler question, for example, “Is that safe?” When people spend time and make an effort to consider both costs and benefits of an action, they may devise a more complex question and response, for example, in the case of risk taking, “What can be learned here?” (Kahneman, 2011; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwartz, 1999; Kahneman & Tversky, 2003). Together Diener and Kahneman have contributed substantially to the understanding of hedonic psychology, defining and measuring well-being, demonstrating its value to society and serving as senior scientists with the Gallup Organization in the domain of well-being (Biswas-Diener, Vittersø, & Diener, 2005; E. Diener, 1984, 2012; E. Diener, Kesebir, & Lucas, 2008; Kahneman, 1999; Kahneman, et al., 1999; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984).

### **The emotions of happiness and well-being.**

Researchers have investigated participants’ automatic perceptions and responses to emotional experiences and measured the impact emotions have on decision-making and resilience through laboratory experiments (Cohn, et al., 2009; E. Diener, et al., 2008; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Fredrickson, et al., 2000; Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003; Kahneman, 1992, 2011; Kahneman & Tversky, 2003; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007; Tugade, Fredrickson, & Barrett, 2004). Fredrickson, who directs the Positive Emotions and Psychophysiology Lab at the University of North Carolina has established a program of research on positive emotions that spans nearly two decades and includes the development and testing of the Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001). This theory offers a

framework for understanding how positive emotions contribute to well-being by enabling people to generate a broad range of thoughts and actions in response to environmental stimuli. For example, in two of numerous experiments regarding the impact of positive emotions, Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) asked 104 participants to view films that were designed to elicit one of four emotions: amusement, contentment, anger, anxiety, or neutrality. Using assessments of attention they demonstrated that in comparison to a neutral state, positive emotions broadened attention and thought-action repertoires while negative emotions narrowed them. Negative emotions, such as fear, elicit protective responses (fight, flee, freeze). This research demonstrated that positive emotions expanded perceptual attention and opened momentary thought-action repertoires that enabled people to generate an array of possibilities from which to choose a response.

Positive emotions set the stage for people to both approach and explore their environments and to respond flexibly to novelty or change. Over time, people accumulate responses and actions, building banks of resources to meet uncertainties and challenges that are part of everyday life (Fredrickson, 2004, 2006). Joy, curiosity, interest and contentment are positive emotions that result from pleasant, momentary experiences. These emotions also generate a variety of actions, (e.g., the desire to play) (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Positive emotions can then be both outcomes of engagement in chosen activities and catalysts for engaging in new or intriguing activities (Damasio, 2003).

Positive emotions build one upon another, resulting in an upward spiral of positivity (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Garland et al., 2010). Fredrickson and

colleagues (Fredrickson, et al., 2008) conducted a randomized longitudinal field experiment using an intervention called Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM), a practice used to develop warm and caring feelings for oneself and others (Salzberg, 2004). Their hypothesis was that this practice could both generate positive emotions and broaden participants' attention. The intervention took place over a nine-week period during which time participants were instructed in the LKM and the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM). For seven weeks of intervention, they participated in the LKM and reported their emotions daily using the DRM. Analysis of the data demonstrated that LKM led to changes in self-reported daily experiences of positive emotions, including love, joy, gratitude, contentment, hope, pride, interest, amusement and awe. Over the nine-week intervention, participants also exhibited increases in a variety of self-reported personal resources including mindful attention, self-acceptance, positive relations with others and good physical health. Participants reported greater satisfaction with their lives and a decrease in depressive symptoms.

Garland et al. (2010) reviewed accumulating empirical evidence supporting a core principle of the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions -- that induced positive emotions have wide-ranging effects on both behavioral and interpersonal domains. Studies in various laboratories across the United States have demonstrated that, in comparison with induced neutral or negative emotions, induced positive emotions enabled participants to experience a broadening of visual attention. These responses are demonstrated behaviorally (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Rowe, Hirsh, & Anderson, 2007), with eye-tracking (Wadlinger & Isaacowitz, 2008) and with brain-imaging studies (Schmitz, De Rosa, & Anderson, 2009; Soto et al., 2009). In their review of current, relevant literature, Garland et al. (2010) found support for the benefits of induced positive emotions to increase people's range of desired actions

(Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004), creativity (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987), and openness to new experiences (Isen, et al., 1987).

Another benefit of positive emotions appears to be an “un-doing” effect on negative emotions (Fredrickson, et al., 2000; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004, p. 320). People create positive emotions when they approach and explore their environments (Fredrickson, et al., 2000; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). When people choose activities that are intrinsically motivating, engaging, and sometimes, just for fun, they will likely exert more effort and continue to participate for longer periods of time resulting in benefits from practice and the upward spiral of positive emotions (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Garland, et al., 2010). Garland et al. (2010) reviewed two experiments that used mindfulness meditation and LKM as interventions for generating positive emotions and are investigating whether such interventions might be useful, not only for building and sustaining well-being in typical populations, but also as interventions that could assist people with disorders of emotion regulation that result in anxiety and depression. They proposed:

People can intentionally increase their positivity ratios by learning to widen the attentional lens to encompass more of the pleasurable, interesting, and meaningful experiences in life, making the painful and dissatisfying ones smaller by comparison. In so doing, people can learn to self-generate upward spirals that resonate within themselves and between themselves and others to increase their odds of flourishing (p.864).

LKM appears to be one way for people to self-generate positive emotions to support coping behaviours for resilience in the face of uncertainty or challenge.

### **The positivity ratio.**

Human beings, however, have a strong negativity bias, (i.e., “bad is stronger than good”) (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Kahneman, 2011). According to Kahneman and Tversky (1984), people prefer to avoid a loss (negative) rather than risk uncertainty and the attendant discomfort of a possible, but unfamiliar, gain (positive). Although some people seek and enjoy change, fear is a negative emotion that often accompanies change or uncertainty in the environment. Negative emotions narrow human responses to quick, automatic reactions that enable protective responses necessary for immediate survival. Adults may, for example, prefer to protect children and themselves by eliminating problems or controlling situations rather than risk the discomfort of uncertain outcomes they cannot anticipate or control (W. Grolnick & K. Seal, 2008; Gurland & Grolnick, 2005).

In a study conducted by Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels and Conway (2009), 86 undergraduate students reported their emotions on a daily basis and completed measures of ego resilience (Block & Kremen, 1996) and life satisfaction (Biswas-Diener, et al., 2005) both before, and after these daily reports. Cohn et al. (2009) found that frequent positive emotions correlated with increased ego resilience and life satisfaction. This research demonstrated support for the Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions’ tenet that positive emotions reflect not only enjoyment in the moment, but also, over time, build resources that enable people to manage negative emotions more effectively, thereby enhancing their well-being and quality of life (Fredrickson, 2006; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Cohn et al. (2009) found that positive and negative emotions can co-exist and, while positive emotions neutralise negative emotions, negative emotions do not impact the effects of positive emotions. These researchers emphasised the need to focus attention on the value of

positive emotions to build capacities for coping with everyday challenges flexibly and adaptively (i.e., to foster resilience) to contribute to life satisfaction.

Gottman (1993) is a psychologist and research scientist whose work focuses on the health and stability of marital relationships. He and his colleagues at the Gottman Institute and The Relationship Institute in Seattle have used longitudinal observational studies to investigate the role of affective experiences in predicting the sustainability of intimate relationships. Gottman's (Gottman, 1993, 1994) research with thousands of couples (observations of counseling interventions and coding of interactions) identified a ratio of positive to negative affective experiences that is necessary to maintain happy, healthy marriages (i.e., for couples to flourish). That ratio is 5:1 positive to negative or critical comments or actions.

Fredrickson and Losada (2005) also presented a mathematical ratio of positive to negative emotions that they believed reflected human flourishing. Using data from Losada's and Heaphy's (Losada & Heaphy, 2004; 1989) observational studies of the interpersonal dynamics of 60 business teams of approximately eight people per team, researchers coded videotapes for positive and negative speech acts ("positive comments of support, encouragement or appreciation [e.g., "that's a good idea"] and negative comments, if the person speaking showed disapproval [e.g., "that's about the dumbest thing I ever heard"] sarcasm, or cynicism") (p.745). Fredrickson and Losada (2005) reported that those teams that displayed more positive than negative interactions in a ratio of approximately 3:1 were more productive and successful (i.e., they flourished). Called Losada's ratio (Seligman, 2011), this has been referred to extensively in positive psychology and management literature. However, Brown, Sokal and Friedman (2013) recently demonstrated inaccuracies in the nonlinear

dynamics and differential equations Fredrickson and Losada used in their 2005 analysis. They also asserted that Losada's and Heaphy's (2004) study of business teams was poorly designed and the groups, both too few in number and inadequately constituted, did not substantiate the claims they made. Based on these assertions, Brown, Sokal and Friedman (2013) challenged Fredrickson's and Losada's work as erroneous.

In response, Fredrickson (2013) retracted the mathematical ratio, but contended that although a precise numerical ratio was not proved, empirical data from her work and Gottman's still point to the significance of experiencing more positive than negative affective events for promoting happiness and well-being:

Little by little, micro-moments of positive emotional experience, although fleeting, reshape who people are by setting them on trajectories of growth and building their enduring resources for survival. The broaden-and-build theory describes the form of positive emotions as to broaden awareness and their function as to build resources for well-being (Fredrickson, 2013, p. 2).

Fredrickson also noted that there can be too much of a good thing; more is not necessarily better, and balancing positive and negative emotions is necessary for flourishing. While it appears that more positive than negative experiences lead to flourishing, research does not suggest that negative experiences or emotions should be eliminated, only that a greater number of positive experiences counters the strength of negative ones. Negative emotions, just as positive ones, can lead to adaptive behaviors.

Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) described the prevalence of mental health and major depression in a sample of 3,032 Americans drawn from MacArthur Foundation's Midlife in the United States Survey. Participants completed surveys and questionnaires during telephone interviews that contributed to Keyes' descriptive analysis of mental health in the United States. Keyes (2002) identified a Continuum of Mental Health that suggested the absence of mental illness does not imply that people are experiencing high levels of well-being. Rather, while there is a percentage of the population that is flourishing or experiencing moderate well-being, a considerable number of people, many of them children and adolescents, are languishing (i.e., not enjoying life so much as simply maintaining existence along a continuum from moderate well-being to depression). When people encounter affective experiences in ratios of less than 3:1 positive to negative, Keyes suggested they languish; and when their life experiences result in affective ratios below 2:1 positive to negative, people are apt to experience depression. Keyes' work with public mental health and governmental agencies in Canada, Northern Ireland, Australia and the U.S. aims to increase understanding for the ways positive mental health, resilience and flourishing can be sustained and contribute both to individual and collective well-being (Keyes, 2010a; Keyes & Simoes, 2012).

#### **Building happiness and well-being through intentional activity.**

Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade (2005) presented a model of chronic happiness based on three primary factors: (1) a genetic set point for happiness [50%], (2) environmental factors [10%], and (3) activities and practices designed to increase and sustain happiness [40%]. While genetic set points do not easily change,



environmental factors and intentional activities can be used to increase happiness and well-being. Lyubomirsky, Director of the Positive Psychology Laboratory at the University of California-Riverside, has conducted research that demonstrated benefits to frequent positive affect using intentional activity.

**Timing, commitment and choice.**

As part of an ongoing program of research into ways to build happiness and well-being through intentional activities, Lyubomirsky, Tkach and Sheldon (2004) conducted two short-term intervention studies using activities to induce positive emotions. In one study, a group of college students (unspecified number) was asked to perform five acts of kindness on one day for each of six weeks; these acts required some effort on their part (e.g., donate blood, visit an elderly relative). Another group was also asked to perform five acts of kindness, but to spread these acts throughout the week for six weeks. The no-treatment control group simply completed measures of well-being before and after the six-week period. Students who performed five acts of kindness in one day increased well-being; students in the group whose acts of kindness were spread throughout the week showed no significant difference in well-being; and the control group demonstrated reduced well-being. Lyubomirsky and her colleagues suggested that spreading the acts of kindness throughout the week diluted the effects of the positive affect participants experienced in the moment and, therefore, that timing is a critical element in designing activities to increase happiness and well-being. A second intervention required students to call to mind things for which they were grateful, (i.e., counting blessings). When students counted blessings once per week, these students increased their well-being, but no appreciable changes in well-being were noted in students who counted blessings every day. Researchers believed this activity became routine and counting blessings no longer had a positive

effect. Savoring pleasurable experiences, carrying out acts of kindness, listing and reflecting on that for which one is grateful are intentional activities that can appreciably increase and sustain well-being (Lyubomirsky, et al., 2011; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005; Park, 2004b; Peterson & Park, 2009; Seligman, et al., 2009; Seligman, et al., 2005). Timing, commitment and choice are factors that influenced the effectiveness of these activities (Lyubomirsky, 2009; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005)

### **Positive psychology interventions.**

In a meta-analysis of 225 experimental studies linking happiness and success, Lyubomirsky, King and Diener (2005) concluded that positive affect may be the *cause* of success within many life domains (e.g., friendship, work performance and health) and; in fact, that success may *depend on* the desirable characteristics, resources and accomplishments generated by positive affect and well-being. Similarly, Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 51 studies of randomized control interventions using positive psychology interventions (PPIs) that included 4,235 participants. They noted that in 25 studies, PPIs were more effective than comparison group interventions for significantly enhancing well-being. They discovered some crucial characteristics of the participants who benefited from the PPIs: those participants who *chose* to participate, benefitted more; interventions were increasingly beneficial as the age of participants increased; and the method of delivery of the PPI was important (i.e., PPIs conducted within individual therapy were most effective; group PPIs were the next most effective method of delivery; and self-administered PPIs, although the least effective, still had a positive effect for participants). Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) offered a cautious interpretation that high levels of effort are required to effect these changes, and individuals who are part of

more individualist cultures benefited more from the PPIs than those participants from collectivist cultures. This analysis “confirms positive psychology interventions can materially improve the well-being of many” (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009) p.484).

**Person-activity “fit”.**

Recently Lyubomirsky and Layous (2013) argued for the use of positive activities with youth to boost positive emotions, thoughts, and behaviours to promote need satisfaction and well-being. They presented a positive-activity model that identified features of positive activities (e.g., amount and variety), features of students (e.g., motivation and effort) and what they defined as “person-activity fit” that influenced the effects of positive activities on well-being. They suggested that through positive activities, youth can develop positive patterns of emotions, thoughts, and behaviours that may serve protective functions over the course of their lives and stressed the need to identify a specific person-activity fit to individualize these positive activities for them to be most effective. Environments also played a role in the effectiveness of PPIs. PPIs could easily be integrated into educational programs in schools, within community environments where families with young children spend time together (e.g., neighborhoods, parks, libraries) and within children’s homes with varying effects depending on the level of individualization offered and the context created for the delivery of these interventions.

Gilman and Huebner (2003), academic psychologists with backgrounds in school psychology, reviewed life satisfaction literature of children and adolescents and found that most young people, just as adults, report happiness levels slightly above average; this statistic appears to be true the world over (E. Diener & Diener, 1996). While these results have been demonstrated across a variety of cultures, Gilman and Huebner (2003)

emphasised that despite adolescents' and children's self-reported happiness, there are still many students who are languishing. Huebner and colleagues developed and tested measures of students' life and school satisfaction with over 1300 primary students and adolescents from grades 3 through 12 (Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Huebner & Gilman, 2002; Huebner, Suldo, Valois, Drane, & Zullig, 2004; Huebner, Suldo, Smith, & McKnight, 2004). They suggested that LS research should encourage school psychologists to focus on the optimization of *all* children's well-being in addition to addressing problems of those students at risk for school failure. Gilman, Huebner and Furlong (2008), co-editors of the *Handbook of Positive Psychology in the Schools*, supported the benefits of positive psychology applications in school environments. Huebner's and Gilman's work with students and schools, together with the work Lyubomirsky and her colleagues (2011) developed regarding intentional activity and person-activity fit, suggest the potential for using positive psychology interventions in schools. Deliberately cultivating positive emotions through well-designed environments and opportunities for children and adolescents to choose activities and engage in ways that enable them to experience achievement, resilience and life satisfaction contributes to students' educational experiences. Positive interventions could significantly impact the happiness and resilience that parents, educators and local and international agencies desire for children. Schools may be one environment where children could engage in intentional activities that fit their individual needs and develop greater happiness and well-being.

## **Eudaimonia and the Life Well-lived**

Deci and Ryan (2008a) contrasted hedonic happiness as an *outcome* with eudaimonic well-being as a *process*. Much of the work that illuminates the eudaimonic approach to happiness research is theoretical and reflects Aristotle's view of the "good life" or the life well-lived as various investigators interpret eudaimonia (Crisp, 2000; Ryff, 1989). Eudaimonia, drawn from the Greek word "daimon", meaning one's "true self", was first used by Waterman (Waterman, 2008) to describe this research tradition in psychology. Waterman (1993) related eudaimonia to personal expressiveness (PE) that draws upon humanistic psychological perspectives of self-actualization including those of Rogers, Erikson and Maslow. Ryan and Deci (2001) suggested that eudaimonia requires challenge, effort and choice, in contrast to hedonia that reflects contentment, freedom from concerns and being happy.

Aristotle's view of eudaimonia has been interpreted in different ways within current literature. Ryan, Huta, and Deci (2008) understood Aristotle's eudaimonia as "living well, being actively engaged in excellent activity, reflectively making decisions, and behaving voluntarily toward ends that represent the realization of our highest human natures" (p. 145). This perspective links closely with the theory of self-determination (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (2008b; 2000). Keyes and Annas (2009) interpreted eudaimonia more simply, as "my activity" (p.197) and Annas, a philosopher, offered the perspective that engaging in an activity or exercising a practical skill allows a form of practical wisdom to develop, "the result not purely a routine outcome, but an intelligent application of thinking in action"

(Annas, 2011, p.2). Perhaps engaging in activities that reflect each person's "true self" promotes individual well-being or practical wisdom that some refer to as "happiness" (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010).

When people challenge themselves, exert effort, make thoughtful decisions and voluntarily use their strengths and talents to contribute to a *common* good, they are engaging in a *process* of well-being. Pleasant emotions may accompany this process (Waterman, 1993, 2008), but eudaimonia requires effort and intentional activities that connect one in some way to a purpose higher than pleasure or self-interest, (e.g., the well-being of family, friends, communities or spiritual expression). And while all that may be true, Delle Fave, together with her colleagues (2011) proposed that, although Aristotle may originally have viewed eudaimonia as the "fulfillment of one's deepest nature in harmony with the collective welfare" (p.204), they found people viewed eudaimonia somewhat differently today. In a multi-national study of 666 participants, Delle Fave et al (2011) found that when they asked people about their understanding of happiness, they primarily linked eudaimonia with the well-being of their families and close others rather than the broad, collective welfare. This seemed to be especially true for people of Western cultures.

Eudaimonia can be described as psychological well-being (PWB), "a way of living that is focused on what is intrinsically worthwhile to human beings" (Ryan, et al., 2008, p. 139). Ryff, a psychology professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Director of the Madison Institute on Aging, developed an approach to psychological well-being to contrast with the study of hedonic happiness, offering another understanding of well-being

research (Ryff, 1989). Ryff and Singer's (2008) model defined PWB from a theoretical perspective based on a distillation of Aristotle's writings correlated with then-current research, identifying six domains of psychological well-being: autonomy, personal growth, positive relationships, environmental mastery, purpose in life and self-acceptance.

Ryff and Singer (2008) focused on Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia as living well and suggested that personal growth comes closest to Aristotle's understanding of eudaimonia. They defined each of the domains and developed self-report measures to assess PWB to begin to ascertain what constitutes human flourishing. These researchers emphasized the significant influence of the surroundings and opportunities for nurturing self-realization that are available to individuals and stressed that while these resources are not equally distributed, people can, and do, *determine* to make the most of their lives with the resources available to them. Beyond psychological benefits, Ryff and Singer (2008) noted that research suggests there may be significant physical health benefits related to engaging in the process of living well (i.e., eudaimonia). Some of these benefits are linked to the functioning of the cardiovascular, neuroendocrine, and immune systems and R.E.M. sleep (Dockray & Steptoe, 2010; Steptoe, Dockray, & Wardle, 2009; Veenhoven, 2008).

#### **Linking eudaimonia and self-determination theory.**

Deci and Ryan's view is that PWB is fostered by the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: (1) autonomy, a sense of choice and decision-making in the regulation of behavior; (2) competence, a sense of efficacy or value one has with respect to both internal and external environments; and (3)

relatedness, the feeling of being connected to and cared for by others, experiencing a sense of belonging (Ryan, et al., 2008, p. 153). When these needs are satisfied, people flourish; when they are thwarted, PWB is diminished.

Beginning with an interest in intrinsic motivation, Ryan and Deci, professors in the Department of Clinical and Social Sciences in Psychology at the University of Rochester, developed Self Determination Theory (SDT) and a tradition of research that, over decades, has culminated in a broad framework for the study of human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008b; Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT provides the basis for a formal theory of eudaimonia that Ryan, Huta and Deci (2008) proposed is characterized by four motivational concepts:

(1) pursuing intrinsic goals and values for their own sake; (2) behaving in autonomous, volitional or consensual ways, not heteronomous or controlled ways; (3) being mindful and acting with a sense of awareness; and (4) behaving in ways that satisfy basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy and the belief that there are basic universal intrinsic values built into human nature including growth, affiliation, community contribution and health.

These researchers suggested that human beings, even children, naturally strive toward goals that reflect these values. Eudaimonic well-being is a *process* of identifying and using one's unique gifts and talents to engage meaningfully in life in ways that develop one's psychological and physical health and well-being, as well as the happiness and well-being of others.



### **Core elements of happiness and well-being.**

Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) suggested that both SWB and PWB are necessary for optimal well-being. While SWB is linked to personal assessments of LS and QoL, PWB is achieved by pursuing meaningful goals, growth and personal development, and forming quality ties to others (Keyes, 2002, 2007, 2010b). In addition to SWB and PWB, Westerhof and Keyes (2010) proposed that social well-being is a third core component necessary for positive mental health and suggested that people need to participate in society in ways that allow them to experience their own social value. Keyes stressed that people languish if they do not experience all three core components of positive mental health. When individuals, families and institutions participate in the range of activities that build and sustain individual well-being, the collective society also benefits in that demand on social resources may be eased and everyday life enriched by the various individual resources offered for the collective well-being. Children, families, schools, and communities flourish.

Hedonia and eudaimonia, although based on distinctly different views of happiness and well-being, do share some common elements. Life satisfaction or perceived quality of life (PQoL) is one element that appears to span both aspects of well-being (Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009; Delle Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick, & Wissing, 2011; E. Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Seligman, 2008). Balancing hedonic experiences of pleasure and comfort with eudaimonic engagement in activities that are both meaningful for one's self and also contribute to the well-being of others are all

necessary for people to function well and flourish (Keyes & Annas, 2009; Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007).

### **New Contributions to the Understanding of Happiness and Well-being**

Sirgy and Wu (2009), both professors of management and researchers of quality of work life, presented a theoretical perspective on the elements of happiness and well-being including the pleasant life, the engaged life, the meaningful and now, the balanced life. They suggested that along with the three elements Seligman and colleagues identified, balance may be a fourth element that comprises happiness and well-being. Delle Fave et al. (2011) referenced Sirgy and Wu's work and suggested this dimension, drawn from Eastern worldviews, has been missing from the understanding of happiness and well-being in Western society. Delle Fave and colleagues (2011) described this fourth element as harmony/balance, framing this from the perspectives of Asian cultures and philosophical traditions, as an inner peace and serenity, the combining and balancing of opposite elements into a whole, and an "ability of the individual to maintain balance and serenity in both enjoyable and challenging times" (p. 199).

The need to balance both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of happiness and well-being continues to develop. Recent research by Huta (2012) and Huta and Ryan (2012; 2010) suggested that people experience greater well-being when their pursuits of happiness include both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being. Huta and Ryan (2010) conducted four studies regarding these two aspects of well-being. Two studies were correlational, one employed experience sampling, and one study used an intervention to examine outcomes of activities motivated by hedonic or eudaimonic goals. In each study they assessed how participants typically felt. Combined results

of these studies that included 837 participants supported the prediction that people who experienced high eudaimonia would have greater well-being than those who experienced only one or the other type of well-being. Huta and Ryan (2010) suggested that the function of hedonia appeared to be related to positive affect in self-regulation of emotion in the short term. Eudaimonia was unrelated to positive affect, and activities did not seem to create pleasant or unpleasant feelings. These researchers suggested that positive affect may accompany the production of results or successful completion of an important long term goal. Ryan and Huta concluded that there is fair evidence to support life satisfaction is related to both hedonia and eudaimonia and both contribute to well-being.

Huta (2012) conducted two retrospective studies, the first with 105 undergraduate students and the second with 110 students to investigate connections between the behaviour of students' parents when they were young and the ways students currently engage in hedonic or eudaimonic experiences of well-being. In both studies students completed online the Current Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives for Activities (HEMA, Huta and Ryan 2010). In the first study, Huta's work suggested that students whose parents displayed demandingness and responsiveness, two dimensions that define positive parenting, displayed greater motivation for eudaimonic pursuits of well-being. Hedonic pursuits did not relate to either dimension of parenting. In the second study, people participated in eudaimonic pursuits only if their parents verbally endorsed eudaimonic pursuits of well-being and modeled these pursuits as well, but not if the students' parents only verbally endorsed eudaimonic activities. Huta's research also demonstrated that students whose parents modeled both hedonic and eudaimonic orientations to happiness enjoyed

higher levels of well-being than those students whose parents modeled only one or the other orientation. This finding suggests the need for both orientations toward well-being, a balance of the two that supports greater well-being. Huta (2012) acknowledged limitations of the studies -- they were retrospective and correlational rather than being longitudinal or providing causal data -- but she suggested that since parents want what is best for their children, this research may begin to “clarify which strategies make a difference” in children’s motivations for the pursuit of happiness and well-being (p. 59).

Huta’s (2012) and Huta’s and Ryan’s (2012; Huta & Ryan, 2010) research presented in these six studies emphasises the perspective that hedonia and eudaimonia are motivations for the pursuit of happiness and well-being and that when they are combined, life satisfaction can be enhanced. Additionally, their research contributes to greater understanding of the construct of happiness and well-being, that hedonia and eudaimonia do not occupy ends of a continuum of well-being experiences, but are complementary elements of a complex construct.

O’Brien and Tranter (2010), researchers from Canada and Australia respectively, and Kjell (2011) a Scandinavian researcher, proposed that there is value in combining well-being concepts with those of sustainability. Moving beyond the more individualistic understanding of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, to incorporate social well-being, harmony/balance and sustainability into the construct of happiness, adds a valuable collective perspective to the construct. Well-being and sustainability draw on interdependencies amongst people and their environments that influence the

choices they make to build and sustain good lives for themselves and their families. This includes opportunities to slow down and enjoy the physical and social environments that make life enjoyable and emphasises health benefits of walking and playing in the outdoors (Honore, 2004; Kjell, 2011; O'Brien & Tranter, 2006). Simultaneously, these activities support the security and well-being of local communities, nations and the global community.

As Delle Fave and Bassi (2009) have reasoned, it is important to integrate new understandings of well-being with previous work. Westerhof and Keyes (2010), Sirgy and Wu (2009), Delle Fave and colleagues (Delle Fave, et al., 2011), O'Brien and Tranter (2010) and Kjell (2011) offered new perspectives of happiness and well-being, emphasising balance and harmony for individual and collective well-being. Balancing one's own needs, responsibilities and ambitions in harmony with those of families, friends, schools and communities, adults both benefit from, and model for, children the ways decisions and actions may impact others. Global well-being and sustainability depend on people making individual choices that contribute to the collective well-being, as well as to that of their own families. Parents and educators are at the front lines of applying these concepts in their families, schools and communities.

### **Framing, Understanding and Building Young Children's Happiness and Well-being**

In this section, I have three main aims. These are to: (1) describe conceptual and theoretical frameworks that underpin development of children's happiness and well-being; (2) illustrate perceptions of children's

happiness and well-being, methods for eliciting perceptions, and factors that contribute to children's well-being; and (3) describe some of the interventions that are being used to build and sustain children's well-being in educational settings.

### **Conceptual frameworks underpinning children's happiness and well-being.**

Numerous authors have reviewed the literature on children's happiness and well-being, QoL and health-related quality of life (HRQoL), and children's and adolescents' LS to determine the various ways these constructs are defined and measured (Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Harding, 2001; Huebner, Suldo, Smith, et al., 2004; Pollard & Lee, 2003). This literature emphasises the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of children's well-being.

Harding (2001) found three of the four WHO domains of children's well-being: physical, psychological and social, were well-represented throughout many of then-current measures; however, Harding found that the environmental domain was under-represented. Based on their review, Pollard and Lee (2003) concluded that the study and understanding of child well-being could be facilitated by greater standardization of definitions and agreement regarding the domains that contribute to it.

Gilman and Huebner (2003) suggested that LS research requires more comprehensive work to develop strategies to promote the psychosocial, educational, and medical outcomes necessary to improve children's and adolescents' QoL. They emphasised the value of positive everyday experiences within family and school environments that contribute to children's and adolescents' LS and the ways these experiences buffer health

and risk behaviors. Each of these reviews suggested the need for a comprehensive framework that could support the research underpinning assessments and interventions needed for building and sustaining children's happiness and well-being in today's society.

Recently Lippman, Moore and McIntosh (2011) offered such a framework of positive indicators that addresses many of the shortcomings noted in the reviews of child well-being summarised above. This framework highlights individual, relationship and contextual factors that influence the following domains: (1) physical health, development, and safety; (2) social development and behavior; (3) cognitive development and education; and (4) psychological/emotional development. Ben-Arieh and Frønes (2011) also offered a similar framework. Together these researchers emphasised that there is no clear picture of the well-being of young children because less research has focused on this population and fewer measures have been developed that define the positive indicators of well-being in the early childhood and early primary school populations. Further, they called attention to the shift for a better understanding of children's optimal development, acknowledging that several countries have developed well-being indicators that better balance positive and negative indicators.

Australia is working toward developing educational and welfare policies that will improve the well-being of children and youth and result in improved positive indicators of their well-being. Government, healthcare and education departments and agencies in Australia, and in many developed countries, are engaged with identifying and implementing evidence-based practices that will build and sustain improved well-being for children and

youth, many of whom may be languishing or depressed (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011).

More work is required to develop “an evidence-based understanding of how to support and promote children’s flourishing” (Holder, 2012, p. 87). Strategies that effectively build and sustain children’s happiness and well-being depend on multiple factors including: children’s own understanding of well-being (Ben-Arieh, 2005); the socio-cultural and theoretical perspectives that frame adults’ understandings of children’s happiness and well-being; and the structures and philosophies of the institutions that create the contexts of children’s everyday lives (e.g., families and schools). Parents’ and teachers’ perceptions and the ways these perceptions influence the choices these adults make as they care for and educate children also influence the development and application of strategies for building and sustaining children’s well-being.

### **Children’s perceptions of happiness and well-being.**

Children’s everyday lives are managed by a variety of adults: parents and family members, teachers and others who provide supervision for them during the variety of daily activities in which they participate. The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) has increased awareness of children’s rights that necessitates children’s participation in the process of developing policies and programs that affect them. Recently researchers have drawn attention to the fact that few studies have been done to understand lay persons’ (e.g., parents, teachers, children) perceptions of happiness and well-being (Delle Fave, et al., 2011; Thoilliez, 2011). These perceptions impact the daily activities and opportunities adults deny or offer children. Beyond basic necessities of life (e.g., food, shelter and healthcare), how do people nurture



children's happiness and well-being? Do children have access to those activities *they* identify as vital to their happiness and well-being? For example, children are drawn to outdoor free play that can offer them opportunities to experience "scary-funny feelings", as Sandseter has demonstrated in her research on preschool children's risky play (2009c, 2010).

Grolnick (2009) conducted research regarding parenting approaches and reviewed research involving children of a variety of ages from one-year-olds to adolescents. She identified three dimensions of parenting that impact children's well-being and facilitate their autonomous motivation in school: (1) autonomy support versus control; (2) structure; and (3) involvement. Dweck, the Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, is a leading researcher in the field of motivation. Her work on the self-conceptions (or mindsets) people use to structure the self and guide their behavior, identified two types of mindsets: (1) fixed mindsets that support individuals' achievement of performance goals and getting "right" answers; and (2) growth mindsets that lead people to persevere with learning tasks to experience the fun of a challenge or the discovery of new knowledge (Dweck, 2000, 2006).

Researchers have argued that the development of formal assessments of young children's happiness and well-being requires an understanding of children's own perceptions of what contributes to their well-being (Ben-Arieh, 2005; Fattore, et al., 2009). The views of the parents, teachers and other adults who interact with and care for children on a daily basis are also necessary. A few qualitative studies have explored children's perceptions of happiness and well-being, and some have also included parents' and teachers'

understandings. Each of the studies described below engaged children in activities to ascertain their perceptions of well-being and what they believed contributed to their experiences of this complex construct.

In one study sociologists Fattore, Mason and Watson (2009) employed experiential methods (e.g., drawings, collages, photography) and then engaged 126 children and adolescents, aged 8-15 years and living in New South Wales, in semi-structured interviews about their understandings of well-being. They included these children both in the processes of data collection and the analysis as they explored children's understanding of well-being. In a second study, Sixsmith, Gabhainn, Fleming and O'Higgins (2007) also used photography to develop an understanding of young children's well-being as conceptualised by children, teachers and parents. This study was conducted in primary schools in Ireland to inform policy decisions about children's education. In a third study, as part of the research team on the Sydney Playground Project (Bundy, et al., 2011), Snow (2011), an honours student, asked a small group of girls in six primary schools in and around Sydney, Australia to draw pictures of their ideal playgrounds to better understand the outdoor activities children would choose for themselves.

Results from the first two studies (Fattore, et al., 2009; Sixsmith, et al., 2007) suggested that these children understood well-being in complex ways and identified relationships and connections with others as *most* essential to their well-being. In the first study, children acknowledged that positive and negative experiences could have multiple ways of influencing their well-being, (e.g. "experiences of failure could be [or could become] well-being experiences") (Fattore, et al., 2009, p. 63). In the second study, researchers

noted that children perceived their well-being somewhat differently than adults. Children's understandings appeared more complex than the adults appreciated (e.g., children identified connections with family as important, but connections with peers and animals contributed more to their well-being than adults generally assumed). In this study, as well as in the third study conducted by Snow, (2011, unpublished honours thesis) researchers found these children especially emphasized the importance of "fun" in their lives. Girls who drew pictures of their ideal playgrounds also expressed the desire to play "just for the fun of it" as they enjoyed freedom to explore and use their imaginations, challenging themselves in park-like settings and open green spaces; they preferred to play with materials with no specific play purpose, over purpose-built structures.

In a fourth study, conducted by Park and Peterson (2006) in the U.S., parents gave written descriptions of their children that were then coded for words related to the 24 Values In Action (VIA) character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) purported to "promote the individual's well-being and happiness" (Park & Peterson, 2006, p. 321). The analysis of parents' descriptions of their children conducted by Park and Peterson (2006) revealed three strengths of the heart (i.e., character strengths), related to happiness and well-being: (1) zest, linked with physical health and safety; (2) love and hope, linked with secure attachments; and (3) social relationships. These strengths have also been identified in previous research using adults' and adolescents' self-reported perceptions of well-being (Peterson, et al., 2007; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

All four of the studies described here were small, qualitative studies that began to shed light on what children, parents and teachers understand and believe is necessary for children to experience and sustain happiness and well-being. Children's perceptions of happiness and well-being detailed in these studies reflected a balance between telic (serious, cautious, goal-oriented, arousal-avoiding) and paratelic (playful, adventurous, experience-oriented, arousal-seeking) motivations (Apter, 2007b). As Apter described in his Reversal Theory of Motivation, people move back and forth between these different motivations as they engage meaningfully in the activities of their everyday lives. Sometimes children in these studies were serious and goal-oriented and other times they were simply interested in playing with friends and pets, experiencing adventure in the outdoors with their mates, expressing paratelic motivations. Fattore et al. (2009) also found that children wanted opportunities to engage in a wide variety of self-selected activities and additionally, these children wanted to participate meaningfully in their families, schools and communities in ways that expressed their social and moral responsibility.

Adults' perceptions of children's well-being however, revealed a greater emphasis on telic motivations; that is, adults in these studies were more often serious, concerned more with children's safety than with opportunities for playful, adventurous interactions. They also held specific goals for children's participation in safe, structured activities. These adults focused more on the outcomes of activities for their own children than on the process of children engaging in activities simply for fun or for the value

pleasurable experiences might contribute to the children's collective well-being.

Together these qualitative studies demonstrated multiple ways to obtain an understanding of children's happiness and well-being, both from children and from adults with whom children shared their everyday lives. Children, parents and teachers offered both common, and also distinctive, perceptions of well-being, and shared insights that could be useful for policy development. Policies could consider explicitly the creation of spaces at school and in the community that are both safe *and* challenging.

**Outdoor free play: risks, uncertainties, safety and adventure outdoors.**

Families provide the first context within which children begin to learn what makes them happy. Children naturally approach and explore their environments, drawn particularly to outdoor free play (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Sandseter, 2009a; Sandseter & Kennair, 2011; Tovey, 2007), and these explorations can present some risks. Children love to experience the sensory aspects of the outdoors, (e.g., the warmth of sunshine; fresh breezes; the textures of grass, sand and trees; the speed of running or rolling down a hill). In free outdoor play children can experience autonomy, making choices to stretch physical and social limits, developing competence through practice and engaging with others for the sheer joy of discovery and the fun of new challenges. Increasingly researchers are sharing concerns regarding children's shrinking opportunities to engage in a broad range of outdoor activities (Malone, 2007; PJ Tranter et al., 2012). Others are highlighting the value of risk as an important part of growing up, and governments are requesting studies to understand children's developmental needs for risk to balance injury

prevention with age-appropriate risk opportunities (Brussoni, et al., 2012; Gill, 2007; Madge, 2009; Madge & Barker, 2007). Children explore the limits of their physical and emotional bodies (Damasio, 2003; Sandseter, 2010; Sandseter & Kennair, 2011), develop social connections with others, and use their imaginations and problem-solving skills in play (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Siegel, 2012; Tovey, 2007). When parents and other adults responsible for children frame risk as danger or threat, their automatic response to children's healthy, age-appropriate risk taking is frequently protective.

In their eagerness to be good parents and raise, healthy, happy children, parents may unintentionally restrict children to a narrow range of activities to keep them safe (Furedi, 2001; Hoffman, 2012; Honore, 2008). As Western society makes increasing demands on parents to produce a particular kind of child, that is, a child who is resilient and well prepared to respond to change and uncertainty (Hoffman, 2012) parents may feel pressured and, as Grolnick and Seal (2008) emphasized, when parents feel pressured they exert greater control over their children that may limit children's autonomy. Many social commentators and academics perceive today's parents as offering children fewer opportunities for age-appropriate risk taking than parents of previous generations (Furedi, 2001; Honore, 2008; Marano, 2008; Skenazy, 2009, 2010), offering instead, "surplus safety" (Buchanan, 1999; Power, 2011) (e.g., adult structured and supervised activities).

Twenge, Zhang, and Im (Twenge, et al., 2004) conducted research that suggests that children are increasingly more externally controlled and less intrinsically directed. They conducted cross-temporal meta-analyses of birth cohorts involving 18,310 college students who took the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966) from the 60's through the 90's as well as 6,554 children aged 9-14 who

took the Children's Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (Nowicki & Strickland, 1973) during the 1970s through the 1990s. They found that college students and children in the U.S. have become increasingly less internally controlled and more reliant on external controls (e.g., rules, parental intervention). These significant findings may not be true the world over, but they may suggest a relationship between parents who "hover" and the increasing reliance on external control seen in children, frequently described in the popular press and in academic literature (Malone, 2007; Marano, 2008; Schiffrin et al., 2013). Parents of today's children would be part of the cohorts Twenge and colleagues (2004) studied. Invasive or "helicopter" parents may, in an effort to protect their children from any discomfort, make decisions for their children without considering children's needs to determine the costs and benefits of risks and children's opportunities to manage both negative and positive outcomes of their actions.

Ungar (2007, 2009), Director of the Resilience Research Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia and a recognized expert in children's resilience studies and interventions, proposed that over-protection demonstrates to children the perception that parents may not believe in their competence. Children may therefore either respond fearfully by not taking *any* chances or, alternatively, they may rebel, taking risks just for thrills, without regard for the consequences of their actions. When adults focus only on preventing injury and promoting safety, they may keep children from the very activities they need to develop competence. Adults may provide safety for children to such a degree that they unintentionally become barriers to children developing resilience, that "ordinary magic" Masten (2001) described as an evolutionary capacity for survival that all human beings possess. "Risky play" (Sandseter,

2010) encourages children to “test their limits and increase their adaptation to their environment” (Sleet & Mercy, 2003, p. 92). When parents encourage children to “Give it a go!”, to make mistakes and learn from them, they offer them opportunities to develop what Dweck (2006) described as growth mindsets that encourage curiosity, rather than fixed mindsets that require children to focus on getting the *right* answers. Brussoni, Olsen, Pike and Sleet (2012) proposed that parents can balance safety and injury prevention with children’s need for age-appropriate risk taking to support children’s health, happiness and well-being.

Holder, Coleman and Sehn (2009) have developed a research tradition concentrated on variables that contribute to children’s happiness and well-being to begin development of evidence-based strategies for building and sustaining children’s well-being. Holder, Coleman and Sehn (Holder, Coleman, & Sehn, 2009) conducted a study of 375 children aged 8-12 years and their parents, using a series of self-rating questionnaires and found that active leisure ( e.g., free play; exercise; athletic activities) was moderately and positively correlated with children’s well-being while passive leisure (e.g., reading a book; watching TV; playing computer games) was weakly and negatively correlated with well-being. Other factors in this study that demonstrated relationships were significantly related to children’s well-being included how important sports were to children, how sports made them feel and parents’ involvement with the athletic activities in which children participated. While there may be many reasons for these findings, Holder et al, (2009) suggested that as children participated in active leisure, they may have benefited both from physical exercise and from engaging socially with



friends. Active leisure may also positively influence children's well-being in that, as Holder and Coleman (2009) found in a study with 432 children, aged 9-12 years and their parents, it often includes social relationships and these correlated significantly both with children's self-reported happiness and as predictors of children's happiness. Outdoor free play offers children multiple opportunities to stretch their limits physically and socially, experience a measure of control in their lives, engage in activities that generate "scary-funny feelings" (Sandseter, 2010) and other positive emotions (e.g., curiosity, joy, exhilaration). These activities may also be fun simply because they often take place outdoors, beyond the direct supervision of adults and may include an element of risk (Sandseter, 2009b; Tovey, 2007). Adults however, may prefer children engage in passive leisure activities that they view as "safer" than outdoor free play.

Age-appropriate risk taking offers children opportunities to experience positive emotions (e.g., curiosity, joy, exhilaration) that Fredrickson's work (1998, 2004; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005) has demonstrated leads to the development not only of happiness in the moment, but also builds resources for the future. Danger or threat requires adults' tolerance for a modicum of uncertainty and trust that children are capable of making decisions, taking actions and managing uncertain outcomes themselves. Adults and children can choose to frame risk positively, as opportunity or challenge, within a context that offers not only safety, but autonomy support (guidance, structure, and involvement) (Grolnick, 2009; Grolnick & Seal, 2008) for children's natural curiosity. With autonomy support, children can engage in activities that are challenging and offer practice for taking responsibility. Some

activities require scaffolding to enable them to develop confidence, as they learn to respond flexibly and adaptively in the face of uncertainty (i.e., they learn to be resilient) (Guldborg, 2009; Ungar, 2007, 2009). Unger (2007) described this as the “risk-taker’s advantage”. It takes time and effort to raise and educate children, and both children and adults may benefit from autonomy support (i.e., including a structure within which to learn and make choices about risk; guidance through discussion with knowledgeable others who model decision-making; and involvement with people and activities that create and sustain connections that support children’s choices). Autonomy support provides the framework children need to gain new skills, engaging in a full range of activities to develop happiness, well-being and resilience.

### **Creating ordinary magic in school settings.**

Schools provide another context for children to participate in activities that build and sustain happiness and well-being and resilience. Waters (2011) indicated that schools are increasingly playing a role in developing the “whole student” as part of a new educational paradigm. Researchers and educational personnel are starting to focus on ways to adjust educational curricula to meet the learning needs of children and adolescents to better prepare them for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Australia’s new National Curriculum is strengths-based, future-oriented and emphasizes critical inquiry (*The shape of the Australian curriculum: Health and Physical Education*, 2012). It is designed to equip students not only with literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology skills, but also with critical and creative thinking skills and personal and social capabilities they need to take part in their world confidently. One strand of the curriculum, Health and Physical

Education, particularly reflects a new emphasis on well-being. This strand aims to engage students in their education in ways that build the following skills: resilience; a strong sense of self; developing and maintaining relationships; making health-enhancing decisions for themselves; and developing competencies that enable them to enhance their own and others' well-being (<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Curriculum/Overview>).

Schools are beginning to implement strategies to meet these new demands for balancing goals for academic achievement and skills for well-being. Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) are strategies used to build and sustain happiness and well-being. The Penn Resiliency Program and the Positive Psychology Curriculum are two programs that have demonstrated effectiveness for improving participants' learning strengths, social skills and resilience through engagement in activities designed to increase happiness and well-being that were effective for adults and adolescents (e.g., counting blessings; writing letters of gratitude). Qualitative studies of students' outcomes revealed, for example, improved social skills as reported by mothers and teachers; however, Seligman et al. (2009) noted students did *not* demonstrate the changes in self-reported depression, anxiety, character strengths or participation in extracurricular activities that they predicted. These researchers emphasized the need for ongoing, well-designed studies. Programs based on identifying and employing signature strengths are being implemented in school systems around the world (Seligman, 2011; Seligman, et al., 2009). The outcomes of these programs have been described positively but much of the information has been presented anecdotally.

Waters, (2011) Director of the Positive Psychology program at the University of Melbourne, framed an analysis of 12 PPIs used in school settings from the perspective that teachers need evidence-based strategies to accomplish the new educational goals they are being asked to meet: equipping students with the social and emotional skills they need to participate as informed and confident citizens of their communities (Waters, 2011). Both Waters (2011) and Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) defined PPIs as interventions aimed toward building strengths rather than “fixing” deficiencies. Results of Sin and Lyubomirsky’s (2009) study demonstrated that PPIs significantly enhanced well-being and decreased depressive symptoms in the populations studied. Waters (2011) analysed PPIs “designed to teach students how to cultivate their own positive emotions (e.g., hope, gratitude and serenity), resilience and character strengths” (pp. 77-78) and found the results were “robust”, strongly supporting the use of well-designed strategies to promote student well-being and academic performance. Huebner and colleagues (Huebner, Suldo, Smith, et al., 2004) expressed concern that schools have traditionally spent more time identifying and diagnosing problems with children and youth than on developing strategies to support children’s meaningful participation in school. They highlighted the significance of positive psychology’s emphasis on individual strengths and capacity building, and shared their belief that using this approach across whole school populations is *at least as important*, if not more important, than “fixing” problems of individual children identified as “at risk”. The Australian Curriculum is new (*Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (Draft)*), just as the Core State Standards in the U.S. are new

(National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010); the success of a new educational approach has not yet been evaluated, however both curricula stress the need for providing all children with opportunities to develop the personal/social skills as well as the academic skills, to be citizens who contribute to society in meaningful and sustainable ways. To effectively implement evidence-based PPIs, institutions must provide the necessary training and support for faculties to roll out positive education approaches and actively create a school culture that supports educating students both for achievement and well-being (Seligman, et al., 2009; Waters, 2011; White, 2009).

Two private schools in Australia are implementing approaches to positive education through the use of PPIs. Geelong Grammar School near Melbourne and St. Peter's College, Adelaide have instituted strategies to provide positive education that includes skills of well-being and skills of achievement (Seligman, et al., 2009). The schools initiated an infusion of positive psychology strategies “into the school culture with the aim of increasing student and staff resilience, well-being and engagement” (Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2009, p. 276). Staff at both schools worked together with experts in the science of positive psychology to integrate strategies into the curriculum in ways that matched the needs and understandings of students from kindergarten through Year 12. Mathew White, formerly Head of Positive Education at Geelong Grammar School and now the Director of Wellbeing and Positive Education at St Peter's College, Adelaide, emphasized the value of positive psychology principles to help schools become transformed institutions that foster qualities such as empathy, creativity, self-

efficacy and resilience (White, 2009, p. 1). The Positive Psychology Project director at Geelong Grammar, Paige Williams, anecdotally reported there were numerous benefits to the project: staff observed improved conflict resolution among students; staff and students benefited significantly from having a common, strengths-based language; and students took time to have meaningful conversations with people on campus (Williams, 2011). White emphasised the qualities of the context, and Williams noted the qualities of the relationships that contributed to the successful implementation of positive education.

Several studies have been conducted to assess the usefulness of (PPIs) in school settings. Reschly, Huebner, Appleton and Antaramian (2008) evaluated aspects of Fredrickson's (1998, 2001) Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions with 293 students in grades 7-9. They used several survey measures to examine associations between positive affect generated by PPIs. The measures were of broadened problem solving - the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule-Children (PANAS-C) (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988); coping strategies involving social support seeking - the Self-Report Coping Scale (Causey & Dubow, 1992); and greater student engagement in school activities - the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI). They found significant, positive correlations between positive affect and the engagement subscales, ranging from 0.37 to 0.47, whereas negative affect was significantly negatively associated with engagement (-0.18 to -0.25). These researchers suggested that their results support Fredrickson's (2001, 2004) Broaden and Build Theory and a possible link between positive emotions, resiliency and future well-being through the effect on coping skills that enable students to stay in school to complete their secondary educations. Although this study involved a small number of

students, it supported the value of positive emotions for increasing students' engagement in school and the need for further research into the use of PPIs in school settings.

O'Rourke and Cooper (2010) set out to discover how happy students were in Western Australia primary schools, and what contributed to their happiness. This study was designed to develop an understanding of the variables that contribute to young children's well-being and to investigate parents' and teachers' views of their children's happiness. Holder and Coleman (2008) studied 432 primary school children in Canada, and O'Rourke and Cooper used the same assessments of children's happiness for 312 primary students in Australia and found that in both countries, within the parent and child questionnaires they administered, items pertaining to social aspects, personality traits and life outcomes were more closely related to children's happiness than were demographic factors such as with whom the child lives, household income, or number of hours spent watching TV (which appeared to have minimal impact on children's happiness). Children who reported higher numbers of friends also reported higher levels of happiness and parents who reported their children as having more friendships outside of school, viewed their children as happier. In both studies, freedom from anxiety, extraversion, optimism and a sense of belonging correlated with children's self-reported happiness and well-being. O'Rourke and Cooper posed this question to children, "Are you lucky?" They found children's answers to this question were positive predictors of happiness in their Australian sample. Perceiving themselves as lucky may have been an indicator of children's positive appraisal of their lives (i.e., their LS). The aim of these studies was to use findings to develop resources and strategies for building and sustaining the happiness and well-being of primary school children.

Recently Norrish, Williams, O'Connor and Robinson (2013) offered an applied framework for positive education. They combined an analysis of the Geelong Grammar School experiment, using data from the five years of implementing a school wide approach for implementing positive education with best-practice teaching to create the Geelong Grammar School (GGS) Model for Positive Education, an approach promoting positive psychology principles for flourishing. This framework targets practices to achieve positive emotions, positive engagement, positive accomplishment, positive purpose, positive relationships and positive health using a focus on character strengths. This framework may be a useful beginning for introducing and implementing the research on happiness and well-being in educational settings, translating research knowledge into applications that support children, educators and families in practical ways to develop happiness, well-being and resilience.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Hedonic and eudaimonic research traditions have identified pleasure, engagement and meaningfulness, relationships and accomplishment as primary contributors to happiness and well-being. Recently the value of balance and harmony has been introduced as another element of this multi-faceted construct. The idea that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being are both distinct and overlapping has been acknowledged and people who experience happiness from both perspectives enjoy greater life satisfaction (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; Peterson, et al., 2007). Huta's and Ryan's (2010) recent studies strengthen this perception.

Research presented here supports the value of PPIs with adults and adolescents, but research that identifies what contributes to successful positive intervention strategies with young children is just beginning. Schools and



other agencies are shifting paradigms to include the perspectives of children and parents as educators and researchers design contexts that support children's happiness and well-being. This shift includes creating foundational frameworks, assessments and intervention strategies that support children's developmental trajectories, balancing their needs, responsibilities and ambitions. It also involves understanding children's everyday experiences, how they generate positive emotions for themselves and how adults can offer a range of activities that provide opportunities for children to exert effort and manage both success and failure as they learn to respond resiliently to the challenges today's complex world offers them. Research has demonstrated a pathway for intervening to promote children's health and well-being emphasizing the value of positive emotions and relationships, meaningful engagement, physical activity, and supportive contexts. The role risk plays in this process requires further exploration, as does the range of activities children need to access to support their achievement of happiness and well-being, courage and resilience adults desire for them.

## CHAPTER 3

### Journal Article

#### Parents' perceptions of risk and their desires for their children's well-being

Anita Nelson Niehues • Anita Bundy • Alexander Broom • Paul Tranter

*Journal of Child and Family Studies* DOI  
10.1007/s10826-013-9891-2

A. N. Niehues (✉) • A. Bundy  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
University of Sydney  
Lidcombe, NSW 2141 Australia  
E-mail: [anita.niehues@sydney.edu.au](mailto:anita.niehues@sydney.edu.au)

A. Broom  
Room 437, Michie Building, St Lucia  
The University of Queensland  
Brisbane, Australia

P. Tranter  
University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy  
PO Box 7916, Canberra, BC 2610, Australia

**Faculty of Health Sciences Publication Statement**

Statement from co-authors confirming the authorship contribution of the PhD candidate.

As co-authors of the paper Niehues, A., Bundy, A., Broom, A., & Tranter, P. (2013). Parents' Perceptions of Risk: and the Influence on Children's Everyday Activities *Journal of Child and Family Studies* DOI 10.1007/s10826-013-9891-2

we confirm that Anita Nelson Niehues has made the following contributions :

- conception and design of the research,
- analysis and interpretation of the findings,
- writing the paper and critical appraisal of content.

Signed.....*AJBroom*.....Date:.....  
"  
Signed.....*Paul Tranter*.....Date: *2/13/14*  
"  
Signed.....*Anita Bundy*.....Date: *29/3/14*  
..

## **Abstract**

This paper reports the results of a qualitative study of parents' perceptions of risk and the influence these perceptions had on children's access to age-appropriate risk-taking activities. Thirty-seven parents, aged 28-55 years, participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews after completing a card sort of the attributes they most desired for their children. Ten participants were parents of young people living with disabilities and 27 were parents of typically developing children. We based our analysis and interpretation of participants' narratives on an adaptation of Charmaz's approach to social analysis and Packer's perspective of hermeneutics. Parents' perceptions of risk, framed from telic (serious, cautious, goal-oriented) and paratelic (playful, adventurous, activity-oriented) motivations and self-determination, influenced their decisions about activities that contributed to their children's well-being. Some parents struggled to trust children to engage in age-appropriate risk-taking playfully and safely without constant supervision. Others provided their children with autonomy support (structure, guidance and connectedness) to develop life skills by taking age-appropriate risks. Results suggested that when parents balanced telic and paratelic motivations, offering children opportunities to make choices, develop competence, and engage in a variety of age-appropriate risk-taking activities, they supported children's self-determination and sense of belonging within their families and communities. We conclude that risk and uncertainty are not only valuable, but necessary, contributors to the lives parents envision for their children.

**Keywords** Risk perception; risk-taking; parents; children's well-being

## Introduction

When parents are asked what they want most for their children, most say, “I just want them to be happy” (Diener & Lucas, 2004; Lyubomirsky, 2009; Seligman, 2008). Many things contribute to children’s happiness and well-being. For example, children love to play outdoors, setting and meeting physical challenges for themselves and playing with friends. Many seek ‘risky play’ – that is, the kind of play that often occurs beyond the watchful eyes of protective adults (Sandseter, 2007; H. Tovey, 2007). Some research suggests that risky play is *necessary* for children to learn to deal with their fears and anxieties in healthy ways (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). Play is a typical childhood activity that offers children opportunities to make mistakes and learn from them within settings where consequences of their actions are rarely more serious than a bump, a scrape, or a few hurt feelings; ultimately these experiences lead to positive consequences of lessons learned.

Play generates positive emotions and offers children experiences that help them broaden and build skills for present and future challenges as they develop coping skills for resilience and well-being (Cohn, et al., 2009; Deci & Ryan, 2008b; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Fredrickson, 2001; Masten, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000). While play is not without its risks, the learning that occurs is valuable and potential for harm is limited.

Children depend on the adults in their lives to access everyday activities and parents’ decisions about which opportunities to offer may be influenced, in part, by *their* perceptions of risk. Parents generally take these responsibilities seriously, aiming to provide a balance of activities that support children’s happiness and well-being. Adults entrusted with the care of children may, understandably, make safety their primary concern. But do children miss out on something when safety becomes a

greater concern than age-appropriate risk and adventure? Could ‘surplus safety’ create a different kind of risk (Buchanan, 1999; Power, 2011)?

Perceptions of risk are malleable; they change over time and vary across cultures according to worldviews (Lupton, 1999; Slovic, 2000). In the western world, risk is regularly viewed as danger or threat, something against which people must protect themselves and others to avoid being blamed for uncertain consequences of their actions (Douglas, 1992; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). Framed in this way, risk prompts fear, a powerful negative emotion that narrows human actions to protection (i.e., fight, flight or freeze) (Fredrickson, 2001). Human beings’ strong negativity bias supports this protective approach to life (Baumeister, et al., 2001; Fredrickson, 2009; Kahneman, 2011). In a ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990a), parents often frame risk narrowly, in terms of their own daily worries and concerns (Alaszewski & Coxon, 2009). If parents’ perceptions of risk include only their worries about keeping children safe, they may miss the benefits that risk taking affords children.

Happiness is a complex construct; when the parents we interviewed used the term, we understood them to mean something akin to well-being as Diener (1984) described it: the experience of more positive than negative emotions and a cognitive judgment of life satisfaction. Well-being includes physical, social, emotional and cognitive domains that require the balancing of multiple elements: pleasure and comfort, engagement and effort, positive and negative emotions, protecting against danger and *also* exploring new experiences in search of possible gains (Dweck, 2006; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Seligman, 2011). Delle Fave et al. (2011) suggested that harmony, achieved through the balancing of opposites, contributes to happiness and well-being. Perhaps well-being is attained by learning to make good decisions in the

context of the uncertainties characteristic of age-appropriate risk taking, balancing telic and paratelic motivations.

Risky play offers children opportunities to test physical limits and practice making decisions as they gain a variety of skills (S. Brown, 2009; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005; H. Tovey, 2007). Sandseter (2010) suggested that risky play, framed in terms of Apter's (2007b) reversal theory of motivation, engages children to move rapidly back and forth between differing emotions - to experience "scary-funny feelings". Moving rapidly from one emotional experience to another is a way children learn to balance the serious, goal-oriented and cautious (i.e., telic) aspects of motivation with playful, activity-oriented and adventurous aspects of the paratelic (Apter, 2007b). Experiencing the outcomes of both telic and paratelic motivations contributes to children's learning about choice, responsibility and resilience within the context of play (Gill, 2007; Guldborg, 2009; Ungar, 2007).

Although there are clear benefits to age-appropriate risk taking, children's access to these activities depends on how the adults responsible for their well-being frame risk. If parents reflect on the *benefits* as well as the costs of risk taking, they may choose to provide opportunities that are both safe enough for children to play freely and 'risky' enough to engage them in learning to manage their own health and well-being (Brussoni, et al., 2012; Grolnick, 2009; Niehues, Bundy, Broom, Tranter, et al., 2013; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). If we believe that risk taking is important to children's development, parents, as well as children, may need to balance safety with adventure as they engage in, and reflect on, everyday risks and uncertainties.

The purpose of this study was to explore parents' perceptions of risk and the ways these perceptions influenced their decisions to offer children opportunities for

age-appropriate risk taking. This paper focuses on parents' perceptions of risk and the ways they dealt with everyday uncertainties in the lives of their daughters and sons.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Participants represented a sample of convenience and included 37 parents aged 28-55 years, divided into two groups based on experiences of risk in their own lives. Group 1 included 18 parents who had faced significant risk in their lives: 10 parents who had confronted risks associated with their child's serious, life-long disability: 5 parents (1 father and 4 mothers) of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), aged 7-10 years; 5 parents (1 father and 4 mothers) of sons or daughters with physical disabilities, aged 12-17 years; and 8 parents (3 fathers and 5 mothers) whose children had no known disability, aged 5-7 years. Group 2 comprised 19 participants who said they had experienced relatively risk-free lives: 4 fathers and 15 mothers who were parents of typically-developing children aged 5-7 years. Parents in both groups had children who had participated in the Sydney Playground Project (SPP), a program of research regarding children's physical and social activity on school playgrounds (Bundy, et al, 2011). Parents of children with autism were drawn from a special education classroom located at a school participating in the SPP; these parents were aware that their children had access to the novel playground materials provided by this project. Parents of young people with physical disabilities had participated in another study regarding advice they had been given about their children. Most of the parents whose children participated in the playground aspect of the SPP had also participated in an intervention that assisted parents and teachers to reframe their perceptions of risk to include uncertainty, opportunity and challenge (Niehues,



Bundy, Broom, Tranter, et al., 2013). All parents volunteered to be interviewed about their perceptions of risk and their experiences with their children.

### **Procedures**

We utilized a card sort of parents' desires for their children as a prelude to semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted by the first author. Card sorts have been used as an exploratory method in various qualitative studies to provide structure for facilitating reflection on choices and planning for the future (Moore, Akhurst, & Powell, 2010; Rugg & McGeorge, 2005). We initially selected 30 attributes, strengths and values adults desired for their children drawn from three sources: the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (Park, 2004a; Peterson, et al., 2005); pilot interviews conducted with two volunteers who were parents of young children; and a list of those desires parents and educators named during an intervention that was part of the SPP (Bundy, et al., 2011). External stakeholders were consulted to narrow the items to 20. One attribute (e.g., power, courage, belonging) was printed on each of 20 index cards. Parents selected one child to foreground; they were asked to sort the cards into three categories relative to that child: very important, important or unimportant. This card sort was designed to help participants identify and review their priorities for a particular child's development and reflect on the role risk might play in their decisions about children's everyday activities.

Semi-structured interviews, conducted following the card sort, focused on the three most important attributes parents selected, how they visualized the child achieving these goals and on ways everyday risk and uncertainty might be part of this process. Participants chose locations of convenience for the interviews (e.g., primary schools, cafés in the community, participants' homes) that generally were conducted on the day the card sort was completed; five interviews were conducted by telephone

within a week of parents' receipt of the cards. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed either by the first author or paid transcribers.

### **Analysis of naturalistic inquiry**

We took a hermeneutic interpretive approach to analysis of the narratives we collected in order to gain an understanding of the parents' perceptions of risk and its influence on their decisions about activities they encouraged for their children. Packer (2011) suggested that narratives are rich with meaning constructed within the dialogue of the interviewer and the interviewee. He therefore advised against the method of chopping data into small bits to exemplify themes across the narratives of several participants. Rather, he proposed that by using lengthier portions of the stories co-constructed by participants and researchers within the interview process, the researcher can create an interpretation that offers the reader an opportunity to "see a new world or see our familiar world in a new way" (Packer, 2011). As we interpreted parents' narratives, we drew on an adaptation of Charmaz's approach to social analysis (Broom, 2009; Kathy Charmaz, 1990), employing constant comparative analysis to identify emergent themes, patterns, and complexities within the stories participants told. Simultaneously we used theories of happiness and well-being, play, motivation and resilience -- triangulating theoretical perspectives to interpret themes that emerged from the data. Narrative, thematic and theoretical lenses enabled us to view and construct a rich and complex interpretation of parents' perceptions of risk and the ways these influenced children's everyday lives (Packer, 2011). We used pseudonyms to safeguard participants' privacy.

## Results

The majority of participants, regardless of group, said they wanted their children to be happy, healthy, and resilient. Many also stated they wanted them to be passionate about something in life, compassionate and able to give something of themselves to their families and communities. Parents promoted these attributes from what emerged as two primary perspectives: self-determination and telic (i.e., serious, cautious, goal-oriented and arousal-avoiding) vs. paratelic (i.e., playful, adventurous, activity-oriented and arousal-seeking) motivations. Individually, parents shared stories of their desires for their children, struggles they encountered in raising them, how risk was involved and their perceptions of the outcomes of children's age-appropriate risk taking. The parents we interviewed had different perspectives of risk that seemed related to their own experiences of risk. Four general themes emerged: parents' fears; resilience; risk as opportunity; and the benefits of everyday risk taking.

### **Nothing to fear but fear itself**

The parents in Group 2 whose lives had been reasonably risk-free took a cautious approach to risk taking, often viewing their children as vulnerable and in need of protection. One mother of two children said, "It's hard to be a parent! Kids don't come with a manual." She and several other parents in this group described worrying about making the "right" or the "best" decisions for their children. The majority of these parents said they believed, "It's a more dangerous world today!" and they worried about "stranger danger", not knowing neighbors, increasing traffic on the streets, and being viewed as incompetent parents. Some parents felt they had become more cautious when they became parents and recognized that they worried more about keeping their children safe than offering them the adventure of age-appropriate risk taking activities.

One way these parents managed their worries was to do everything *with* their children (e.g., riding their bicycles together on designated paths). Another strategy parents used was to avoid activities that made them feel uncomfortable, imagining negative consequences they might have to endure if they allowed children to engage in challenging activities, however developmentally appropriate.

Group 2 parents spoke of pressured lives, balancing competing demands on their time and energy, processing the staggering amount of information experts offered about good parenting (e.g., exercise, nutrition, spending family time together), managing the expectations society has for them (Hoffman, 2012) and their own expectations for providing a good life for their families. Interestingly, although these parents acknowledged a myriad of worries, they continued to seek information about parenting, choosing for example, to participate in a risk reframing intervention at their children's primary schools (Bundy, et al., 2011; Niehues, Bundy, Broom, Tranter, et al., 2013).

Paradoxically, while they wanted children to be resilient (i.e., to bounce back from disappointment or persevere when an activity is hard), few of these parents offered ideas about how they could (or did) help their children become resilient. Rather than considering the value of struggling to overcome barriers or fears to enjoy a sense of pride in achievement, this group of parents often expressed hope that their children would experience lives better than their own had been, with fewer difficulties and more opportunities than they had growing up. Rather than approaching risk as a way of promoting resilience, these parents approached any risk fearfully and, perhaps unintentionally, modeled worry and anxiety for their children.

One mother of three, Nicola, spoke of how she had been a risk-taker when she was younger, but, as a parent, she grappled with risk taking:

Yeah, I wanted to be a race car driver. Yes, I um, like to drive fast and to tempt myself a little bit. But that's all changed since I've had kids. It's funny how you do change. And, I suppose it all comes up to how I was brought up 'cause, you know my parents were always saying, 'Be careful, be careful, be careful!' So, now I'm doing it to my children." No, I've lost that excitement [of risk] since I've had kids. Yeah. For risks, it's like it's now, more sensible, yeah. [And] that's good and bad, 'cause, you feel that once you've had kids, a little bit of you has died. Like, I feel like I've lost a little bit of me, because now, I don't feel like I'm me, 'cause, I'm too straight down, and now, what do you do?

Interviewer: What was the best thing about that, the fast cars?

Nicola: Being in control. Yeah, just the whole joy of the ride! Yeah, but I also, I wish I had a little bit that's, because then I'd be a bit more liberal with the kids. 'Cause I think that I'm inflicting my fears on them, so when they grow up they'll do the same to their children, so, I'm not, I feel that my dad's done this to me. He kept saying, 'Be careful, be careful!' He always makes you think the worst of everything, so then you become paranoid whereas, it's nice to be aware of that, but at the same time, not to become obsessed with it. . . . So I don't want to do that to my kids.

Interviewer: So then, how do you do things differently?

Nicola: I am always a bit worried, about how, like, I used to fly all the time and now I'm scared, since I had kids I won't go on an airplane.

When Nicola and her husband were planning to visit her husband's parents, they contemplated flying to Melbourne. At first their son was excited at the prospect

of flying, but as discussions continued and Nicola expressed her fear about the family flying together, she noted that John became less and less excited. Nicola said:

Don't you want to go see Grandma and Grandpa? And finally John said, 'No! Let *them* come. Or, can't we catch a train?' And I think that's 'cause he, [I] realise that I talk to my husband and [John] might hear the conversation. 'Cause *I've* said, let's catch a train.

Interviewer: So he's using the same solution you're using?

Nicola: Yeah.

Interviewer: What would you like to see happen next for John?

Nicola: I'd like John to take a few more risks, but also to keep his, I want him to remain sensible. 'Cause I don't want him to hurt himself in the process, but I've noticed that when he does take a risk and there's a good outcome, he gets very proud. You can see that he's very proud. And I think that sometimes he doesn't fit in with a bunch of 6-year-olds, because he's a little bit too sensible. But like, other than just running around, which he loves to do, I think that I'd like him to let go a little bit. And just, have a bit, like remain sensible, but also, not be so, like he shouldn't have fears at [his] age.

Interviewer: How do you see that happening?

Nicola: I think it's me. I've gotta', gotta' promote it a little bit more and maybe . . . (thinking) maybe model it a little bit, yeah, like, you know, he's scared of getting on there and playing. Or maybe, just, by me making him catch that plane to go and see [Grandma and Grandpa] then that's one fear that he's overcome. And he'll see that it's not so bad.

This mother once experienced risk as exhilarating, but now struggles with offering adventurous age-appropriate activities to her children, such as flying with

family to visit relatives. She was aware that she wanted something different for her son; she also had an inkling that her fears and negative emotions could relate to the words of caution she heard over and over from her father, “Be careful!”, and her own words her children overheard, “I’m *afraid* to fly!”.

Parents found it hard to focus on the opportunities risk and uncertainty offered. Identifying potential benefits of everyday risks was challenging for them. As one parent articulated, and others also shared, “children are only little” and “they will have to grow up soon enough” suggesting that, for example, they drove their children to school and protected them from risks of the “real world”-- until they were older.

When we asked parents in Group 2, those who had experienced little risk, when their young daughters and sons might be “ready” to make good decisions, several parents said that they would “just mature I guess”. They said they would likely allow their children to cross streets and walk to school alone “probably when they are 12 or so, by the time they go to secondary school”.

### **Resilience in the face of fear**

Some parents who had experienced significant risks in their lives intentionally supported their children’s engagement in everyday activities that felt a bit risky to them and although their responses did not suggest that they viewed risk as opportunity, they did not allow their own fears to overwhelm them. Instead they embraced risk in ways that gave their children the chance to engage in activities to broaden their life experiences, build skills, show compassion and generate positive emotions. These parents seemed to know that their fears might be out of proportion to any real risk and they chose to get past them for their children’s benefit. One

mother shared how her life experiences impacted her response to risk in her son's life.

Salwa who, with her husband, immigrated to Australia from Lebanon said:

Really, we have a lovely life here. You have to see the way we grew up in. We had days when my mum didn't know when we went to school, if we would be back. That's hard. We had a very hard life. My granddad had been killed just because we are a different religion than the others. We had a hard life, and you have to expect anything from all surrounds. Somehow, yeah, we are racist. But we are deeply hurt, not because we want to be. I [can talk to] anyone, but not deeply. Just, I have neighbors, I talk to them, 'Hello, how are you?', and that's it. I won't have them come into my place. Maybe I can see them, I can say hello. But they have a different way of life.

While she does not easily trust people, Salwa said she tries not to overprotect her son, Nasri, and she teaches him to be kind and giving to others. She is uncomfortable letting Nasri play outside without her supervision. Fear is a constant companion as she decides how to encourage Nasri in what to do and what to avoid. She has to remind herself, "This is a safe country".

Salwa struggled to overcome her own fears. She takes Nasri to church and together they arrange flowers for Mass, choosing to do something kind for their community. She also chose to participate in a research study at Nasri's school that encouraged children's free play and involved Salwa in her son's school community, sharing her thoughts about risk and children's everyday activities. Salwa participated in everyday risks at her own level of tolerance so as to support Nasri's engagement in life.



Danielle, a mother of two young children, shared experiences with her son Michael, who, as a baby, spent many days in hospital due to severe asthma. Each time they came home, people said to her:

'How are you? You must be falling apart!' And it's like, actually, no, because there are children in the ward who aren't coming home. We're home. So you have to put it into perspective. We went *temporarily* [to hospital]; yes, it was very difficult and it's an emotional roller coaster, and I didn't sleep because I needed to make sure he was *breathing!* But you know, we said goodbye to a whole stack of children who aren't coming home. And my mantra became, 'It could be worse'. That mantra I just shared with my father last week. It *could* be worse so I have to be positive, and there's always something worse out there.

When this mother experienced a risk to her child's health, she chose to focus on the fact that things could be worse and, despite the fear and uncertainty their family experienced, her son came home from hospital. She chose not to focus on how difficult this time had been, but on her gratitude for a positive outcome (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005). Danielle said it is important to her that her son's early experiences with asthma not limit his opportunities for challenging and exciting activities. She said:

I think there's a sense of protection with Michael. I find that his preference is to be close rather than to move away. And I'm hoping that over time, as he gets older and his independence and confidence boosts, it will improve. We think a lot about the consequences for Michael. So, let's go on holiday. Well, we can't go overseas because if Michael has an episode, how do we manage it? Whereas, if we go on holiday in Australia and he has an

episode, it's a little bit easier to manage. So, we have to let go of that at some point I think, because we don't want to withhold things from him.

These mothers are representative of the parents who had experienced life-threatening situations that had an impact on the way they viewed risk. They acknowledged their feelings, negative and positive, and chose to make appraisals that helped them tolerate their fears. They employed positive emotions to help neutralise negative ones in order to engage in everyday activities that were important for their children's well-being (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Fredrickson, et al., 2000). Both mothers wanted their sons to be strong and confident and they encouraged them to participate in family and community activities, despite risks or some discomfort. These mothers modeled courage in response to life's uncertainties and challenges.

### **Risk as opportunity**

Parents who had experienced significant risks themselves, particularly risks associated with parenting a child with a disability, were the only ones to perceive risk as opportunity. Parents in Group 1 primarily focused on skills their children needed when they were apart from their parents -- working with their children to develop strategies to participate in everyday activities with increasing *interdependence* with friends, educators or care providers. They listed as top priorities for their children: an ability to make mistakes and learn from them, a sense of belonging and an ability to make good decisions. These parents were able to describe how they helped facilitate resilience in their children. By viewing risk as opportunity or challenge, these parents anticipated skills their children needed to engage in meaningful activities and provided autonomy support (i.e., structure, guidance and connectedness) (Grolnick, 2009; W. Grolnick & K. Seal, 2008) to enable them to be happy in the present and accumulate the life skills they needed to flourish in the future. They wanted their

children to have opportunities to make choices, develop competence and enjoy a sense of belonging, that is, to be self-determining individuals (Deci & Ryan, 2008b; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

One father said he viewed himself as an “advocate and facilitator of change” for his son who has osteogenesis imperfecta (OI), or brittle bones, a condition that puts Christopher at risk for easily breaking bones. Like most parents we interviewed who had experienced significant risks in life, this father chose to view risk and uncertainty as opportunity or challenge (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003) rather than as danger or threat only. He said, “Risk is the *only* way to achieve any of the [attributes] in the card sort.”

These parents engaged in playful, activity-oriented and adventurous (paratelic) interactions with their children; yet, they were also motivated to help the children achieve goals and to exercise appropriate caution (telic motivations). They accepted uncertainty as part of raising children, allowing there is no “right” way of parenting. *Each day* involved uncertainty and weighing up the costs and benefits of activities that children need and want to do (e.g., going to school, making friends, swimming with dolphins). While these activities often presented the risk of a “melt-down” (i.e., a reaction to becoming overwhelmed), a broken bone, or a disappointment, these consequences also provided lessons.

Ann, a mother of two sons, one of whom has an ASD, spoke about risk and uncertainty in her life and said it is like “pulling straws” to anticipate what will work best with a child with ASD “because each day is so different”. She said it helped Will if she used the same routines and strategies he was learning in his classroom to support him in negotiating new situations. When Will’s class went on a field trip, rather than sending him on the bus with his class, she decided to drive Will to the

park. This decision “backfired,” however, because, when Will arrived and he was *not* with his mates, participating in the usual routines, he became overwhelmed and had a “melt-down”. Without familiar routines, Will was unable to make the transition from his mother to his class to participate in this community activity. Ann viewed the “meltdown” as *her* mistake and noted that uncertainty (risk) is something she and her husband have come to expect as Will tries new things. While she may have wanted to protect Will from the potentially overwhelming sensory experiences of the bus ride, Ann said she would likely make a different choice the next time, “let go” a bit more, and let Will use the strategies he is learning at school without her intervention. Ann’s story demonstrates the effort she puts forth to provide Will with autonomy support, using methods especially suited to his abilities, planning for uncertainties and also encouraging him to risk participating in age-appropriate community activities.

Sandy, a mother of a young daughter, Beth, described their adventures at an indoor rock-climbing center. They originally sought out this activity because Beth asked her mother if they could climb a mountain together. Sandy said:

We say in our family that the minute [Beth] was strong enough to push people away, she did, so she could be independent. Like, we called her ‘Triple D’, Dare Devil Dude, ‘cause she was always tightrope walking. You don’t want children to hurt themselves but she has always been, you know, ‘I don’t want to sit on your knee. I don’t want to cuddle, I want to play. I want to climb!’ But, no [matter the number] of times saying to a child ‘if you keep doing that, you’ll hurt yourself!’ Do they understand? Nah, they keep doing it and then they hurt themselves. I can’t think of too many things we wouldn’t allow her to attempt. You know, like I wouldn’t let her jump off the roof or walk along the roof’s edge, but if she wants to experience heights then, you

know, we'll walk her along something that's high up and see, 'How's that make you feel? What do you think would happen?' So we talk about it, you know. And she's quite "with it", being able to predict what might happen. At the moment she likes rock climbing, so, we're rock climbing, indoor rock climbing. So off we went rock climbing and we realized that she could climb up, she just couldn't get down. So, she likes going up and waving to you, 'Look how high I am now!' So I said, 'okay, come down now.' 'I can't!' 'Well you're gonna have to, you can't stay up there.' So, she had to try. Well, there were tears; I mean she was 14 meters up this wall. 'What if I can't get down? What if I fall?' So, going up there was none of that fear; that I know! Going up, happy as! It was coming down that became the issue for her. So I was saying to her, 'You can't fall. There's no possible way of you falling. So you need to lean back, otherwise you're gonna scrape yourself up, you'll *cause* an injury. So, lean out'. She had to climb down quite a percentage of it and I kept saying to her, 'Now stop, do you reckon you can do it now?' Cause she knows how to come down. 'Check again, now can you do it?' Then she got to a spot where I thought she could [lean out] and I said to her, 'Now?' She said she couldn't and I said, 'Well, you're going to have to because otherwise you're going to have to stay there for the rest of the time, really'. So she goes, 'I'll try.'" And she did it!

Sandy described her concern that she wanted Beth to have a try getting down the proper way, not simply inching her way back down the wall, but leaning out and using the rope. She said her daughter likes to push the envelope and sometimes as a parent, she pushes the envelope *for* her daughter. She said:

How do you know you can't do it? Give it a go! And so, I mean, Beth does lots of activities and we say to her, you know, like, she goes 'I'll never be able to do that.' 'Well, how long do you reckon 'til never comes?' Like, so we try to put stuff into perspective for her. So, you know, it's about practice. It's about trying.

A third mother, Rena, whose son also has an ASD, talked about using videotaped social stories, (Gray, 2010) to help her son prepare for exciting experiences. Social stories refer to a specialized technique parents and professionals use to support persons with autism to participate more comfortably in new or challenging situations. Rena created a social story for her son, James, about the Easter Show, a very large public event with lots of people, rides, animals, sights, sounds, and smells that could easily overwhelm a child, like James, who has sensory processing challenges. Rena said:

I don't take him to a lot of open entertainment things, because of the excessive noise. And I prepped him beforehand, read him a social story, gave him video footage of what the show looks like. I had put so much effort into it. Paid my admission, got inside, walked around for 25 minutes and that was it. I couldn't—he couldn't do it. It was just—he hated it. Hated it! And I couldn't define what it was that he hated. Whether it was the noise of the crowd, the smell of the animals or whether it was, you know, there was so much going on. There was nothing I could do to prepare him for that side of it. So, I took the risk of taking him.

These narratives (and others within the interviews) revealed three mothers' struggles as they made decisions to support their children's developing competence. Both Ann and Rena used strategies to help prepare their sons for new experiences

and, whether or not their decisions allowed the boys to negotiate challenges successfully, these mothers intentionally focused on the learning that occurred for themselves and their sons. Ann emphasized the fact that Will benefits from routines his classroom teachers use and sometimes her “best guess doesn’t work!” Will’s security ‘in the moment’ actually depended on Ann trusting Will and his teachers enough to let go of her own need to protect her son. She said she would know her son had achieved a major goal when he used the strategies himself and “there are no more melt-downs!”

Sandy said she offers Beth lots of activities, many of them challenges that Beth chooses herself, and she encourages her to persevere when things are hard, to “Give it a go!” and keep practicing, to talk things through with someone she trusts. For now that trusted person is often her mother, but Sandy says she thinks it is important for Beth and other children to learn that they can go to people other than their parents to ask for help. They need to learn that other people have experiences that their parents don’t have, and she thinks Beth needs to learn to trust herself to make good decisions as well as to trust that people other than her parents can also help her. Sandy believes that some parents want their children to depend only on them and feels that this can limit children’s development of resilience.

Rena savored the time she and James had enjoyed at the Easter Show, however limited, and noted a small, but positive change, “He’s still experiencing it. It’s okay”. For Rena, James had made a step towards participating in community activities. These mothers put considerable effort into offering their children autonomy support, intentionally employing positive appraisals of life’s everyday risks and modeling both flexibility and adaptability, key characteristics of resilience (W. Grolnick & K. Seal, 2008; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005; Masten, 2007). The

stories of these families reflect the constant balancing of opposing perspectives, illustrating a dynamic tension between telic and paratelic motivations and their awareness of children's needs for risk and freedom. Parents provided their children with opportunities to experience new, and sometimes risky, activities and enough support for them to engage in these activities to learn from the consequences of their actions.

### **Everyday risk taking: The benefits**

Happiness, well-being and resilience require effort, tolerance for uncertainty, some failures and often discomfort as both parents and children develop the competence to manage everyday uncertainties. Many parents in Group 1 and their children engaged in trial and error, made mistakes, and experienced failure as well as success. These parents modeled ways of reframing difficult situations positively by asking, for example, "What can we learn from this?" By offering children age-appropriate risk taking experiences and the chance to manage some uncertainty themselves, the parents we interviewed who had experienced more risk in life provided their children with more than safety in the moment; they offered young people the benefits of everyday risk taking. Rather than offering them safety in the moment they offered them opportunities to broaden and build skills for meeting challenges now and in the future.

I like to think it's been good for the school. That's my spin-off. . . . One of [Drew's] teachers at the end of last year said, 'Look, I tell you, I was really uncertain how it was all going to work.' . . . And his homeroom teacher said they just think it's good for him to keep having a very positive effect on one particular boy. Apparently he'd been a naughty boy, but he's just had this turnaround [since becoming friends with Drew]. From our point of view we



think it's just fantastic because he's [Drew's] friend. [The teacher] said, 'Don't think it's just been good for [Drew]! He's not the only one benefiting.' Great! So I think it's been a really positive thing for the school too; they were worried about how he'd fit in and he fitted in well!

Jana described the outcome of her family's perseverance to find a school that could offer Drew, their 15 year old son who has significant physical disabilities, the kind of social and academic opportunities that could meet his needs. Jana said Drew flourished in his new school (Cohn, et al., 2009) and in fact, he enjoyed it so much that he chose to participate in open day presentations for prospective students because he wanted to share why he thought other students should choose to attend his school. This was challenging because Drew is dysarthric and it is hard for people to understand him, so he uses a communication device. Drew challenged himself to make this presentation and met another goal he set for himself.

Drew and his family took significant risks when his first high school proved a poor match for his needs and they decided to make a change. Drew's sense of belonging was, in fact, more important to them than his progress in the academic curricula. It took Drew's family nearly two years to find a new school that was accessible and could provide some academic adaptations. The principal and teachers explained that while they did not have the same resources for special education that public schools might have, they were willing to offer Drew a chance to see if he might benefit from their programs. This family persevered and took a chance on finding a setting where Drew could balance making friends, learning, and participating in ways that allowed him to contribute his strengths to benefit other students. After changing schools, Jana said, "I always remember [Drew] telling me, "I am worth to be born!" Drew, his parents and teachers chose to take time, put forth considerable effort, and

employ a positive appraisal of uncertainty, trusting that it was just as likely that this risk would yield positive as negative consequences (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

Simply accessing educational programs that meet their children's needs often requires significant effort and problem-solving on the part of parents. Both parents of children living with disabilities and those whose children are developing typically illustrated some of the challenges and benefits of taking some risks for, and with their children.

Danielle and her daughter, Andrea, benefited from their willingness to employ a positive appraisal of a situation and put forth some effort to achieve a desirable outcome. The pair persevered in a joint effort to help Andrea improve her understanding of basic math concepts. When Andrea's teacher told Danielle that she just didn't think math was Andrea's "thing", this assessment of her daughter's abilities was unacceptable to Danielle because she described herself as a math "whiz". She knew her daughter was a capable student and believed that with some support Andrea would persevere and gain confidence in her math skills. Danielle sought the teacher's collaboration and also did some problem-solving on her own. At home she spent time with Andrea to clarify some basic concepts and together they practiced math problems. Danielle took a risk to question her daughter's teacher and Andrea took a risk as well, that is, she took an action with a potentially uncertain outcome, to try to increase her math skills. Andrea benefited from her own efforts and from her mother's willingness to take time to support her capability and her developing math competence.

Sarah was happy to see her daughter, Alice, crossing a busy street on her own to go to local shops, just as her older sister had done at the same age. She said, "I can't limit Alice's chance for this bit of independence just because she uses a power

chair!” Jim recalled the fun he and his sons had when they went to a football game together; he savored the experience with his son, Tom, at a spectator sport. Although Tom’s discomfort with noise and crowds had kept him from accompanying his father and brother previously, Jim kept offering the opportunity, and *this* time Tom *chose* to come along. Terri applauded her daughter Heather’s determination to improve and maintain her health and develop communication skills so, despite multiple physical disabilities and a seizure disorder, Heather could enjoy the freedom of being home alone. Heather learned to use her communication device to call for help if she needed it, a vital step towards increasing interdependence. Terri valued each step Heather took to achieving her goals.

Christopher’s mother, Elena, recounted a time when her son was five years old and the family had been looking forward to a special outing. As they were getting ready to go Christopher, who has OI, broke a bone, something that had happened to him many times by this age. Christopher just looked up at her and said, “I broke. Oh well, just get a plaster, put it on and let’s GO!” Missing out on something he wanted to do was, for Christopher, far worse than breaking a bone. This mum and dad believed that their son’s need to experience life fully was more important than protecting him from every broken bone or adhering to every expert’s cautious recommendation. They believed there are worse things than a broken bone. As Elena said, “He won’t be thanking me for one less broken bone! He’ll be remembering the times he rode the motorcycle with his dad or swam with dolphins.”

Together these parents, along with Sandy, Jana and Danielle, viewed their children as capable and provided the right amount of structure, guidance and connectedness these young people needed to achieve their joint goals. Many parents shared similar stories; those who took a more paratelic perspective (playful, activity-

oriented and adventurous) and those who were able to balance telic (serious, goal-oriented and cautious) and paratelic motivations, promoted activities that offered uncertain outcomes with potential benefits as both parents and children practiced resilience. Parents' stories reflected their pleasure, not their fears, as their sons and daughters participated in everyday activities and experienced the benefits risk-taking yielded.

### **Discussion**

We interviewed 37 parents who comprised two groups with regard to their experiences of risk: parents who had experienced serious threats to their own or their children's lives and parents who had led a relatively risk-free existence. As it turned out, these groups also differed with regard to their views of risk and the practices in which they engaged for managing risk. Parents who chose to view risk as part of daily life spoke of the everyday uncertainties they experienced with their children; they shared stories that demonstrated their beliefs that risk offers benefits: opportunities for children to overcome fears, develop resilience and take some chances that offered opportunities to gain essential life skills. Parents who had experienced threats in life themselves, for example, growing up in a war-torn country, caring for a baby hospitalized with life-threatening asthma, or parenting a child with a serious, lifelong disability, chose to acknowledge life's uncertainties. They took on some risks themselves to make sure their children did not miss out on the benefits of age-appropriate risk taking because of their own fears (e.g., sharing kindnesses with others, traveling overseas with family, engaging in community events or swimming with dolphins).

Grolnick and Seal (2008) suggested that it takes time and effort to offer autonomy support; when parents feel pressured their response is often to increase

control. It is easier and sometimes safer, for parents just to say, “No,” to activities that seem risky, forgetting that age-appropriate risk taking is important to development. If parents believe that risk taking is too much trouble (too risky), children and families may miss important benefits of age-appropriate risk taking: opportunities to experience exhilaration and other positive emotions; pride in achievement and overcoming challenges; and developing resilience to gain life skills for managing health, happiness and well-being.

Parents who said they had experienced very little risk in life worried about keeping their children from making mistakes or experiencing the discomfort of failure; they expressed uncertainty about their decisions. In comparison with parents who had experienced significant risk, these parents worried about relatively insignificant uncertainties (e.g., minor injury). But the root of their concerns seemed to be based as much in being thought to be a “good parent” as in fears that real harm might come to their child. They defended their protective decisions, worried when they believed their parenting skills were being questioned and, often, resorted to controlling their children’s activities and the contexts within which they allowed them to play. In narrowing and protecting, these parents missed opportunities to benefit from tolerating some uncertainty and discomfort or modeling persistence in the face of challenge. In fact, some parents modeled risk aversion, inadvertently teaching their children to doubt their abilities for managing everyday risks (Power, 2011; Ungar, 2007). Buchanan (1999) referred to constant and unnecessary protection as ‘surplus safety’. By putting surplus safety before the potential benefits of dealing with uncertainties, parents may run the risk of unintentionally placing their children in harm’s way in the future, when they are no longer able to protect them.

Fredrickson and Losada (2005) demonstrated that people must encounter three positive emotions, comments or experiences for each negative one if they are to flourish. Parents may be unaware of the consequences of negative or fearful words or of the number of times they must express positive thoughts if their children are to see everyday activities as adventurous rather than dangerous, simply part of growing up. If parents' primary concern for their children has been safety and they have limited children's opportunities to manage uncertainty for the first 12 years of their lives, it seems unlikely that they will have had much practice experiencing the uncertain consequences of their choices, learning from mistakes or weighing up costs and benefits of risks to make good decisions for themselves. Without the practice necessary to weigh up the consequences of their actions, children and adolescents may choose the excitement and exhilaration of unhealthy risk taking experiences without considering the outcomes of their decisions or they may be afraid to challenge themselves at all.

Parents who had faced the most serious risks seemed the best able to balance telic (serious, goal-oriented and cautious) and paratelic (playful, activity-oriented and adventurous) motivations in their approach to parenting. They confronted risks and worked through life's uncertainties--both creatively and safely. They chose to share control with their children and other adults and freed young people to ask for support when needed. By combining telic and paratelic motivations and providing children with autonomy support, these parents assisted their children to develop a sense of their own capacities, gradually letting go as their daughters and sons accumulated life skills and demonstrated abilities to manage the inevitable risks of their everyday lives. These parents modeled perseverance and encouraged their children to take significant, age-appropriate risks to develop resilience – that 'ordinary magic' (Masten, 2001)

argued is a common human capacity; they delighted in their sons' and daughters' participation in typical everyday activities, regardless of the effort required or the discomfort they may have felt themselves.

Perhaps parents in Group 1 may have benefited from greater practice dealing with uncertainties. Some of these parents were older and would have had more time to practice managing risk in their families. Additionally, these parents might just naturally possess an inclination to reflect on their experiences, looking for positive outcomes or lessons in everyday life. Group 2 parents were perhaps, more naturally inclined towards telic motivations, serious-minded and cautious, protecting and keeping themselves and their children safe regardless of the potentially positive gains risk taking or uncertainty might offer. Rather than taking time to consider how they might provide some support or scaffolding that might make it possible for their children to engage in age-appropriate risk taking, these parents often made quick, either/or decisions, their goals to intervene and keep children safe and themselves comfortable.

We agree with Sandseter and Kennaire (2011) that risk and uncertainty are not only valuable, but essential to achieving the lives parents envision for their children, lives of health, happiness, well-being and resilience. Risk and uncertainty offer opportunities for children to balance motivations and purposefully consider whether the cost of a risk is worth the potential benefit. Diener and Lucas (2004) found that, in addition to happiness, young adults highly valued fearlessness in children. Clearly the parents that Diener and Lucas described, and many of those who participated in this study, understood risk and uncertainty as part of life. When both parents and children 'look risk in the eye', make mistakes and learn from them, develop a sense of belonging, and learn to balance the uncertainties of everyday risks effectively, they

take the chance of becoming happy, healthy and resilient members of their families and communities.

While we recognize that this study is based on a small sample of parents and that we cannot generalize the results to large populations of people across countries, we offer the stories of these parents as means for parents and others engaged in raising and teaching children to reflect on the outcomes, benefits as well as the costs, of supporting children to engage in healthy, age-appropriate risk taking within free play and various other everyday activities to offer them opportunities to create health, happiness and well-being, long-term benefits that parents and teachers desire for young people.



## References

- Alaszewski, A., & Coxon, K. (2009). Uncertainty in everyday life: Risk, worry and trust. *Health, Risk & Society, 11*(3), 201 - 207. doi: 10.1080/13698570902906454
- Apter, M. J. (2007). *Reversal theory: The dynamics of motivation, emotion, and personality* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oneworld.
- Baumeister, R., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology, 5*, 323. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.5.4.323
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Broom, A. (2009). Intuition, subjectivity, and Le Bricoleur: Cancer patients' accounts of negotiating a plurality of therapeutic options. *Qualitative Health Research, 19*(8), 1050-1059. doi: 10.1177/1049732309341190
- Brown, S. (2009). *Play: how it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*. New York: Avery.
- Brussoni, M., Olsen, L. L., Pike, I., & Sleet, D. A. (2012). Risky Play and Children's Safety: Balancing Priorities for Optimal Child Development. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 9*(9), 3134-3148. doi: 10.3390/ijerph9093134
- Buchanan, C. (1999). Building better playgrounds: A project for parents. *UAB Magazine, 19*(3).
- Bundy, A., Naughton, G., Tranter, P., Wyver, S., Baur, L., Schiller, W., . . . Brentnall, J. (2011). The Sydney Playground Project: Popping the bubblewrap-unleashing the power of play: A cluster randomized controlled trial of a primary school playground-based intervention aiming to increase children's

- physical activity and social skills. *BMC Public Health*, 11. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-11-680
- Charmaz, K. (1990). 'Discovering' chronic illness: Using grounded theory. *Social Science & Medicine*, 30(11), 1161-1172. doi: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(90\)90256-R](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(90)90256-R)
- Cohn, M. A., Fredrickson, B. L., Brown, S. L., Mikels, J. A., & Conway, A. M. (2009). Happiness Unpacked: Positive Emotions Increase Life Satisfaction by Building Resilience. *Emotion*, 9(3), 361-368. doi: 10.1037/a0015952
- Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2008). Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development, and health. *Canadian Psychology*, 49(3), 182-185. doi: 10.1037/a00128001
- Delle Fave, A., Brdar, I., Freire, T., Vella-Brodrick, D., & Wissing, M. (2011). The Eudaimonic and Hedonic Components of Happiness: Qualitative and Quantitative Findings. *Social Indicators Research*, 100(2), 185-207. doi: 10.1007/s11205-010-9632-5
- Diener, M., & Lucas, R. (2004). Adults Desires for Childrens Emotions across 48 Countries: Associations with Individual and National Characteristics. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 35(5), 525-547. doi: 10.1177/0022022104268387
- Douglas, M. (1992). *Risk and blame: essays in cultural theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset*. New York: Random House.
- Folkman, S., & Moskowitz, J. T. (2000). Positive affect and the other side of coping. *American Psychologist*, 55(6), 647-654.

- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, *56*(3), 218-226. doi: DOI: 10.1037//0003-066X.56.3.218
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2009). *Positivity*. New York: Crown Publishing Group.
- Fredrickson, B. L., & Losada, M. (2005). Positive Affect and the Complex Dynamics of Human Flourishing. *American Psychologist*, *60*(7), 678-686. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.60.7.678
- Fredrickson, B. L., Mancuso, R. A., Branigan, C., & Tugade, M. M. (2000). The undoing effect of positive emotions. *Motivation and Emotion*, *24*(4), 237-258.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gill, T. (2007). *No fear: Growing up in a risk averse society*. London: Calouse Gulbenkian Foundation.
- Gray, C. (2010). *The new social story book*: Future Horizons Incorporated.
- Grolnick, W. (2009). The role of parents in facilitating autonomous self-regulation for education. *Theory and Research in Education*, *7*(2), 164-173. doi: doi: 10.1177/1477878509104321
- Grolnick, W., & Seal, K. (2008). *Pressured parents, stressed-out kids: Dealing with competition while raising a successful child*: Prometheus Books.
- Guldberg, H. (2009). *Reclaiming childhood: Freedom and play in an age of fear*. London: Routledge.
- Hoffman, D. M. (2012). Risky investments: Parenting and the production of the "resilient child". *Health, Risk & Society*, *12*(4), 385 - 394. doi: 10.1080/13698571003789716
- Huta, V., & Ryan, R. (2010). Pursuing Pleasure or Virtue: The Differential and Overlapping Well-Being Benefits of Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives.

*Journal of Happiness Studies*, 11(6), 735-762. doi: 10.1007/s10902-009-91714-4

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking: fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1984). Choices, values, and frames. *American Psychologist*, 39(4), 341-350. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.39.4.341

Lupton, D. (1999). *Risk*. New York: Routledge.

Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing Happiness: The Architecture of Sustainable Change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 111-131.

Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227-238. doi: 10.1037//0003-066x.56.3.227

Masten, A. S. (2007). Resilience in developing systems: Progress and promise as the fourth wave rises. *Development and Psychopathology*, 19(3), 921-930. doi: 10.1017/s0954579407000442

Moore, A., Akhurst, J., & Powell, J. (2010). Using a card sort to structure and promote enquiry-based learning. *The British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 73(5), 229-236. doi: 10.4276/030802210x12734991664264

Niehues, A., Bundy, A., Broom, A., & Tranter, P. (2013). Everyday uncertainties: Reframing adults' perceptions of risk in children's outdoor free play. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 1-. doi: 10.1080/14729679.2013.798588

Packer, M. (2011). *The Science of Qualitative Research*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Park, N. (2004). Character Strengths and Positive Youth Development. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591, 40-54. doi: 10.1177/0002716203260079
- Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: The full life versus the empty life. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 6(1), 25-41. doi: 10.1007/s10902-004-1278-z
- Power, A. (2011, June 21, 2013). Thoughts on Surplus Safety. Retrieved from [allenpower.wordpress.com/2011/03/08/thoughts-on-surplus-safety/](http://allenpower.wordpress.com/2011/03/08/thoughts-on-surplus-safety/)
- Rugg, G., & McGeorge, P. (2005). The sorting techniques: a tutorial paper on card sorts, picture sorts and item sorts. *Expert Systems*, 22(3), 94-107. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0394.2005.00300.x
- Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68-78. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68
- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2007). Categorizing risky play - 'how can we identify risk taking in children's play?'. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 15(2), 237-252. doi: DOI:10.1080/13502930701321733
- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2010). 'It tickles in my tummy!': Understanding children's risk taking in play through reversal theory. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 8(1), 67-88. doi: 10.1177/1476718x09345393
- Sandseter, E. B. H., & Kennair, L. E. O. (2011). Children's risky play from an evolutionary perspective: The Anti-phobic effects of thrilling experiences. *Evolutionary Psychology*, 9(2), 257-284.
- Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*. New York: Free Press.

- Slovic, P. (2000). *The Perception of Risk*. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd,.
- Tovey, H. (2007). *Playing outdoors: Spaces and places, risk and challenge*. New York: Open University Press.
- Tulloch, J., & Lupton, D. (2003). *Risk and Everyday Life*. London: Sage.
- Ungar, M. (2007). *Too safe for their own good: How risk and responsibility help teens thrive*. Crow"s Nest, N.S.W.: Inspired Living.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Journal Article**

#### **Reframing Healthy Risk Taking: The Struggle to Implement Strategies that Promote Well-Being in Children of All Abilities**

**Anita Nelson Niehues • Anita Bundy • Alexander Broom • Paul Tranter**

A.N. Niehues

A. Bundy, Faculty of Health Sciences  
Discipline of Occupational Therapy  
University of Sydney  
Lidcombe NSW 2141 Australia  
e-mail: [anita.niehues@sydney.edu.au](mailto:anita.niehues@sydney.edu.au)

A. Broom, School of Social Science  
University of Queensland  
Brisbane QLD Australia

P. Tranter, School of Physical, Environmental and Mathematical Sciences  
University of New South Wales at the Australia Defence fort Academy  
Canberra ACT Australia

## Faculty of Health Sciences Publication Statement

Statement from co-authors confirming the authorship contribution of the PhD candidate.

As co-authors of the paper: Niehues, A., Bundy, A., Broom, A., Tranter, P. Reframing healthy risk taking: the struggle to implement strategies that promote well-being in children of all abilities, that has been submitted, reviewed and is in revision for *The Journal of Child and Family Studies*, we confirm that Anita Nelson Niehues has made the following contributions:

conception and design of the research  
analysis and interpretation of the findings  
writing the paper and critical appraisal of content

Signed..... *AJBroom* ..... Date: 21/3/14

..  
Signed..... *Paul Tranter* ..... Date: 21/3/14

..  
Signed..... *Paul Bundy* ..... Date: 29/3/14

..



## **Abstract**

This paper reports the results of a qualitative study regarding struggles adults face and strategies they use to manage uncertainties associated with children's healthy and age-appropriate risk taking. It highlights struggles adults experience as they attempt to find a balance between protecting children and offering them autonomy support (structure, guidance, connectedness) and outlines some of the strategies they use to manage their own concerns as they offer children opportunities to develop practical life skills and well-being. Twenty-seven parents of typically developing children and 10 parents of children living with social or physical disabilities engaged in a card sort designed to help identify and review priorities for their child as a prelude to semi-structured, in-depth interviews regarding ways risk and uncertainty contribute to children reaching these goals. Eight teachers of the typically developing children also participated in interviews regarding perceptions of risk in everyday life and parents' concerns about children's risk-taking. We took a hermeneutic interpretive approach, including constant comparative analysis of interview transcripts, to gain an understanding for parents' and teachers' struggles and the strategies they used to offer children age-appropriate activities with gradually increasing challenge and responsibility. This study provides unique insights into the ways adults manage their own uncertainties and employ strategies to offer children opportunities to practice managing risks in their own everyday lives to support children in developing skills that contribute both to children's own to well-being and to the collective well-being of families, schools and communities.

**Keywords:** Risk perceptions; Children's risk taking; Autonomy support; Resilience; Children's well-being

## Introduction

Most adults desire happiness for the children they parent and teach (M. Diener & Lucas, 2004; Lyubomirsky, 2009; Noddings, 2003; Seligman, et al., 2009). There is considerable interest in developing and sustaining children's happiness and well-being, in part because of evidence that children in a number of developed countries are experiencing increasing levels of *unhappiness* (e.g., anxiety, depression) (Eckersley, 2011; Peter Gray, 2011). Burdette and Whitaker (2005) suggested that decreased opportunities to engage in outdoor free play may be one contributing factor to these problems. There seems to be an increasing protectiveness toward children and an ever more risk-averse approach to life generally (Furedi, 2001; Gill, 2007; Skenazy, 2010; Ungar, 2009).

Play is part of children's everyday lives, offering opportunities to build body-mind connections that support the development of physical, social, emotional and cognitive skills (S. Brown, 2009; Damasio, 2003). To develop maximum skills and well-being, children require opportunities to stretch their limits, act on their unique interests, make choices, take action and cope with the uncertainties of everyday life. Children's autonomous engagement in self-determined activities helps them develop relatedness (i.e., a sense of belonging) as well as competence (Deci & Ryan, 2008b). The consequences incurred in playful interactions foster abilities to deal with uncertainties and develop skills necessary for more complex actions and interactions (Sandseter, 2009b; Sandseter & Kennair, 2011; H. Tovey, 2007). Yet, in a desire to keep children safe, well-meaning adults have been shown to unknowingly limit children's access to the full range of experiences and emotions needed to build and sustain well-being and develop resilience (Brussoni, et al., 2012; Cohn, et al., 2009; Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2007; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Ungar, 2009).

In the social context of increased focus on individual risks in developed countries, adults may protect children so much that they rarely experience uncertainty in everyday life (Alaszewski & Coxon, 2008; Baumeister, et al., 2001; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990a; Kahneman, 2011). Parents, uncertain as to how they will be perceived by other parents, teachers or agencies responsible for children’s welfare, may err on the side of caution rather than risk being perceived as poor parents (P. Tranter, 2006). This, in turn, results in concern from teachers that due to their “duty of care,” they could be blamed for uncertain outcomes; some simply prefer not to take a chance, especially with someone else’s child (Niehues, Bundy, Broom, Tranter, et al., 2013). Adults may fear harsh judgments in a risk averse and litigious society. Thus, when they limit children’s access to any activities with potentially risky or uncertain outcomes, adults may be protecting *themselves* as much as protecting children from harm. In short, children’s experiences of risk may be limited by adults’ desires to protect them *and* by uncertainty as to whether the decisions they make will be perceived by others as responsible or “right” decisions.

Delle Fave, Brdar, Friere, Vella-Brodrick and Wissing (2011) proposed that one element of happiness involves the balancing of opposites, for example: comfort with effort; telic [cautious, goal-oriented] with paratelic [adventurous, experience-oriented] motivations (Apter, 2007b); positive with negative emotions; and protective with approach/explore responses. Parents and teachers can intentionally choose to balance safety with challenge, helping children weigh up positive and negative consequences to make good decisions that contribute to their own well-being and that of others. However, such choices on the part of adults necessitate “slow thinking” (Kahneman, 2011; Kahneman & Tversky, 2003), a complex process that requires both time and effort—commodities often in short supply.

An opportunity to investigate the internal conflict between protecting children and allowing them to experience challenges and uncertainty that lead to optimal development arose in the Sydney Playground Project (SPP) (Bundy, et al., 2011), a three-year research program conducted in Catholic co-educational primary schools in Sydney, Australia. SPP involved workshops with parents and teachers discussing the risks and benefits of outdoor free play. During the two-hour “risk reframing” interventions, adults recalled their own childhood play experiences; discussed benefits of play, especially play that occurred when adults were *not present*; and exchanged stories of their perceptions of risk. This intervention was designed to assist participants in expanding their views of risk to include uncertainty, opportunity and challenge (Niehues, Bundy, Broom, Tranter, et al., 2013). SPP gave rise to the current in-depth examination of strategies parents and teachers used to tolerate the uncertainties that accompany decisions regarding the opportunities they provide to children.

This paper has two aims: 1) to highlight struggles adults experience as they attempt to find a balance between protecting children and offering them autonomy support (structure, guidance, connectedness) (Grolnick, 2009; W. Grolnick & K. Seal, 2008) for age-appropriate risk taking, and 2) to outline some of the strategies adults use to manage their own uncertainties as they offer children chances to develop practical life skills by accessing and mastering a variety of healthy, age-appropriate risks.

## **Methods**

Participants in this qualitative study included 27 parents, 28-55 years of age, whose typically developing children, aged 5-7 years, participated in the SPP (Bundy, et al., 2011) and 8 teachers of these children. Another 10 participants, 36-55 years of

age, were parents of daughters or sons living with disability. Five of these parents, 1 father and 4 mothers, had children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), aged 7-10 years, who attended a special education classroom located at a primary school participating in the SPP (Bundy, et al., 2011). Another 5 parents, 1 father and 4 mothers, were raising sons or daughters with physical disabilities, aged 12-17 years; these parents had previously participated in a study investigating advice they had received over time regarding their child. These participants were sensitized to the everyday risk and uncertainty of parenting a child with a lifelong disability. We use pseudonyms to maintain participants' privacy.

### **Procedures**

Parents were invited to complete a card sort that included attributes they desired for their children prior to engaging in semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the first author. Card sorts have been used in qualitative studies as an exploratory method to provide structure to facilitate participants' reflection on choices and planning for the future (Moores, et al., 2010; Rugg & McGeorge, 2005).

Initially we selected 30 attributes (strengths and values) adults desired for their children drawn from three sources: the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (Park, 2004a; Peterson, et al., 2005); pilot interviews conducted with two volunteers who were parents of young children; a list of those desires parents and educators named during risk reframing interventions described above (Bundy, et al., 2011). Members of the SPP project team and members of a faculty research group at the University of Sydney Faculty of Health Sciences assisted in narrowing the items to 20. One attribute (e.g., power, courage, belonging) was printed on each of 20 index cards. Parents were asked to sort the cards into three categories relative to their child: very

important, important or unimportant. The card sort was designed to help participants identify and review their priorities for their child.

Parents then participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews that focused on the three most important attributes they selected, their actions to support their children to build competence in these areas, and on ways risk and uncertainty might contribute to reaching these goals. Participants chose locations of convenience for the interviews (e.g., primary schools, cafés in the community, participants' homes) that generally were conducted on the same day they completed the card sort; five of the interviews were conducted by telephone within a week of parents' receipt of the cards.

In addition to the interviews with parents about attributes, teachers participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews regarding their perceptions of risk in everyday life, uncertainties involved with children playing with novel materials on school playgrounds, and their perceptions of parents' concerns about children's age-appropriate risk-taking during everyday activities, (e.g., outdoor free play). These interviews took place in conference rooms or offices at schools. All interviews were conducted by the first author; lasted between 45 and 90 minutes; and, with participants' permission, were audio-recorded and transcribed to create textual data for in-depth comparative analysis.

### **Analysis of naturalistic inquiry**

We took a hermeneutic interpretive approach to analyzing the interviews in order to gain an understanding of the struggles parents and teachers experienced and some of the strategies they used to offer children age-appropriate activities with gradually increasing challenge and responsibility. Drawing on an adaptation of Charmaz's approach to social analysis (Broom, 2009; Kathy Charmaz, 1990), we

employed constant comparative analysis to discover themes, patterns, and complexities within parents' and teachers' narratives. We also applied Packer's (2011) perspective of hermeneutic interpretation, choosing to retain significant portions of transcripts rather than reducing participants' stories to short quotes to illustrate emergent themes. We triangulated theories of happiness and well-being, play, motivation and resilience to interpret patterns and complexities within the narratives we collected. Thus, the narrative, thematic and theoretical lenses we used enabled us to construct an appreciation for parents' and teachers' struggles and the strategies they use to manage uncertainties about children's everyday risk taking.

### **Results**

A pattern emerged within each narrative as parents shared observations about their children's "true selves", strengths and vulnerabilities. Parents seemed to want others to see their children at their best and also to be seen as 'good' parents. When parents described their children and the ways they dealt with their unique needs, nearly all of the parents of typically developing children asked if *we* thought they were good parents. Curiously, the parents raising children living with disabilities did not ask this question. However, they relayed many stories of times when they had faced risk and uncertainty to make opportunities available to their children. These parents appeared more certain of the decisions they made for, and with, their children and adolescents.

Teachers' narratives usually included an acknowledgment of their duty of care and how this sometimes created ambivalence regarding what they perceived as valuable lessons that reasonable risk taking offered children and whether or not they were willing to take the chance involved with supporting children's choices for free play or managing uncertainties at school. One teacher said when children had the

opportunities to play with the novel materials that the SPP provided, they were highly engaged; there were fewer “squabbles” on the playground; and her job was easier because there were fewer instances when she was asked to mediate disagreements.

Parents and teachers described the importance of allowing children to practice activities, experience both failure and success, and problem-solve solutions themselves, thereby gathering skills to weigh up costs and benefits of risk taking. Many emphasized that children learn more from actual experiences than from simply being told what to do and what not to do. They acknowledged the pride they observed in their children when they engaged with, rather than avoided, challenges (e.g., climbing a tall slippery dip [slide]; learning to ride a bicycle; staying at home alone; or successfully confronting the ups and downs of friendships in the playground). When these adults witnessed children overcoming a barrier or flourishing as they accomplished some new challenge, they celebrated with them and were encouraged to tolerate their own uncertainties. Children began to demonstrate increasing competence to manage risk or uncertainty in everyday activities themselves. Parents and teachers shared some of their struggles and the strategies they used to manage the risks that are simply part of everyday life.

As we compared participants’ approaches to managing their children’s age-appropriate risk taking and their own uncertainties, six main strategies emerged. These strategies are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Adults’ strategies for managing children’s age-appropriate risk taking

<b>Control</b>	Adults don’t allow children to take any risk.
<b>Take time</b>	Adults take the time to learn children’s interests and abilities and reflect on everyday risks as a step toward allowing age-appropriate risk taking.



<b>Develop trust</b>	As adults gain greater trust in children’s abilities and in the environments within which children play, they increase support for children’s age-appropriate risk taking.
<b>Make positive appraisals</b>	Adults choose to make positive appraisals and value the experience of uncertain outcomes.
<b>Take a chance</b>	Adults and/or children choose to take a chance, to tolerate some uncertainty, when they perceive a risk as worth the probability of achieving a positive outcome.
<b>Let go</b>	Parents and teachers “let go” and provide autonomy support and boundaries as needed to promote children’s decision making to manage the risks and uncertainties of daily life.

When adults had experienced considerable risk in their own lives or uncertainties associated with parenting children with disabilities, they seemed to use these strategies flexibly, depending on specific circumstances. They were more able to embrace strategies toward the bottom of Table 1. Other participants were just beginning to think of how they might offer their children more opportunities for age-appropriate risk-taking and the strategies they might use for this purpose.

With time and autonomy support, participants might progress in using a greater array of strategies or more complex strategies to manage their uncertainties. Many participants stated that they benefited from the risk reframing sessions associated with the SPP; they wished for more opportunities to engage in similar workshops. Parents and teachers, just as children, need autonomy support to develop new skills. Interviews were conducted at one point in time, shortly after the risk reframing interventions, and perhaps participants needed more time and autonomy support to develop and use strategies further to the bottom of Table 1 above. In the following sections, we explore each strategy in detail and illustrate how these adults

did not consistently use just one strategy but moved from using one to another strategy depending on individual situations and their own experiences.

### **Controlling risk and taking time to reflect on choices**

This section illustrates the strategy parents often used when they responded automatically to children's risk taking. Eliminating or avoiding risk is quick, easy and automatic. When parents sought to control what children could do they employed strategies to avoid or eliminate risk as much as possible. While there are legitimate reasons for protectiveness, when control strategies become the *primary* strategies adults employ they may keep children from opportunities to feel exhilaration or pride in overcoming barriers or meeting challenges and they may also prevent children from seeing that the world does not end if they fail to meet a challenge (Ungar, 2007). One mother of two typically developing primary school children said:

I can *tell* you that it's no more dangerous than when we were growing up, but the fact is, even if I don't say it's more dangerous, my actions demonstrate that I do [believe this]. You could ask me the next question, 'Do you let your child walk down the road to buy milk?' No. 'Do you leave your child home on their own while you go down the road?' No. 'Do you let your child ride their bike around the block while you're at home?' No. So, I definitely think it's a more dangerous world.

When adults framed the world in this way, the strategy they used most often was avoidance. One teacher said, "We don't let them take any risks!" A father offered his solution to fears about his son's safety when riding his bicycle: he bought a house with the backyard asphalted over, so his son could ride his bike within a fenced backyard. As people focus more on keeping one's own child safe, as this father did, the impact of individual decisions on collective safety may be missed. By

protecting, or over-protecting each child, there are fewer children playing outside, streets become lonely and deserted, and the risks to the remaining children increase; this then, does not serve collective well-being.

Another father made different choices for his son, Tyler, a typically developing kindergartener. Jeremy's stories demonstrated the way he balanced protectiveness with approach/explore behaviors as he managed his son's access to risky activities and his own uncertainties. Jeremy delighted in the time he and his son spent together and described himself and his son, Tyler, as risk-takers, recounting a time when they went to a water park together--one with a "very big water slide!"

Jeremy said:

We were at Wet 'n Wild, like, a water park. You know? So we started up there [to the top of the slide] and Tyler [said], 'Dad, I'm not going on that.' So we, I [said] (very calmly, as a matter of fact), 'No, you are going'. So, he cried all the way up. Like, you see, people are looking at me and saying, 'Ohhhhhhhh! Why is he [making him go]? He doesn't want to go.' I [said], 'No, he has to'. 'Cause there is no danger, it's just fear. So I took him up there and um, when we got down . . .

Interviewer: Did you go together?

Jeremy: Yeah, yeah. 'Cause he is under age, so we went together. When we got down, he was soooo happy that he [said], 'I want to go back!' So we went [again], 4 times.

Interviewer: It's your thought then that it's good to go ahead and . . . ?

Jeremy: It's good, yes. Yes. It's *good* to try. Yes.

Jeremy did not worry about what other people were saying as he and his son climbed the slide, neither did he worry about Tyler's response to descending the slide,

knowing that Tyler had enjoyed similar challenges. He was confident that, together, they would delight in the adventure. In fact, Jeremy saw this as an opportunity for Tyler to gain competence; as he explained, there was no danger, only *fear* of something Tyler had not done before. He showed Tyler that one way to approach uncertainties in life is to approach them with people he trusts.

Despite Jeremy's confidence in giving Tyler new experiences, when he was asked if he lets Tyler walk to school on his own, Jeremy said, "No!" emphatically. Instead, he said he accompanies Tyler to and from school because, although they live close to the school, there is a busy street to cross. Also, his family does not know many people in the neighborhood and Tyler has neither friends, nor an older sibling, to accompany him. In this situation Jeremy was not willing to take the risk for Tyler to learn to cross streets independently and walk to school without an adult. He admitted that he could take the time to teach Tyler to cross the street safely, but he also acknowledged that walking Tyler to school was a part of their relationship he enjoyed because he had not had these kinds of daily routines with his own father. Jeremy's choice in this situation reflected his own desire for comfort and pleasure, rather than Tyler's need to develop competence in crossing streets safely. Perhaps this also reflects Jeremy's sense that he was totally responsible for Tyler's safety, rather than being able to share some of this responsibility with other people. In both situations, enjoying the water slide and walking to school, Jeremy took time to reflect on Tyler's engagement in age-appropriate risk taking and made purposeful decisions.

### **Time, trust and taking a chance**

When adults took time to reflect on the variety of potential outcomes of a risk, to develop trust in their own decision-making, or in their children's competence, they found they could also tolerate more uncertainty. When parents and teachers balanced

their fears with the likelihood that a child might *benefit* from an experience, they were more likely to take a chance to allow a child to practice managing the uncertainties of a situation or activity. Several participants shared stories of deliberately making choices to let their children try exciting, challenging, even risky, activities. When adults set appropriate boundaries and offered autonomy support they allowed children to take on more responsibility for their own well-being within everyday activities.

Lyubomirsky and colleagues demonstrated that the use of intentional activities builds and sustains happiness (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005). Perhaps intentional activities also help build the trust necessary for adults to offer children opportunities for age-appropriate risk taking (e.g. taking time and making an effort to get to know people in the neighborhood or school community). Parents and teachers took time to talk through possible outcomes with children before they engaged in activities and helped them prepare for what might occur. Adults sometimes offered alternatives for how a child might respond; other times they simply provided children with time to problem-solve and create their own solutions. Children learned to trust parents and teachers to provide only as much support--and as many boundaries--as necessary. Children and adults reflected on outcomes and, together, learned both from success and failure.

Parents and teachers considered strategies they used to manage their discomfort with children's free play and pondered new strategies to build their tolerance for age-appropriate risk taking. Several parents said that questions raised during the risk reframing sessions influenced their thinking about how they might offer children more opportunities for "risky" play. They were concerned that their children might miss out on essential learning if they did not learn to manage their own

worries more effectively; they wondered how to manage their own discomfort differently.

Kiera, a parent of two typically developing boys aged 5 and 6 years, said she is a shy person, not “*at all*” a risk-taker, but she described her process of allowing her two sons to play in the park across the street from their home without her constant presence:

It took me a long while to let go. Yeah. So I’d sit on the verandah and monitor. Where we live is very, very safe. There’s not a lot of strangers, um, there’s always a parent watching someone’s kids. Well, after we had that [risk reframing] I thought, aww, I wonder if I can start to go inside and look out the window? You know, you just can’t let go all at once. So some days I’d sit out there and, you know, enjoy it. So, then I’d go inside. And other days I’ll be inside getting dinner ready and have a check now and then. I think, like, I think someone asked, ‘Are these fears real or are they what we see in the media?’ and, I think it’s a bit of both, like, we have to be careful that it’s a different world and all the rest of it, but I thought, no, I’ve gotta get them to let go, or *I’ve* gotta let go, or they’ve gotta, well, probably both! [The boys] must start to show a bit, become a bit responsible for their actions. [I’m] probably holding my kids too tight. I’d always probably tried, not to rescue them, but to sort of step in, instead of letting them go through the process. ... And my little one’s quite feisty (laughing) so, I’d try to step in to stop whatever he was getting ready to do. I let that go and he’s starting to get the balance now.

Kiera said that when she stopped “stepping in” and let her sons play in the park, settling their differences on their own, they developed a different kind of

relationship; they were actually learning to work things out *together* and as a result, the whole family “felt calmer”. Kiera built her tolerance for uncertainty a little bit at a time and her boys began to experience increasing competence in their interactions with each other; they had time and space to practice these new skills and this allowed them to manage some uncertainties as they increased security in their own abilities, rather than depending on someone else to step in to solve their disagreements. Kiera’s insights are typical of those other parents reported as they stepped back and gave themselves permission to build strategies for managing their own uncertainty and discomfort a little bit at a time, giving children greater access to activities for managing age-appropriate challenges.

### **Positive appraisals**

Another mother, Rachel, was very confident in her approach to managing uncertainty related to her youngest son, Brian, and his high activity level. Rachel and her husband have two older children and were very aware of what is required of a child in primary school. Although Brian has no medical diagnosis, they were concerned about how he would fit in at school. Rachel said:

Brian is very competitive by nature. And it doesn’t matter what we do to try and reel that in. He just seems to continue. Achieving makes him happy, and being active makes him happy. Yeah and you know, getting recognized, not necessarily from us, but from teachers and coaches, that makes him want to do even better. Yeah, he’s a swimmer; he plays rugby; he plays baseball; he plays basketball. We have to keep him entertained somehow, and that’s why we do it.

Interviewer: And if he doesn’t have those things going on?

Rachel: (Laughing). Then he gets into trouble! He doesn't, he's not an independent player. He doesn't play with toys at all. Um, he's active, he's outside, and even if he's inside, he's jumping around and doing somersaults and playing football. So, in order to keep him entertained, he's involved in a lot of sports, so then he's got something to do pretty much every afternoon. He's very good academically as well and he's quite happy to do homework, sit down at dinner and then he's quiet. And it works! . . . When he was little we were concerned that when he went to school, that competitive [nature] would rub [people] the wrong way. But in fact, it's the opposite. He, the kids feed off it, and I think that will hold him as he gets older. And we've learned that, from day one, he's been a ball of energy and everyone who meets him pretty much sees the same thing. He's very well-behaved now and not, you know, when Brian was little we really were concerned that he wouldn't be able to control himself.

Rachel said that because of Brian's active and competitive nature they had to start early to help him make good choices. She reflected:

Even just running around on the playground or walking on a [high] fence. You know, where other kids will walk on the fence, Brian will run, and wants to get past people and that's where that whole competitive thing comes in. So, it comes back to explaining to him, from the time he was really little, 2 or 3 [years old], that it's not a good thing to do anyway. So, sort of figure out what you're doing in a way, in a playground running around -- he's *super*-fast -- so it's just, you have to be aware that *you* might be fast, but other kids mightn't be fast.

Interviewer: And how does what you're doing impact someone else?



Rachel: Yeah. And you know, he's grown up a bit and has confidence. So he's really learned to think about those things for himself now. Lots of reminding him and, when we go somewhere, we talk it out, what might happen, before he goes. If we're going to someone's house or to a party, it's a discussion beforehand. Okay, it doesn't matter what other people are doing, think about what you're going to do and you know, kind of just, if something goes wrong, what's gonna happen? Or, if someone says 'let's go and do this', [think], would you be allowed to do it?

Interviewer: How did you get to the point that you knew you had to do this?

Rachel: I call him a cyclone. He's just on the go all the time. And, you know, that's not a bad thing and I think it's good for him. We can't change it, so we have to learn to deal with it. And we had to learn to teach *him* how to deal with it.

Rachel's approach included making a positive appraisal of Brian's nature and then creating strategies to support his development of practical skills for managing himself in various environments. She acknowledged that Brian needed to learn how to manage his "true self" in ways that contributed to others' happiness and well-being as well as his own. Rachel and her husband prepared Brian as best they could, creating a positive appraisal of his nature and taking a chance to trust him to use strategies they taught him to manage his behavior appropriately at school and in other social situations.

Helping children create positive appraisals of people and situations and identify ways to show compassion contributes to one's own happiness as well as to collective well-being. Just as Rachel helped Brian learn to take others into account,

Ann shared a story about how her son, Will, a young boy with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, demonstrated compassion for a little girl he met in the hospital. Ann said:

He was in hospital and he had a favorite little toy, Dorothy from the Wiggles. And there was a little baby and she didn't have hardly any visitors. I think [a welfare agency] was involved, 'cause it was a carer that came in and out. There was no one to pick her up or hug her or anything like that. And she liked Will's Dorothy doll, but she had something contagious so the nurse said that if you're going to touch her, be sure to wash your hands. And Will decided to give her his doll. He said, "Mummy, she's got no toys!"

Will chose to take a chance, to "let go" of a favorite object and offer this toy to someone he barely knew. This kindness created a positive experience for a baby that contributed not only to *this* child's well-being, but also contributed to a sense of well-being for Will, his mother and possibly, for the staff caring for this little one, that is, Will's action contributed to the collective well-being. This is one example of an everyday experience that offered positive emotions for several people as Will and his mum took time, effort and a sense of connection with others to risk "letting go" of one's own comfort to offer another person a small act of kindness.

**A most difficult strategy: letting go**

Danielle, a mother of two, said she wanted her children to be able to make mistakes and learn from them, to be confident in themselves and make choices based on their own feelings, not on what others said or chose to do. Just as Rachel and her husband offered Brian strategies to make good decisions himself and Ann supported Will in deciding to share a toy with another child, Danielle helped her children weigh up consequences of their actions and make choices. Danielle shared a story of how friendships in the playground perplexed her typically developing daughter, Andrea,

who is a year three student. Although she enjoyed lots of friends, Andrea was puzzled when one lot of girls didn't want her to be friends with another lot.

Danielle's story illustrated how her daughter's conundrum allowed her to learn an important life lesson. Danielle said:

I think my daughter identified that clicking with this one lot was an error in judgment. And she had to step away and decide, 'I don't want to be friends with one lot, I want to be friends with whoever I want to. I don't necessarily have to do what these people tell me'. She had the skills to step back and have a chat to me. And I guess my role there was to help her identify what *she* [wanted to do]. And I think, now I hear her talking to my little one, (Andrea's younger brother), saying, 'You need to be friends with whoever you like. You don't have to be friends with one person and nobody can tell you who to be friends with.' And I think that's gorgeous. It felt fabulous as a parent and I didn't *do* anything. All I did was assist her to take that step back and not have such a narrow view. And I think to be able to take that step back and then months later have her sit in the family room with my son and say, 'You know, no one can tell you who to be friends with. That's something *you* work out.' And I think, 'perfect'! That's a life skill. It's lovely, and it's only happened once, but I like to think that she draws on that when she's in a difficult situation.

Danielle spoke about the necessity of chatting with her children, the everydayness of checking in with each other, and the need to get out of her children's way so that they could learn to manage things themselves. She gave some examples regarding her son Michael, a kindergartener with asthma:

You know, something happens and my son will come up and say, 'Mum, what do I do?' Well, what do you think you should do? And I can manage the response and provide guidance, but I also want him to have a go at trying to resolve it himself. It's about bouncing it off mum and saying, 'I think I might do this.' Well, why don't you go and try that and see what happens. And he'll come back and he'll either say, 'Well, that didn't work,' or 'everything's fine'. And then I need to manage the result if it didn't work; we need to talk some more and come up with something else. But if it does work, well, my job is done. And to a certain degree, he seeks [a solution] on his own. I just want them to try and resolve their own issues.

Danielle shared how she helped her children manage uncertainties by sitting down and having a chat with them. Some teachers used a similar strategy to avert or manage risk in daily activities at school by communicating with parents through notes or chats when parents arrived to collect their children at the end of the day. One young teacher said, although it felt risky sitting down with parents as equal participants in the risk reframing sessions, these interactions helped her understand that both parents and teachers wanted the same things for children. She said this process offered an opportunity to let go of some fears to build more trusting relationships with one another. Trust, whether in relationships between parents and children, parents and other parents, parents and teachers or teachers and children, seemed to help people tolerate risk and uncertainty more effectively. Participants shared strategies such as taking the time to discuss differing perspectives, choosing to act on positive, rather than negative appraisals of people and situations, and taking some chances, knowing that outcomes may be positive or negative. They shared how

they had to choose to let go of some of their fears to make decisions to support positive changes in both their children and in themselves.

Danielle described one such situation. Her daughter, Andrea, was invited to a sleepover at a friend's house. In the past Danielle and her husband had always said no. This time Danielle took time to consider the possibility. She talked to her husband and pointed out that she and her husband knew the parents of Andrea's friend well and trusted them. They also trusted Andrea and thought this opportunity was likely to be fun for her. Danielle said:

I think it was a big step for me! I think my daughter nearly died when I turned around and said yes, you can go. Andrea felt this massive boost of independence because I dropped her off and, you know, everything was fine and she was on her own. And I actually think it was the best thing I could have done.

Laughing, Danielle described how Andrea had come home and reported on her behavior. "Mum, I cleaned up after myself and I remembered my manners! "

Thinking about her son, Michael, Danielle added:

We're not quite there with Michael. I find that he's very, his preference is to be close, rather than to move away. He's too young. He still needs us, but we need to help him learn to let go as he learns to manage and becomes more independent. By the same token, *we* need to be letting go.

Danielle took time to think about each of her children and their needs. She made positive appraisals and learned to trust her children and others. When her children were ready to take some risks she acknowledged she had to take a chance and gradually let them go. Depending on the unique needs of each child and

particular situations, Danielle moved gracefully back and forth along the progression of strategies from controlling to letting go.

Learning to “let go” was hard for most adults and took conscious effort. As children demonstrated increasing abilities to make good decisions and act responsibly, adults were better able to offer children more control. Parents of young people living with disabilities shared stories that illustrated the necessity of letting go in order for children to learn to cope with the uncertainties of the “real world” and gain competence in life skills to create and sustain happiness and well-being (Niehues, Bundy, Broom, & Tranter, 2013). When the adults we interviewed trusted others sufficiently to *share* responsibility for children’s safety and well-being, they were able to move away from controlling to use increasingly more complex strategies to allow children to engage in a greater range of healthy risk taking activities. Parents and teachers were often pleasantly surprised with the results of their efforts: children demonstrated competence and adaptability and learned practical life skills. This experience is not unusual; parents, teachers, and researchers too, can underestimate the capacities and maturity of children (Freeman, 2007).

### **Discussion**

This study has provided unique insights into parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of risk and uncertainty within the contexts of families and schools. Within the interviews we conducted a majority of participants stated that they wanted children to be happy, healthy and resilient. For example, one mother said, “I want them to have a life!” and a father shared that he wanted his children to “find something they are passionate about” to help balance times of unhappiness and uncertainty they would inevitably face in life. Nonetheless, many participants said they would never let their children do the things they had done as children (e.g., riding bikes all over the

neighborhood; playing at the beach or in the bush with friends and siblings; building cubby houses and billy-carts) without supervision. They said this was both because of their own fears but also, because they believed it is a more dangerous world today and others might judge them harshly.

Participants' stories reflected considerable ambivalence as to how best to protect and care for their own children. While a few narratives revealed a concern for the well-being of others, it appeared more difficult for people to take risks on behalf of, or to depend on, others beyond the circle of their own family. They seemed to lack a vision for how such actions might contribute to the collective well-being of a school, neighborhood or larger community. This reflects a focus on individualism rather than on collective responses to the challenges of raising children and the happiness and well-being that comes about through engagement with others and the meaningfulness of contributing to something beyond one's self and one's immediate family. Results from this study reveal a wider recognition that within the context of increasing time-pressures and risk aversion, adults simply minimize uncertainty and limit their sphere of responsibility to family and close friends (Delle Fave, et al., 2011). This may, in turn, result in a reduction in reciprocity amongst adults, reflecting a weakening of social ties around managing risk in ways that facilitate all children's age-appropriate risk taking.

A number of adults we interviewed believed it is easier and more time efficient to protect against problems and keep children safe and comfortable by making decisions *for* them. Much of the information that comes through the media, from school communications, conversations with people at work or with family members, is focused on what has gone wrong in the world, reflecting negative risk discourse (Bishop, 2013) and adults feel compelled to protect children from all

possible harm. At the same time, even the most risk averse parents were interested in exploring how they might overcome some of their fears to offer children more risk taking opportunities. Participants shared some of their own childhood experiences and what they had learned through outdoor free play. One teacher said, “Children need to learn to take risks” and many parents agreed, although they also expressed their struggles to let go and allow children to learn through making some mistakes.

Kiera’s story illustrated the use of autonomy support and the reflective process Kahneman (2011) described as “slow thinking”; Kiera employed effort over time to explore and choose a more complex response to her children’s everyday risk taking. Conscious strategies appeared to help adults override their automatic, protective responses. When adults built trust, made positive appraisals of people or situations, took some chances and let go a bit at a time, they were better able to tolerate children approaching and exploring age-appropriate risks. They also modeled this process for their children. By employing strategies that stretched their tolerance for uncertainty, parents encouraged their children to engage in activities to build resources for managing their own lives with greater self-determination (autonomy, competence and relatedness) (Deci & Ryan, 2008b). They were also better able to cope with risk and challenge resiliently.

Participants, especially parents of children living with disabilities, created *positive* risk narratives and deliberately engaged children in activities to help them develop practical life skills and build resilience. One of these strategies was to help children build trust in themselves and in their ability to ask people for assistance. Parents of children living with disabilities also were concerned that their children not miss out on opportunities to become and be resilient people. They struggled to make age-appropriate risk taking available for their children and looked for ways to help



them interact with a variety of people, accessing information and making good decisions for managing their own well-being. These parents recognized the importance of preparing their children to care for themselves now, and more importantly, in the future when their parents are no longer able to manage for them.

This study has contributed to our understanding of how children's access to healthy, age-appropriate risk taking is influenced by adults' perceptions of risk and uncertainty. It suggests the need for adults to access opportunities to develop and apply strategies to manage their own uncertainties and discomfort.

### **Conclusion**

When participants took time to consider the value of children's healthy and age-appropriate risk-taking many recalled times when they offered their children opportunities to challenge themselves or to manage uncertain circumstances. They shared some of their struggles and the strategies they used to manage their own uncertainties. Participants' stories highlighted the value of taking time to reflect on the costs and benefits of risk, building trust in each other and in children, intentionally creating positive appraisals of people and situations, taking some chances and learning to let go of some fears in service of children's happiness and well-being. If these things are true, then we can conclude that when adults put more faith in others to share responsibility for building and sustaining the happiness and well-being of their own children, they might feel greater confidence in themselves and take on more responsibility for supporting all children to pursue happiness and well-being through age-appropriate risk taking. All children might have more opportunities to practice managing the risks and uncertainties of their everyday lives to develop greater

confidence and resilience (i.e., flexibility and adaptability) and the collective well-being of families, schools and communities might also be better served.

### References

- Alaszewski, A., & Coxon, K. (2008). The everyday experience of living with risk and uncertainty. *Health, Risk & Society, 10*(5), 413-420.
- Apter, M. J. (2007). *Reversal theory: The dynamics of motivation, emotion, and personality* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oneworld.
- Baumeister, R., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology, 5*, 323. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.5.4.323
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Bishop, R. (2013). Go out and play, but mean it: Using frame analysis to explore recent news media coverage of the rediscovery of unstructured play. *The Social Science Journal, 50*(4), 510-520. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2013.07.014>
- Broom, A. (2009). Intuition, subjectivity, and Le Bricoleur: Cancer patients' accounts of negotiating a plurality of therapeutic options. *Qualitative Health Research, 19*(8), 1050-1059. doi: 10.1177/1049732309341190
- Brown, S. (2009). *Play: how it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*. New York: Avery.
- Brussoni, M., Olsen, L. L., Pike, I., & Sleet, D. A. (2012). Risky Play and Children's Safety: Balancing Priorities for Optimal Child Development. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 9*(9), 3134-3148. doi: 10.3390/ijerph9093134

- Bundy, A., Naughton, G., Tranter, P., Wyver, S., Baur, L., Schiller, W., ... Brentnall, J. (2011). The Sydney Playground Project: Popping the bubblewrap-unleashing the power of play: A cluster randomized controlled trial of a primary school playground-based intervention aiming to increase children's physical activity and social skills. *BMC Public Health*, *11*. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-11-680
- Burdette, H., & Whitaker, R. (2005). A national study of neighborhood safety, outdoor play, television viewing and obesity in preschool children. *Pediatrics*, *116*(3), 657 - 662.
- Charmaz, K. (1990). 'Discovering' chronic illness: Using grounded theory. *Social Science & Medicine*, *30*(11), 1161-1172. doi: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(90\)90256-R](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(90)90256-R)
- Cohn, M. A., Fredrickson, B. L., Brown, S. L., Mikels, J. A., & Conway, A. M. (2009). Happiness Unpacked: Positive Emotions Increase Life Satisfaction by Building Resilience. *Emotion*, *9*(3), 361-368. doi: 10.1037/a0015952
- Damasio, A. (2003). *Looking for Spinoza: joy, sorrow and the feeling brain*. Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt.
- Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2008). Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development, and health. *Canadian Psychology*, *49*(3), 182-185. doi: 10.1037/a0012801
- Delle Fave, A., Brdar, I., Freire, T., Vella-Brodrick, D., & Wissing, M. (2011). The Eudaimonic and Hedonic Components of Happiness: Qualitative and Quantitative Findings. *Social Indicators Research*, *100*(2), 185-207. doi: 10.1007/s11205-010-9632-5

- Diener, M., & Lucas, R. (2004). Adults Desires for Childrens Emotions across 48 Countries: Associations with Individual and National Characteristics. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 35(5), 525-547. doi: 10.1177/0022022104268387
- Eckersley, R. (2011). A new narrative of young people's health and well-being. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 14(5), 627-638. doi: 10.1080/13676261.2011.565043
- Fattore, T., Mason, J., & Watson, E. (2007). Children's conceptualisation(s) of their well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, 80(1), 5-29. doi: 10.1007/s11205-006-9019-9
- Fredrickson, B. L., & Branigan, C. (2005). Positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and thought-action repertoires. *Cognition and Emotion*, 19(3), 313-332. doi: DOI:10.1080/02699930441000238
- Furedi, F. (2001). *Paranoid parenting: Abandon your anxieties and be a good parent*.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gill, T. (2007). *No fear: Growing up in a risk averse society*. London: Calouse Gulbenkian Foundation.
- Gray, P. (2011). The decline of play and the rise of psychopathology in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Play*, 3(4), 443-463.
- Grolnick, W. (2009). The role of parents in facilitating autonomous self-regulation for education. *Theory and Research in Education*, 7(2), 164-173. doi: doi: 10.1177/1477878509104321
- Grolnick, W., & Seal, K. (2008). *Pressured parents, stressed-out kids: Dealing with competition while raising a successful child*: Prometheus Books.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking: fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

- Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (2003). The rational choice, values and frames. *Psikhologicheskii Zhurnal*, 24(4), 31-42.
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2009). *The how of happiness: is it possible to become lastingly happier and if so, how?* Paper presented at the Happiness & Its Causes Conference, Sydney, Australia.
- Lyubomirsky, S., & Layous, K. (2013). How Do Simple Positive Activities Increase Well-Being? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22(1), 57-62. doi: 10.1177/0963721412469809
- Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing Happiness: The Architecture of Sustainable Change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 111-131. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.111
- Moore, A., Akhurst, J., & Powell, J. (2010). Using a card sort to structure and promote enquiry-based learning. *The British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 73(5), 229-236. doi: 10.4276/030802210x12734991664264
- Niehues, A., Bundy, A., Broom, A., & Tranter, P. (2013a). Parents' perceptions of risk and the influence on children's everyday activities. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. doi: 10.1007/s10826-013-9891-2
- Niehues, A., Bundy, A., Broom, A., Tranter, P., Ragen, J., & Engelen, L. (2013b). Everyday uncertainties: Reframing adults' perceptions of risk in children's outdoor free play. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 223-237. doi: 10.1080/14729679.2013.798588
- Noddings, N. (2003). *Happiness and Education* (1 ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Packer, M. (2011). *The Science of Qualitative Research*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Park, N. (2004). Character Strengths and Positive Youth Development. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591, 40-54. doi: 10.1177/0002716203260079
- Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: The full life versus the empty life. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 6(1), 25-41. doi: 10.1007/s10902-004-1278-z
- Rugg, G., & McGeorge, P. (2005). The sorting techniques: a tutorial paper on card sorts, picture sorts and item sorts. *Expert Systems*, 22(3), 94-107. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0394.2005.00300.x
- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2009). Characteristics of risky play. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 9(1), 3-21. doi: 10.1080/14729670802702762
- Sandseter, E. B. H., & Kennair, L. E. O. (2011). Children's risky play from an evolutionary perspective: The Anti-phobic effects of thrilling experiences. *Evolutionary Psychology*, 9(2), 257-284.
- Seligman, M., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(3), 293-311. doi: 10.1080/03054980902934563
- Skenazy, L. (2010). *Is freedom too risky for kids?* Paper presented at the Festival of Dangerous Ideas, Sydney, Australia.
- Tovey, H. (2007). *Playing outdoors: Spaces and places, risk and challenge*. New York: Open University Press.
- Tranter, P. (2006). Overcoming Social Traps: a key to creating child friendly cities. In B. Gleeson & N. Sipe (Eds.), *Creating child Friendly Cities: Reinstating Kids in the City*. New York: Routledge.

Ungar, M. (2007). *Too safe for their own good: How risk and responsibility help teens thrive*. Crow"s Nest, N.S.W.: Inspired Living.

Ungar, M. (2009). Overprotective Parenting: Helping Parents Provide Children the Right Amount of Risk and Responsibility. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 37(3), 258 - 271. doi: 10.1080/01926180802534724

## **Chapter 5**

### **Journal Article**

**Title:**

Everyday uncertainties: Reframing perceptions of risk in outdoor free play

**Authors:** Anita Nelson Niehues, PhD candidate

University of Sydney, Sydney Australia

Current address: 1036 Tranquil Lane

Estes Park, Colorado 80517 USA

E-mail: anita.niehues@sydney.edu.au

Mobile telephone: 970 646-6516

Anita Bundy, Professor and Chair of Occupational therapy

University of Sydney, Sydney Australia

Alex Broom, Associate Professor of Sociology

University of Queensland, Brisbane Queensland

Paul Tranter, Associate Professor

School of Physical, Environmental, and Mathematical Sciences

University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force

Academy, Canberra Australia

Jo Ragen, Senior Research Associate

University of Sydney, Sydney Australia

Lina Engelen, Research Fellow & Project Manager

University of Sydney, Sydney Australia



**Abstract:**

This paper reports the results of risk reframing, an intervention to offer parents and educators a context for building new and complex perceptions of risk in children's outdoor free play. Our objective was to alter these adults' perceptions of risk to increase the sustainability of an innovative child-centred playground intervention. Qualitative data in the form of audio-recordings of risk reframing sessions, brief participant evaluations and field notes kept by project staff were collected and either transcribed in their entirety or summarised in brief written reports. These data were subjected to constant comparative analysis to identify emergent themes. Results suggest that educators and parents benefit from opportunities to share risk perceptions and discuss the costs and benefits for offering outdoor free play to children to achieve their common goals for children: health, happiness, and resilience.

**Keywords:** Play, Risk, Reframing, Children, Parents

This project received funding from the Australian Research Council (DP0877590) as well as from the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (570808).

## Faculty of Health Sciences Publication Statement

Statement from co-authors confirming the authorship contribution of the PhD candidate:

As co-authors of the paper Niehues, A., Bundy, A., Broom, A., Tranter, P., Ragen, J. and Engelen, L. (2013). Everyday uncertainties: Reframing adults' perceptions of risk in children's outdoor free play. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, doi:10.1080/14729679.2013.798588.

We confirm that Anita Nelson Niehues has made the following contributions:

conception and design of the research  
analysis and interpretation of the findings  
writing the paper and critical appraisal of content

*AJBroom*

Signed..... Date: 21/3/14  
"  
Signed..... *Paul Tranter* Date: 21/3/14  
"  
Signed..... *Paul Ragen* Date: 24/3/14  
"  
Signed..... *J. Engelen* Date: 24/3/14  
"  
Signed..... *Anita Bundy* Date: 24/3/14

## Introduction

Notions of risk and danger are shaped by experiences that develop out of participation in various daily contexts and cultures (Douglas, 1992). Risk, once a neutral term indicative only of the likelihood of an occurrence, has been more recently associated with danger. Within the “risk society” (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990b) of Westernized countries, such as Australia, risk is increasingly synonymous with danger, the term evoking fear that narrows thoughts and actions to protective responses (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001).

Risk can be framed positively, however. Research from many disciplines suggests risk plays a necessary role in children’s development. In short, children benefit from experiences that involve uncertainty and challenge in order to master the environment and develop feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Dweck, 2006; Grolnick, 2009; W Grolnick & K. Seal, 2008; Sandseter & Kennair, 2011), all essential to health and well-being, (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Whether children fail or succeed at a particular challenge, they learn to manage uncertainty and build resources to become happy, resilient people.

Adults *do* want children to be happy, productive and successful; they also want them to demonstrate resilience and to flourish. When Diener and Lucas (2004) surveyed young adults about the emotions they *most* desired for their children, they chose both happiness and *fearlessness*. Ironically, whilst adults desire fearlessness for children, their own *fearfulness* of potential danger and negative outcomes may interfere with children engaging in healthy challenges that build courage and resilience, both closely linked to fearlessness (Marano, 2008; Murus, 2009; Skenazy, 2009). A key question is generated: how do children learn the limits of their abilities if they are offered only activities where there is no risk of failure? Furthermore, if

they are never allowed to experience discomfort, how do children develop physical skills, learn to regulate their emotions, extend themselves in social relationships or persevere in the face of cognitive challenges?

Fredrickson, in her broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, suggested that when children approach and explore (rather than flee or freeze), they experience momentary positive emotions that expand their thoughts and actions, thus opening an array of possible responses to uncertainty. As these responses accumulate, children build resources for resilience and, in turn, flourish. (Cohn, et al., 2009; Fredrickson, 1998, 2001, 2004).

### **Children's response to play.**

Children are naturally drawn to play and many children particularly seek “risky play”, the kind that most often occurs outdoors and beyond the purview of adults (S. Brown, 2009; Sandseter, 2007; Helen Tovey, 2007) . Within risky play, children experience “scary-funny” feelings, the ambiguous emotional shifting back and forth between negative and positive emotions, pushing their limits and thereby strengthening physical and emotional skills (Sandseter, 2009b).

Sandseter (2010) framed children's experiences of risky play in Apter's Reversal Theory, a motivational theory comprised, in part, by telic and paratelic states (Apter, 2001, 2007a, 2007b). While children are in a telic state, they tend towards serious-minded, goal-oriented, sensible, cautious, and arousal-avoiding activity. In contrast, when they experience a paratelic state, they choose playful, activity-oriented, adventurous, thrill-seeking, and arousal-seeking activity. In a paratelic state, children *feel* “protected.” They are so engaged in the process of reaching their goals, that the idea of danger is irrelevant. Children's quality of life is enhanced by play that engenders a paratelic state.

Without access to *unpredictable* play, children miss out on the “scary-funny” feelings and self-determined challenges that promote self-management and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008b; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sandseter, 2009b; Siegel, 2007; Stephenson, 2003). Further, when children feel secure enough in themselves to act on their curiosity (Helen Tovey, 2007) and meet challenges they choose, they gain confidence and what Ungar (2007, 2009) described as the “risk-taker’s advantage.”

### **Adults’ response to risky play**

While children benefit from shifting rapidly between states and experiencing the sensations and emotions risky play offers, adults tend to “get stuck” in a telic state or risk-protective mode, and constrain children to controlled, predictable and “safe” play. However, to say that all adults act from a strong negative bias with regard to risk is an oversimplification. People bring their individual perceptions and temperaments with them when they make judgments and positive perceptions of risk do exist (Lupton, 2006). In fact, the *young* Australian adults that Tulloch and Lupton (2003) studied said that they *sought* risk in order to experience control in their lives, to strive for self-improvement, and to experience the heightened emotional experiences that accompany risk. In short, they said that adventurous, risky, and goal-directed activity made everyday life pleasurable and meaningful.

If they are aware of the pleasures and benefits, why do parents and teachers so often prevent children from experiencing scary-funny, “risky” play? Do they *forget* the benefits of risk-taking when they become responsible for children’s well-being? As society’s expectations continue to grow, parents and teachers may simply choose to manage their worries and concerns about negative consequences by avoiding potentially risky situations (Grolnick, 2009; W Grolnick & K. Seal, 2008; Gurland & Grolnick, 2005; Hoffman, 2012).

Parents and teachers have many constraints on their time; they are confronted with countless decisions related to children. Often decisions are made quickly to meet a need in the present moment. Kahneman (2011) contrasted “fast thinking,” which relies on heuristics (i.e., rules of thumb that develop out of participation in daily cultures) and often yields protective responses (Gardner, 2008), with “slow thinking.” Slow thinking, which involves weighing up possible outcomes before making a choice and considering whether the potential gain is worth the risk of possible loss (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984), requires effort and, therefore, is reserved for complex decision-making (Kahneman, 2011). Nonetheless, slow thinking about risk taking and children may be just what parents and teachers need in order to neutralise their own fears and negativity. Parents and teachers, just as children, benefit from slowing down their thinking and taking time to explore new information through discussion with people they trust. People often make sense of new perceptions by actively applying them to their own lives in the context of storytelling (Statler & Roos, 2007).

We began with the belief that engaging parents and teachers in a process that uses stories and reflection to link children’s development to healthy risk-taking might offer them the opportunity to construct new, more complex frames of risk and uncertainty. The purpose of this paper is to report the results of an intervention created for parents and educators of children participating in the Sydney Playground Project (SPP) and to use these results to illustrate a process by which parents and educators began to re-construct healthy risk-taking for their children.

The SPP was designed to examine the effectiveness of this risk-reframing intervention conducted in tandem with a simple playground-based intervention. The playground intervention encouraged children to be active and develop social skills by taking age-appropriate physical, social, emotional and cognitive risks within the

safety of the school playground and to experience the natural consequences of their actions. Children were offered loose parts and recycled materials (e.g., cardboard boxes, milk and bread crates, tyres) to use as they chose during recess on primary school playgrounds. All materials met Australian safety guidelines for playground equipment; however, the innovative nature of this child-centred intervention raised questions of risk: What if someone got hurt? Who would be to blame if a child accidentally injured herself? How would parents respond to a child's injury? And, how would a child's accidental injury impact the adults supervising the playground?

Insert picture here

The likelihood of children experiencing even minor injuries on the playground was small, but the fears of a few adults could create enough uncertainty and discomfort within the participants to threaten the longevity of the new playground experiences (Bundy et al., 2008; Bundy, et al., 2009). Thus, plans for managing the materials and integrating them into the routine of school recess were dependent on adults' agreement that some risk or uncertainty in the moment was acceptable in exchange for potential benefits to children's present and future well-being. Adults involved in the study needed to view risk as a positive experience for children and manageable within trusting relationships amongst educators, parents and children, and researchers. Our objective was to alter parents' and teachers' perceptions of risk to increase the sustainability of the playground activities and extend beyond the playground intervention to the promotion of play in out-of-school environments.

In the adult-centred risk-reframing intervention described here, educators and parents engaged in experiential learning tasks intended to expand their views of risk to include danger *and* opportunity, costs as well as benefits, and the value of decisions and actions with uncertain outcomes (Andrew, 2003; Hillson & Murray-Webster,

2007). Activities were created to engage adults playfully using a paratelic orientation towards healthy risk-taking within children's outdoor play. Participants had opportunities to experience some cognitive dissonance, to challenge their automatic perceptions of risk, and to reflect on and tell stories about their own family's experiences as means for re-framing their perceptions of risk as a multi-faceted construct that could include uncertainty, opportunity and adventure, as well as danger and hazard.

### **Methods**

Ethics approval for this study was granted by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number 02-2006/8700) and by the Catholic Education Office of the Archdiocese of Sydney. Risk reframing was conducted in 9 Catholic primary schools and 1 community recycling agency that sourced and "kid-proofed" many of the playground materials. All schools were within a 10 km radius of the University of Sydney's Health Sciences campus in Lidcombe, New South Wales, Australia. The geographical area and the Catholic Education Office were chosen for convenience but it was known *a priori* that both the area and the schools vary widely in terms of important factors that impact parents' beliefs and children's play: (e.g., socio-economic status; culture; and mothers' education). The schools' SEIFA (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006) ratings were between 883.40-1094.16. Only one school was in the lowest 15% (SEIFA scores less than 900), and no schools were in the upper 15% (scores above 1100). Four schools were in areas where AEDI (Australian Early Development Index) scores indicated more than 10% of children are developmentally vulnerable in two or more areas (Royal Melbourne Children's Hospital, 2006-2012).



## **Participants**

A total of nearly 150 participants took part in risk reframing sessions. This included 3 times as many parents as educators from 9 schools, along with 4 staff and 8 volunteers from the community agency. Participating parents shared the following characteristics: they: chose to send their children to Catholic primary schools; were available during the school hours; were primarily mothers between 28 and 44 years of age, and were parents of children whose activity levels and social behaviours were being monitored as part of the SPP. Nothing is known about their professional roles. Educators invited to attend risk reframing included teachers of participating children, principals, assistant principals and teaching or non-teaching staff assigned to supervise playgrounds during recess or to manage the SPP at their schools. Educators were primarily women with teaching experience from less than 2 years to more than 10 years; most educators were also parents. Teachers were released from other duties for the 2-hour session, which occurred during school hours; the schools were compensated for the teachers' time. Participants from the community agency who engaged in a risk reframing session included men and women, both staff and people participating in a corporate volunteer program. All had regular contact with children similar in age to the SPP participants; some were parents.

## **Procedures**

Risk reframing, named "Opportunities for Adventure," consisted of one 2-hour session conducted in a space that allowed for both small ( $n=6-8$ ) and large ( $N=12-24$ ), whole-group discussions (i.e., school learning centre, recreation hall, conference room). In order to ensure that both parents and educators heard the concerns of the other group, small groups deliberately comprised both educators and parents. The groups engaged in the series of tasks described in Table 1. Following

each task, the small groups reported on one aspect of their discussion, specified at the beginning of the task. Following each short (5-10 minute) small group task, project staff facilitated large group discussion by eliciting the requested information and probing to gather additional experiences and opinions about risk.

Each risk reframing session began with an opportunity for participants to complete a short survey of their beliefs about risky play, an introduction to the SPP and to the concept of risk as uncertainty or opportunity. Each small group then created a list of strengths, qualities or experiences they desired for the children they parented or taught. Through reflection and discussion, participants determined what was most important to them individually and collectively. They identified their three top priorities and shared them with the large group. This task set the stage for each of the remaining six learning tasks.

Table 1. Opportunities for Adventure Learning Tasks

Task	Synopsis	Purpose
Starting the journey	Adults' desires for children	To ascertain adults' priorities for the children they are raising.
Picture it!	Visualising adults' favourite places to play as children, the qualities of those places and the nature of the activities	To draw out positive memories of childhood play.
Back to the future!	Visualising what their children most love to do, where and with whom they play	To compare participants' childhood play with that of children today.
Safety first?	Video of young boy trying to test his skills on the slippery dip (slide)	To become aware of the impact of adults' negative actions on children's age-appropriate risk-taking.

Empathising with Nemo's Dad	Short video clip from <i>Finding Nemo</i> . Nemo responds to his dad's over-protectiveness with disastrous consequences	To discuss the effects of adults' negative actions on children's choices.
Put yourself in <i>this</i> Mum's shoes	Story of young girl climbing at the park, changing from confident to fearful in response to mother's panicked voice	To become aware of the impact of adults' fears on children's age-appropriate risk-taking.
Put yourself in <i>this</i> Mum's shoes	Picture of young girl who has climbed a very tall tree and description of her Mum's nonchalant response	To become aware of the impact of adults' positive actions on children's age-appropriate risk-taking.

---

## Data analysis

Data in the form of audio recordings of risk reframing sessions, brief written participant evaluations, and field notes kept by project staff were collected and either transcribed in their entirety or summarised in brief written reports depending on the nature of the data. These data were analysed by the first author in collaboration with the second author, the principal investigator of the SPP. Research project team members also contributed to the analysis through regular project process meetings. An adaptation of Charmaz's approach (Broom, 2009; K. Charmaz, 1990) to social analysis was used to identify initial emergent themes, patterns, and complexity regarding participants' experiences and beliefs about risk, assumptions regarding risk and possible implications of these perceptions for children, families, educators, schools and communities.

## Results and Discussion

Participants engaged readily in all tasks; their demeanour at times serious, at other times playful. Shifting between small and large group discussion, in either

direction, was often difficult because participants seemed to want to spend more time reliving memories from childhood and experiences with their children, and grappling with the everyday uncertainties they experienced with children at home, in class or on the playground.

Participants valued having a context in which to explore the costs and benefits of age-appropriate risk-taking in children's outdoor free play. Data analysis revealed the following themes: Parents' and educators' desires for children are very similar and both fear negative evaluation; parents and educators experienced surprise at the paradox of simultaneously wanting and preventing particular outcomes for their children; and risk presents ambiguities and decisions that require time and effort to understand. We discuss these below in a format designed to capture the development of the themes over time within the sessions.

### **What do parents and educators want for children?**

Adults in all risk reframing sessions chose happiness, good health, confidence and resilience as the highest priorities for their children. Some also chose: having good values; being able to learn from mistakes; recognising the good in all; being respectful and kind; being able to make one's way in the world; having friends and belonging; something to feel passionate about; contributing to the "world" (e.g., family, friends, community).

### **The first "Aha!" moments**

As participants considered the reactions of children to unnecessary controls of an adult, they generally seemed to experience a moment when they recognised *themselves* in the behaviour of these adults, an "Aha!" moment. These were characterised by laughter and comments such as, "Oh my God, that's me! I am so totally like that!" or "We're always so anxious all the time. I just need to take a chill

pill or drink a pina colada and relax! *Let them take some risks!*” Participants recognised that sometimes, with the best intentions, *they* became barriers to children’s age-appropriate, healthy risk-taking opportunities.

In response to the “Aha!” moments, participants began to share their thoughts about the source of their own negative reactions to risk-taking in their children. These parents and teachers take their responsibility for children’s well-being seriously. They noted the number of people offering advice about raising children and agencies monitoring health and welfare. Rather than being helpful, they expressed that the amount of available information often led to uncertainty and could be overwhelming. One mother of two school aged children said, “Kids, they don’t come with a manual!”

### **Fears of negative evaluation**

Both parents and educators expressed a desire to appear competent and capable of making decisions that others would view as appropriate and in the best interests of the children in their care. One young teacher said it felt risky just sitting down and working together with parents as equals during the risk reframing session. Teachers cited “duty of care” and worried about the consequences of parents disagreeing with their decisions or actions. Teachers worried they might lose their jobs if a parent complained.

Educators shared feelings of uncertainty. One assistant principal, a parent of two young adults, shared an experience she had on the playground. As she observed some boys building with the materials, she felt they were pushing the limits of acceptable risk. She was torn, wanting to intervene, but she intentionally tolerated her discomfort; she decided to give them time to experience some real consequences and try some new strategies themselves. Eventually, with effort and some miss-steps, the

boys achieved their goal with celebration, as this adult supported both their resourcefulness and her own ability to tolerate uncertainty.

### **Ambiguities of risk**

Ambivalent feelings also were common. One new teacher who was not yet a parent said, “Children are precious cargo! We don’t *let* them take any risks!”

Another veteran teacher with three grown children felt just the opposite, “Parents seem to be a lot more anxious about what can happen to their children. Parents have this fear that, you know that [children] are always at risk. Children need to be taught to take risks; children need to learn to *take* risks”. A third teacher and parent of two young children said, “If it was my child, of course I’d let her do it (go down a slippery dip head first). But would I let someone else’s child? No! The risk goes up about 300%!”

### **A context for responding to risk and uncertainty in new ways**

As the activities progressed, participants often experienced a second “Aha!” moment, when it struck them that they have the power to do things differently. They began weighing up their responsibilities to keep children safe with their desires for children to make good choices and manage risks for themselves. Both educators and parents spoke of the need for new strategies and reducing their fears of uncertainty in order to allow children to reap the benefits of taking healthy, age-appropriate risks. At the conclusion of the risk reframing sessions, many parents and educators asked to have more sessions like the one they had just completed.

Parents, educators and adults volunteering to provide materials for the SPP benefited from the risk reframing process designed to incorporate theories of flourishing, positivity and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008b; Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Grolnick, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000;

Seligman, 2011; Seligman, et al., 2009). Participants recalled positive emotions and benefits of risky play from childhood and agreed that risk and uncertainty are part of life. They verbalised the expectation that children need to experience some scrapes and failures if they are to become happy, healthy and resilient people. Parents heard teachers' concerns about the potential impact of being blamed for minor injuries. They also seemed to realise the consequences of expecting teachers to limit children's actions so much that they became bored. Teachers heard that their supervisors accepted that children sometimes incurred minor injuries and believed the lessons learned were worth the cost of a scrape or bruise. Most participants experienced some cognitive dissonance during the session. Within the context of a playful, positive approach, parents and educators explored their perceptions of risk. They connected their own memories of childhood play and its benefits with their desires for their children and were forced to confront the differences, the reasons why they were different, and the validity of the differences.

Parents, teachers and their supervisors discovered how easily automatic protective responses can throw up unintentional barriers. They were surprised by how their own responses to risk had changed now that they were responsible for children. "Aha!" moments occurred when they discovered that some of their responses had as much to do with a perceived need to protect *themselves* from negative consequences as with protecting children from potential harm.

As these adults intentionally replaced the notion of "risk" with "uncertainty," "opportunity" and "challenge," they realised that the ways in which they respond to children's risk-taking is their own choice. They also considered how to manage their own discomfort that would inevitably occur when offering children different play experiences.

Risk reframing succeeded in many ways. The intervention disrupted participants' automatic protective responses to uncertainty and offered them time to consider other possibilities for responding to risk. Parents and educators began to realise that automatic protective responses can actually get in the way of what they want for their children and that skills for managing uncertainty have to be built. The "Aha!" moments that participants experienced powerfully emphasised that risk and uncertainty will ultimately result in what they most desire for children: health, happiness and resilience. Participants actively constructed more complex frames for viewing risk and uncertainty in children's lives as well as their own. They did this by engaging in an experiential learning process, discussing their own perceptions of risk and those of others, and by making sense of differing perceptions by sharing stories of their own experiences as children and with the children they parent and teach today.

In some schools, these new frames and the positive outcomes participants saw for their children likely contributed to the success of the materials aspect of the playground project and to sustaining it even after the study ended. However, risk reframing involving parents and teachers of a subset of children was not enough to enable all schools to engage fully with the project. Those schools cited a variety of reasons for their lack of engagement (e.g., ongoing demand for new materials, the view that the materials looked messy on the playground, and the belief that there were already a variety of options to offer children the physical activity they needed at school). Risk aversion may or may not have contributed, especially considering that only teachers of participating children, not *all* school staff that had playground duty, participated in risk reframing.

Risk aversion can result in adults making simple choices to protect children and keep them safe in the present. Sometimes these choices are understandable. A



more complex framing of risk and uncertainty, however, offers a forward glance in time to when children feel not only safe, but also secure in making decisions and taking actions themselves to manage their own health and well-being competently (Brussoni, et al., 2012). Finding the appropriate tension between negativity and positivity, fear and courage, telic and paratelic motivation, fast and slow thinking or the costs and benefits of risk in children's lives is difficult, both for adults responsible for children and for children themselves. The adults who participated in these risk reframing interventions seemed to re-construct risk as complex and many started to challenge themselves to view the benefits of risky play as worth some uncertainty. Amidst everyday uncertainties both adults and children benefit from autonomy support provided by people they trust as they learn to make choices, take healthy, age-appropriate risks and learn to tolerate, as well as benefit from, risk and uncertainty.

The SPP risk reframing intervention modelled a process that offered participants opportunities to explore risk and uncertainty in a "safe" and playful environment. They engaged in tasks and discussions that allowed them to critique and reframe automatic responses to everyday uncertainties and supported them in making decisions that offered new options or solutions to challenging situations for their children and themselves. This process resulted in surprising, "Aha! moments" that disrupted automatic risk perceptions and offered time for participants to consider more complex perceptions of risk in everyday life. We believe that future research should involve all school staff.

Further, we expect that a similar process could be used successfully in contexts beyond schools when people are engaged in developing strategies for approaching novelty, risk and uncertainty in new ways. This might include for example, parents, daycare or afterschool care providers and their administrators;

community and local council members along with providers of community services such as parks, adventure playgrounds or cycling paths; or children and youth living with disabilities, their families and service providers planning new educational, assisted living or employment opportunities for themselves or those for whom they care.

There are several areas of future inquiry that stem from risk reframing. Data were obtained from parents during several initial sessions that contributed to the development of the Test of Risk in Play Scale (TRiPS) (Hill & Bundy, 2012), an assessment designed to be used before and after the sessions to determine whether the intervention had influenced participants' risk attitudes towards children's play. Along with further use of the TRiPS, fidelity to intervention measures need to be developed to ensure that the content of risk reframing is delivered consistently across all groups of participants, particularly in the portions of the session where facilitators probe for additional information in the context of the large group discussions. Manualising would ensure that the intervention process accurately reflects the theoretical principles on which it is based (Dumas, Lynch, Laughlin, Phillips Smith, & Prinz, 2001; Faulkner, 2012).

Semi-structured interviews with parents about the long term benefits of the intervention (e.g., in what ways did they offer their children greater access to free play since participating or what strategies have they used to manage their discomfort) could provide information about whether parents have used their new frames of risk to offer children more opportunities for outdoor free play. Finally, parents' and educators' perceptions of risk and uncertainty and the ways they model management of risk for their children likely have considerable impact on the ways children construct risk for themselves. Exploring children's understanding of risk and

uncertainty in the context of outdoor play could be another fruitful area of investigation, using methodology similar to Fattore, Mason and Watson (2012) and Thoilliez (2011) who have examined children's perceptions of well-being and happiness.

## References

- Andrew, M. (2003). *Reframing Risk Using Systems Thinking*. Paper presented at the Contemporary Ergonomics Conference.
- Apter, M. J. (2001). *Motivational Styles in Everyday Life – A Guide to Reversal Theory*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Apter, M. J. (2007a). *Danger: Our quest for excitement*. Oxford: Oneworld.
- Apter, M. J. (2007b). *Reversal theory: The dynamics of motivation, emotion, and personality* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oneworld.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Broom, A. (2009). Intuition, subjectivity, and Le Bricoleur: Cancer patients' accounts of negotiating a plurality of therapeutic options. *Qualitative Health Research*, 19(8), 1050-1059. doi: 10.1177/1049732309341190
- Brown, S. (2009). *Play: how it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*. New York: Avery.
- Brussoni, M., Olsen, L. L., Pike, I., & Sleet, D. A. (2012). Risky Play and Children's Safety: Balancing Priorities for Optimal Child Development. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 9(9), 3134-3148. doi: 10.3390/ijerph9093134
- Bundy, A., Lockett, T., Naughton, G. A., Tranter, P. J., Wyver, S. R., Ragen, J., . . . Spies, G. (2008). Playful Interaction: Occupational Therapy for All Children on the School Playground. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* 62(5), 522-527. doi: 10.5014/ajot.62.5.522
- Bundy, A., Lockett, T., Tranter, P. J., Naughton, G. A., Wyver, S. R., Ragen, J., & Spies, G. (2009). The risk is that there is "no risk" : a simple, innovative

- intervention to increase children's activity levels. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 17(1), 33 - 45. doi: DOI:10.1080/09669760802699878
- Charmaz, K. (1990). 'Discovering' chronic illness: Using grounded theory. *Social Science and Medicine*, 30(11), 1161-1172.
- Cohn, M. A., Fredrickson, B. L., Brown, S. L., Mikels, J. A., & Conway, A. M. (2009). Happiness Unpacked: Positive Emotions Increase Life Satisfaction by Building Resilience. *Emotion*, 9(3), 361-368. doi: 10.1037/a0015952
- Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2008). Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development, and health. *Canadian Psychology*, 49(3), 182-185. doi: 10.1037/a00128001
- Diener, M., & Lucas, R. (2004). Adults Desires for Childrens Emotions across 48 Countries: Associations with Individual and National Characteristics. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 35(5), 525-547. doi: 10.1177/0022022104268387
- Douglas, M. (1992). *Risk and blame: essays in cultural theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Dumas, J. E., Lynch, A. M., Laughlin, J. E., Phillips Smith, E., & Prinz, R. J. (2001). Promoting intervention fidelity: Conceptual issues, methods, and preliminary results from the EARLY ALLIANCE prevention trial. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 20(1, Supplement 1), 38-47. doi: 10.1016/s0749-3797(00)00272-5
- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset*. New York: Random House.
- Fattore, T., Mason, J., & Watson, E. (2012). Locating the Child Centrally as Subject in Research: Towards a Child Interpretation of Well-Being. *Child Indicators Research*, 5(3), 423-435. doi: 10.1007/s12187-012-9150-x

- Faulkner, M. S. (2012). Intervention fidelity: Ensuring application to practice for youth and families. *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing, 17*(1), 33-40. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-6155.2011.00305.x
- Fredrickson, B. L. (1998). What good are positive emotions? *Review of General Psychology, 2*(3), 300-319. doi: 10.1037/1089-280.2.3.300
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist, 56*(3), 218-226. doi: DOI: 10.1037//0003-066X.56.3.218
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 359*(1449), 1367-1377. doi: 10.1098/rstb.2004.1512
- Fredrickson, B. L., & Losada, M. (2005). Positive Affect and the Complex Dynamics of Human Flourishing. *American Psychologist, 60*(7), 678-686. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.60.7.678
- Gardner, D. (2008). *Risk: The Science and Politics of Fear*. Carlton North, Victoria: Scribe Publications Pty Ltd.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Grolnick, W. (2009). The role of parents in facilitating autonomous self-regulation for education. *Theory and Research in Education, 7*(2), 164-173. doi: doi: 10.1177/1477878509104321
- Grolnick, W., & Seal, K. (2008). *Pressured Parents, Stressed-Out Kids*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books.
- Gurland, S. T., & Grolnick, W. S. (2005). Perceived threat, Controlling parenting, and children's achievement orientations. *Motivation and Emotion, 29*(2), 103-121. doi: doi: 10.1007/s11031-005-7956-2

- Hill, A., & Bundy, A. C. (2012). Reliability and validity of a new instrument to measure tolerance of everyday risk for children. *Child: Care, Health and Development*. doi: doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2214.2012.01414.x
- Hillson, D., & Murray-Webster, R. (2007). *Understanding and Managing Risk Attitudes*. Aldershot: Gower.
- Hoffman, D. M. (2012). Risky investments: Parenting and the production of the "resilient child". *Health, Risk & Society*, 12(4), 385 - 394. doi: 10.1080/13698571003789716
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking: fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1984). Choices, values, and frames. *American Psychologist*, 39(4), 341-350. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.39.4.341
- Lupton, D. (2006). Sociology and risk. In G. Mythen & S. Walklate (Eds.), *Beyond the Risk Society: Critical Reflections on Risk and Human Security*. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.
- Marano, H. E. (2008). *A nation of wimps: the high cost of invasive parenting*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Murus, P. (2009). Fear and Courage in Children: Two Sides of the Same Coin? [Original article]. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 18, 486-490. doi: 10.1007/s10826-009-9271-0
- Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68-78. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68
- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2007). Categorizing risky play - 'how can we identify risk-taking in children's play?'. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 15(2), 237-252.

- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2009). Characteristics of risky play. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 9(1), 3-21. doi: 10.1080/14729670802702762
- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2010). 'It tickles in my tummy!': Understanding children's risk-taking in play through reversal theory. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 8(1), 67-88. doi: 10.1177/1476718x09345393
- Sandseter, E. B. H., & Kennair, L. E. O. (2011). Children's risky play from an evolutionary perspective: The Anti-phobic effects of thrilling experiences. *Evolutionary Psychology*, 9(2), 257-284.
- Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*. New York: Free Press.
- Seligman, M., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(3), 293-311. doi: 10.1080/03054980902934563
- Siegel, D. (2007). *The mindful brain: reflection and attunement in the cultivation of well-being*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Skenazy, L. (2009). *Free-Range Kids: Giving Our Children the Freedom We Had Without Going Nuts with Worry*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Statler, M., & Roos, J. (2007). *Everyday Strategic Preparedness: The Role of Practical Wisdom in Organizations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stephenson, A. (2003). Physical risk-taking: dangerous or endangered? *Early Years*, 23(1), 35. doi: DOI:10.1080/0957514032000045573
- Thoilliez, B. (2011). How to Grow up Happy: An Exploratory Study on the Meaning of Happiness from Children's Voices. *Child Indicators Research*, 4(2), 323-351. doi: 10.1007/s12187-011-9107-5
- Tovey, H. (2007). *Playing Outdoors: Spaces and Places, Risk and Challenge*.



- Tulloch, J., & Lupton, D. (2003). *Risk and Everyday Life*. London: Sage.
- Ungar, M. (2007). *Too safe for their own good: How risk and responsibility help teens thrive*. Crow"s Nest, N.S.W.: Inspired Living.
- Ungar, M. (2009). Overprotective Parenting: Helping Parents Provide Children the Right Amount of Risk and Responsibility. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 37(3), 258 - 271. doi: 10.1080/01926180802534247

## CHAPTER 6

### Discussion and Conclusions

In Chapter 6, I present a general discussion of the findings, conclusions drawn from the findings, implications for practice, limitations of the study, future directions for research and personal reflections on this study.

#### Overview of the Study

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a detailed understanding of parents' perceptions of risk gathered from a small sample of parents and teachers of children, some of whom were typically developing and some living with disability. I wanted to identify ways these perceptions influenced children's access to age-appropriate risk taking within the rhythms of their everyday lives. Through risk reframing workshops and in-depth interviewing, I explored parents' perceptions of risk, asking them to reflect on what they most desired for their children, how they saw them reaching these goals and if they thought risk played a role in children achieving the lives they envisioned for them. Set in the context of research suggesting risk is a valuable and necessary contributor to happiness and well-being and resilience, I shared findings of this study in three journal articles: "Parents' perceptions of risk and the influence on children's everyday activities"; "Reframing healthy risk taking: the struggle to implement strategies that promote well-being in children of all abilities"; and "Everyday uncertainties: reframing perceptions of risk in outdoor free play".

In the first article, "Parents' perceptions of risk and the influence on children's everyday activities", I identified two primary perceptions of risk: (a) danger that elicits parents' fears and automatic protective responses to children's risk taking and (b) uncertainties, opportunities and challenges that are part of everyday life. In the second article, "Reframing healthy risk taking: the struggle to implement strategies

that promote well-being in children of all abilities”, I illustrated the struggles all parents have with learning to be parents and the strategies they used to manage their own worries and discomfort as they offered children age-appropriate risk taking activities or limited children’s opportunities and why they made these choices. In the third article, “Everyday uncertainties: reframing perceptions of risk in outdoor free play”, I described the risk reframing process I used to shift parents’ perceptions of risk to construct new frames of risk to include danger, threat, uncertainty, opportunity and challenge. Taken collectively, these papers offer a window on parents’ beliefs and everyday practices and on the ways in which these contribute to, or constrain, children’s growing happiness, well-being and resilience.

### **Parents’ Choices**

The parents who participated in this study perceived risk primarily from one of two perspectives: (1) simply, as danger or (2) reflectively, as multi-faceted, including uncertainty, opportunity and challenge. Parents who said they had led relatively risk free lives themselves viewed risk as danger or threat and responded automatically and protectively to children’s age-appropriate risk-taking. Other parents, who shared stories of risks and uncertainties they had experienced, viewed risk as multi-faceted and complex, a part of everyday life. Viewing risk as uncertainty led them to respond adaptively to children’s desires for age-appropriate risk-taking, and consider both costs and benefits when they supported these activities. By actively constructing positive risk frames, parents intentionally disrupted the automatic belief that “risk is danger” and selected responses that offered opportunities for mastery and adventure. They did not relinquish their roles for protecting their children; rather they broadened their views about what that meant.

The literature I reviewed on happiness and well-being suggested that balance between hedonia (pleasure, comfort) and eudaimonia (engagement, meaningfulness) leads to greater happiness and that balance/harmony are a part of the experience of well-being. When parents eliminate or control all risks and obstacles, they may unintentionally become barriers to children's developing resilience (Masten, 2001, 2007). On the other hand, when parents balance children's needs for safety with their desires to approach and explore risk, children are likely to gather positive experiences in greater numbers than negative ones and to flourish (Fredrickson, 2013; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Fredrickson, et al., 2000).

### **Intentional Activities for Building Happiness, Well-being and Resilience**

Researchers (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013; Lyubomirsky et al, 2005, 2011) have shown there are ways to employ activities intentionally in order to increase and sustain happiness. In this study, parents' perceptions of risk, whether negative or positive, created the context within which children learned to approach or avoid risk taking. Parents of children living with disabilities and those who had experienced risks to their own lives were more able to put everyday risks in perspective. Those parents who employed "approach and explore" risk attitudes were able to generate positive emotions and experiences even in the face of failure or disappointment by asking questions that led to positive appraisals, "What could be learned from this?" or "What might we try next time?"

### **Struggles and Strategies**

All parents struggled to offer their children good lives. Some struggled to keep children from experiencing unhappiness by controlling their activities and the contexts they accessed. Despite struggling, others intentionally employed a range of strategies to provide opportunities for their children to develop practical skills.

Parents managed their misgivings or discomforts to help children access activities they needed to learn skills, overcome fears, and have fun by taking everyday risks (e.g., going down a big water slide; taking care of oneself during a sleepover at a friend's house).

### **Risk Reframing: A Process for Constructing New Risk Frames**

Risk reframing intervention reflected research and theories in positive psychology designed to broaden adults' perceptions of risk; these interventions provided a safe, playful context for sharing. Parents and teachers savoured positive moments in their own play as children and considered the benefits they gained from that play, which was almost always risky by today's standards. By contrasting their experiences with those of their own children, they began to see the need for new frames of risk. They began to consider how they might develop new strategies and allow new opportunities for their children. One of those strategies was to intentionally forestall automatic protective responses and reflect on both the benefits and costs of a risk in the activities of everyday life. Risk became more than danger.

### **Conclusions**

Parents' perceptions of risk have significant influences on children's access to the range of activities needed for building practical life skills and accumulating resources for developing resilience, happiness and well-being. The human negativity bias that supports survival is strong but when this survival orientation becomes the primary response to age-appropriate risk taking, it narrows opportunities -- unless something occurs to disrupt the cycle. Raising a child with a disability, for example, disrupts the cycle. Families must carefully construct unique practices and routines that suit the child's individual needs and those of the family. They *must* take risks because the consequence of not taking risks is just too high. Their children might not

learn to take the ordinary risks that everyday life offers to develop practical skills for achieving their goals in life.

### **Implications for Occupational Therapy Practice**

When occupational therapists (OTs) collaborate with families and children it is important to consider how parents frame risk and how this influences the decisions they make for and with their children. Although the parents of children living with disabilities that I interviewed were particularly supportive of their children's need to take risks and learn from them, not all parents of children with disabilities respond in this way. Certainly OTs' own perceptions of risk affect parents' beliefs and practices and colour their understanding of families. The need to slow down decision-making, build trusting relationships and offer parents real opportunities to evaluate the directions interventions may lead, are valuable considerations. Safety in the moment or challenges that help children build security in their abilities to manage their health and well-being are choices families make together with autonomy support from health care personnel, educators and other professionals. OTs might also benefit from taking time to consider their own struggles with risk and how these influence the opportunities and challenges they offer children and families in the context of collaborative interventions and consultations.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study reflects limitations of qualitative research in that the sample of participants was small, chosen for convenience and limited to parents residing in Australia. Because of the nature of the sample the findings cannot be generalized to all parents.

## **Recommendations for Future Study**

This research leads to multiple areas of continuing study. I will share only three. First, there is a need for further exploration of both adults' and children's tolerance for risk and uncertainty. I believe there is a continuum of responses from risk aversion and rigidity through to the ability to tolerate increasing amounts of uncertainty and complexity to the degree that people might crave risk opportunities and be able to tolerate a high degree of uncertainty. It could be useful to assess one's flexibility to move back and forth along this continuum depending on varying factors (e.g., child's age, perceived capabilities and tolerance for risk, parents' ability to create scaffolding that allows them to be more comfortable with a child's ability to take risks or manage new situations). If happiness can be increased and sustained through intentional activity, perhaps risk tolerance can also be influenced by intentional activities in ways that could allow parents to offer children greater access to age-appropriate risk taking. All these require exploration.

The value of risk reframing interventions for educators and parents and the development of fidelity to intervention measures for the risk reframing process is another important area. Along with this it would be useful to continue development of the Test of Risk in Play Scale (Hill & Bundy, 2012) that was initially developed for use before and after risk reframing sessions to detect changes in parents' perceptions of risk in children's outdoor free play. I believe this assessment could be expanded to include risks other than those related to physical activity in outdoor free play (e.g., social risks).

Finally, I would like to study children's perceptions of risk in outdoor free play. It would be interesting to consider the process of engaging young children in activities to elicit their perceptions of risk and to document their abilities to weigh up

the costs and benefits of particular risks to make decisions for themselves. I see this as risk reframing for children, a potentially important process for children growing up today in a risk averse world (Gill, 2007).

### **Personal Reflections on my PhD Journey**

I have had an amazing opportunity to pursue my interest in the reflective process of reframing at the University of Sydney. Both the sense of competence that proceeds from mastery and the resilience that develops out of minor defeats have contributed immeasurably to my happiness and well-being. I learned to take risks to develop skills that I needed to accomplish my long term goal of completing a PhD. I have learned the intentional process of reframing situations to find the value and opportunity for choosing to focus on strengths and next steps. There have been sufficient uncertainties, opportunities and challenges along the way for me to develop resilience and reflect on, and savour, the benefits of this risky, Australian adventure.



## References

- Alaszewski, A., & Coxon, K. (2008). The everyday experience of living with risk and uncertainty. *Health, Risk & Society*, 10(5), 413-420.
- Alaszewski, A., & Coxon, K. (2009). Uncertainty in everyday life: Risk, worry and trust. *Health, Risk & Society*, 11(3), 201 - 207. doi: 10.1080/13698570902906454
- Andrew, M. (2003). *Reframing Risk Using Systems Thinking*. Paper presented at the Contemporary Ergonomics Conference.
- Annas, J. (2011). *Intelligent Virtue*: OUP Oxford.
- Apter, M. J. (2001). *Motivational Styles in Everyday Life – A Guide to Reversal Theory*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Apter, M. J. (2007a). *Danger: Our quest for excitement*. Oxford: Oneworld.
- Apter, M. J. (2007b). *Reversal theory: The dynamics of motivation, emotion, and personality* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oneworld.
- Aspinwall, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G. (2010). The value of positive psychology for health psychology: progress and pitfalls in examining the relation of positive phenomena to health. *Annals of behavioral medicine : a publication of the Society of Behavioral Medicine*, 39(1), 4-15. doi: 10.1007/s12160-009-9153-0
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2014). ACARA Retrieved from <http://www.acara.edu.au/>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2011). Headline indicators for children's health, development and wellbeing. Canberra, ACT.
- Baumeister, R., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*, 5, 323. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.5.4.323
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Ben-Arieh, A. (2005). Where are the Children? Children's Role in Measuring and Monitoring Their Well-Being. *Social Indicators Research*, 74(3), 573-596. doi: 10.1007/s11205-004-4645-6
- Ben-Arieh, A., & Frønes, I. (2011). Taxonomy for child well-being indicators: A framework for the analysis of the well-being of children. *Childhood*, 18(4), 460-476. doi: 10.1177/0907568211398159
- Biswas-Diener, R., Kashdan, T., & King, L. (2009). Two traditions of happiness research, not two distinct types of happiness. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(3), 208-211. doi: 10.1080/17439760902844400
- Biswas-Diener, R., Vittersø, J., & Diener, E. (2005). Most people are pretty happy, but there is cultural variation: The inughuit, the amish, and the maasai. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 6(3), 205-226. doi: 10.1007/s10902-005-5683-8
- Bowen, G. A. (2008). Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: a research note. *Qualitative Research*, 8(1), 137-152. doi: 10.1177/1468794107085301
- Broom, A. (2009). Intuition, subjectivity, and Le Bricoleur: Cancer patients' accounts of negotiating a plurality of therapeutic options. *Qualitative Health Research*, 19(8), 1050-1059. doi: 10.1177/1049732309341190
- Brown, N. J. L., Sokal, A. D., & Friedman, H. L. (2013). The complex dynamics of wishful thinking: The critical positivity ratio. *American Psychologist*, 68(9), 801-813. doi: 10.1037/a0032850
- Brown, S. (2009). *Play: how it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*. New York: Avery.
- Brown, S., & Vaughan, C. (2009). Play: How It Shapes the Brain. *Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*, 60.

- Brussoni, M., Olsen, L. L., Pike, I., & Sleet, D. A. (2012). Risky Play and Children's Safety: Balancing Priorities for Optimal Child Development. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 9(9), 3134-3148. doi: 10.3390/ijerph9093134
- Buchanan, C. (1999). Building better playgrounds: A project for parents. *UAB Magazine*, 19(3).
- Bundy, A., Luckett, T., Naughton, G. A., Tranter, P. J., Wyver, S. R., Ragen, J., . . . Spies, G. (2008). Playful Interaction: Occupational Therapy for All Children on the School Playground. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* 62(5), 522-527. doi: 10.5014/ajot.62.5.522
- Bundy, A., Luckett, T., Tranter, P. J., Naughton, G. A., Wyver, S. R., Ragen, J., & Spies, G. (2009). The risk is that there is "no risk" : a simple, innovative intervention to increase children's activity levels. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 17(1), 33 - 45. doi: DOI:10.1080/09669760802699878
- Bundy, A., Naughton, G., Tranter, P., Wyver, S., Baur, L., Schiller, W., . . . Brentnall, J. (2011). The Sydney Playground Project: Popping the bubblewrap-unleashing the power of play: A cluster randomized controlled trial of a primary school playground-based intervention aiming to increase children's physical activity and social skills. *BMC Public Health*, 11. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-11-680
- Burdette, H., & Whitaker, R. (2005). A national study of neighborhood safety, outdoor play, television viewing and obesity in preschool children. *Pediatrics*, 116(3), 657 - 662.
- Carleton, R. N., McCreary, D. R., Norton, P. J., & Asmundson, G. J. G. B. F. o. N. E. S., Revised. Depression and Anxiety, 23, 297-303. (2006). Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, Revised. *Depression and Anxiety*, 23, 297-303.
- Catherine, O. B., & Paul J., T. (2010). Positive psychology, walking and well-being: Can walking school buses survive a policy of school closures? *World transport policy and practice*, 15(4), 42-54.
- Charmaz, K. (1990). 'Discovering' chronic illness: Using grounded theory. *Social Science and Medicine*, 30(11), 1161-1172.
- Charmaz, K. (1990). 'Discovering' chronic illness: Using grounded theory. *Social Science & Medicine*, 30(11), 1161-1172. doi: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(90\)90256-R](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(90)90256-R)
- Cohn, M. A., Fredrickson, B. L., Brown, S. L., Mikels, J. A., & Conway, A. M. (2009). Happiness Unpacked: Positive Emotions Increase Life Satisfaction by Building Resilience. *Emotion*, 9(3), 361-368. doi: 10.1037/a0015952
- Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2014). Common core state standards initiative Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- Crisp, R. (Ed.). (2000). *Aristotle Nichomachean Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Damasio, A. (2003). *Looking for Spinoza: joy, sorrow and the feeling brain*. Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt.
- Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2008a). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: An introduction. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9(1), 1-11.
- Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2008b). Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development, and health. *Canadian Psychology*, 49(3), 182-185. doi: 10.1037/a00128001
- Delle Fave, A., & Bassi, M. (2009). The contribution of diversity to happiness research. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(3), 205-207. doi: 10.1080/17439760902844319
- Delle Fave, A., Brdar, I., Freire, T., Vella-Brodrick, D., & Wissing, M. (2011). The Eudaimonic and Hedonic Components of Happiness: Qualitative and Quantitative Findings. *Social Indicators Research*, 100(2), 185-207. doi: 10.1007/s11205-010-9632-5

- Dennhardt, S., & Rudman, D. L. (2012). When Occupation goes 'Wrong': A Critical Reflection on Risk Discourses and their Relevance in Shaping Occupation. In G. E. Whiteford & C. Hocking (Eds.), *Occupational Science: Society, Inclusion, Participation* (pp. 117-133). Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, *95*(3), 542-575.
- Diener, E. (2006). Guidelines for national indicators of subjective well-being and ill-being. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, *1*(2), 151-157.
- Diener, E. (2012). New findings and future directions for subjective well-being research. *American Psychologist*, *67*(8), 590. doi: 10.1037/a0029541
- Diener, E., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2008). *Happiness: unlocking the mysteries of psychological wealth*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing.
- Diener, E., & Diener, C. (1996). Most people are happy. *Psychological Science*, *7*(3), 181-185.
- Diener, E., Helliwell, J., & Kahneman, D. (Eds.). (2010). *International differences in well-being*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Diener, E., Kesebir, P., & Lucas, R. (2008). Benefits of accounts of well-being - For societies and for psychological science. *Applied Psychology*, *57*(SUPPL. 1), 37-53.
- Diener, E., & Ryan, K. (2009). Subjective well-being: A general overview. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *39*(4), 391-406.
- Diener, M., & Lucas, R. (2004). Adults Desires for Childrens Emotions across 48 Countries: Associations with Individual and National Characteristics. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *35*(5), 525-547. doi: 10.1177/0022022104268387
- Dockray, S., & Steptoe, A. (2010). Positive affect and psychobiological processes. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, *35*(1), 69-75. doi: 10.1016/j.neubiorev.2010.01.006
- Douglas, M. (1992). *Risk and blame: essays in cultural theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Dumas, J. E., Lynch, A. M., Laughlin, J. E., Phillips Smith, E., & Prinz, R. J. (2001). Promoting intervention fidelity: Conceptual issues, methods, and preliminary results from the EARLY ALLIANCE prevention trial. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, *20*(1, Supplement 1), 38-47. doi: 10.1016/s0749-3797(00)00272-5
- Dweck, C. (2000). *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development*: Psychology Press.
- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset*. New York: Random House.
- Eckersley, R. (2006a). Is modern Western culture a health hazard? *International Journal of Epidemiology*, *35*(2), 252-258.
- Eckersley, R. (2006b). Progress, sustainability and human well-being: Is a new worldview emerging? *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development*, *1*(4), 304-317.
- Eckersley, R. (2011). A new narrative of young people's health and well-being. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *14*(5), 627-638. doi: 10.1080/13676261.2011.565043
- Fattore, T., Mason, J., & Watson, E. (2007). Children's conceptualisation(s) of their well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, *80*(1), 5-29. doi: 10.1007/s11205-006-9019-9
- Fattore, T., Mason, J., & Watson, E. (2009). When Children are Asked About Their Well-being: Towards a Framework for Guiding Policy. *Child Indicators Research*, *2*(1), 57-77. doi: 10.1007/s12187-008-9025-3
- Fattore, T., Mason, J., & Watson, E. (2012). Locating the Child Centrally as Subject in Research: Towards a Child Interpretation of Well-Being. *Child Indicators Research*, *5*(3), 423-435. doi: 10.1007/s12187-012-9150-x
- Faulkner, M. S. (2012). Intervention fidelity: Ensuring application to practice for youth and families. *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing*, *17*(1), 33-40. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-6155.2011.00305.x

- Folkman, S., & Moskowitz, J. T. (2000). Positive affect and the other side of coping. *American Psychologist*, *55*(6), 647-654. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.55.6.647
- Fredrickson, B. (1998). What good are positive emotions? *Review of General Psychology*, *2*(3), 300-319. doi: 10.1037/1089-280.2.3.300
- Fredrickson, B. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, *56*(3), 218-226. doi: DOI: 10.1037//0003-066X.56.3.218
- Fredrickson, B. (2004). The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, *359*(1449), 1367-1377. doi: 10.1098/rstb.2004.1512
- Fredrickson, B. (2006). Unpacking positive emotions: Investigating the seeds of human flourishing. *The Journal of Positive Psychology: Dedicated to furthering research and promoting good practice*, *1*(2), 57 - 59.
- Fredrickson, B. (2009). *Positivity*. New York: Crown Publishing Group.
- Fredrickson, B. (2013). Updated thinking on positivity ratios. doi: 10.1037/a0033584
- Fredrickson, B., & Branigan, C. (2005). Positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and thought-action repertoires. *Cognition and Emotion*, *19*(3), 313-332. doi: DOI:10.1080/02699930441000238
- Fredrickson, B., Cohn, M. A., Coffey, K. A., Pek, J., & Finkel, S. M. (2008). Open Hearts Build Lives: Positive Emotions, Induced Through Loving-Kindness Meditation, Build Consequential Personal Resources. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *95*(5), 1045-1062.
- Fredrickson, B., & Joiner, T. (2002). Positive Emotions Trigger Upward Spirals toward Emotional Well-Being. *Psychological Science*, *13*(2), 172-175.
- Fredrickson, B., & Losada, M. (2005). Positive Affect and the Complex Dynamics of Human Flourishing. *American Psychologist*, *60*(7), 678-686. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.60.7.678
- Fredrickson, B., Mancuso, R. A., Branigan, C., & Tugade, M. M. (2000). The undoing effect of positive emotions. *Motivation and Emotion*, *24*(4), 237-258.
- Fredrickson, B., Tugade, M. M., Waugh, C. E., & Larkin, G. R. (2003). What Good Are Positive Emotions in Crises? A Prospective Study of Resilience and Emotions Following the Terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11th, 2001. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *84*(2), 365-376. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.365
- Furedi, F. (2001). *Paranoid parenting: Abandon your anxieties and be a good parent*.
- Gardner, D. (2008). *Risk: The Science and Politics of Fear*. Carlton North, Victoria: Scribe Publications Pty Ltd.
- Garland, E. L., Fredrickson, B., Kring, A. M., Johnson, D. P., Meyer, P. S., & Penn, D. L. (2010). Upward spirals of positive emotions counter downward spirals of negativity: Insights from the broaden-and-build theory and affective neuroscience on the treatment of emotion dysfunctions and deficits in psychopathology. *Clinical Psychology Review, In Press, Corrected Proof*.
- Giddens, A. (1990a). *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1990b). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gill, T. (2007). *No fear: Growing up in a risk averse society*. London: Calouse Gulbenkian Foundation.
- Gilman, R., & Huebner, S. (2003). A review of life satisfaction research with children and adolescents. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *18*(2), 192-205. doi: 10.1521/scpq.18.2.192.21858
- Gottman, J. (1993). The roles of conflict engagement, escalation, and avoidance in marital interaction: a longitudinal view of five types of couples. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *61*(1), 6.

- Gottman, J. (1994). *What predicts divorce?: The relationship between marital processes and marital outcomes*: Psychology Press.
- Gray, C. (2010). *The new social story book*: Future Horizons Incorporated.
- Gray, P. (2011). The Decline of Play and the Rise of Psychopathology in Children and Adolescents. *American Journal of Play*, 3(4), 443-463.
- Gray, P. (2011). The decline of play and the rise of psychopathology in children and adolescents. *Am. J. Play*, 3, 443-463.
- Grolnick, W. (2009). The role of parents in facilitating autonomous self-regulation for education. *Theory and Research in Education*, 7(2), 164-173. doi: 10.1177/1477878509104321
- Grolnick, W., & Seal, K. (2008). *Pressured Parents, Stressed-Out Kids*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books.
- Grolnick, W., & Seal, K. (2008). *Pressured parents, stressed-out kids: Dealing with competition while raising a successful child*: Prometheus Books.
- Guldberg, H. (2009). *Reclaiming childhood: Freedom and play in an age of fear*. London: Routledge.
- Gurland, S. T., & Grolnick, W. S. (2005). Perceived threat, Controlling parenting, and children's achievement orientations. *Motivation and Emotion*, 29(2), 103-121. doi: 10.1007/s11031-005-7956-2
- Harding, L. (2001). Children's Quality of Life Assessments: A Review of Generic and Health Related Quality of Life Measures completed by Children and Adolescents. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 8(2), 79-96. doi: 10.1002/cpp.275
- Hill, A., & Bundy, A. C. (2012). Reliability and validity of a new instrument to measure tolerance of everyday risk for children. *Child: Care, Health and Development*. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2214.2012.01414.x
- Hillson, D., & Murray-Webster, R. (2007). *Understanding and Managing Risk Attitudes*. Aldershot: Gower.
- Hoffman, D. (2012). Risky investments: Parenting and the production of the "resilient child". *Health, Risk & Society*, 12(4), 385 - 394. doi: 10.1080/13698571003789716
- Holder, M., & Coleman, B. (2009). The Contribution of Social Relationships to Children's Happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 10(3), 329-349.
- Holder, M., Coleman, B., & Sehn, Z. L. (2009). The contribution of active and passive leisure to children's well-being. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 14(3), 378-386.
- Honore, C. (2004). *In praise of slow: how a worldwide movement is challenging the cult of speed*. London: Orion.
- Honore, C. (2008). *Under Pressure How the epidemic of hyper-parenting is endangering childhood*. Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin.
- Huebner, E. S., & Gilman, R. (2002). An Introduction to the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale. *Social Indicators Research*, 60(1-3), 115-122. doi: 10.1023/a:1021252812882
- Huebner, E. S., Suldo, S., Valois, R. F., Drane, J. W., & Zullig, K. (2004). BRIEF MULTIDIMENSIONAL STUDENTS' LIFE SATISFACTION SCALE: SEX, RACE, AND GRADE EFFECTS FOR A HIGH SCHOOL SAMPLE. *Psychological Reports*, 94(1), 351-356. doi: 10.2466/pr0.94.1.351-356
- Huebner, E. S., Suldo, S. M., Smith, L. C., & McKnight, C. G. (2004). Life satisfaction in children and youth: Empirical foundations and implications for school psychologists. *Psychology in the Schools*, 41(1), 81-93. doi: 10.1002/pits.10140
- Huta, V. (2012). Linking Peoples' Pursuit of Eudaimonia and Hedonia with Characteristics of their Parents: Parenting Styles, Verbally Endorsed Values, and Role Modeling. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 13(1), 47-61. doi: 10.1007/s10902-011-9249-7

- Huta, V., & Ryan, R. (2010). Pursuing Pleasure or Virtue: The Differential and Overlapping Well-Being Benefits of Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 11(6), 735-762. doi: 10.1007/s10902-009-9171-4
- Isen, A. M., Daubman, K. A., & Nowicki, G. P. (1987). Positive affect facilitates creative problem solving. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52(null), 1122.
- Kahneman, D. (1992). Reference points, anchors, norms, and mixed feelings. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 51(2), 296-312.
- Kahneman, D. (1999). *Objective happiness*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking: fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Kahneman, D., Diener, E., & Schwartz, N. (1999). *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (Vol. null). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kahneman, D., Krueger, A. B., Schkade, D. A., N., S., & Stone, A. A. (2004). Survey Method for Characterizing Daily Life Experience: The Day Reconstruction Method *Science*, 306, 1776-1780. doi: 10.1126/science.1103572
- Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1984). Choices, values, and frames. *American Psychologist*, 39(4), 341-350. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.39.4.341
- Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (2003). The rational choice, values and frames. *Psikhologicheskii Zhurnal*, 24(4), 31-42.
- Kashdan, T. B., Biswas-Diener, R., & King, L. A. (2008). Reconsidering happiness: The costs of distinguishing between hedonics and eudaimonia. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 3(4), 219-233.
- Keyes, C. (2002). The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing in Life. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 43(2), 207-222. doi: 10.2307/3090197
- Keyes, C. (2007). Promoting and protecting mental health as flourishing: A complementary strategy for improving national mental health. *The American psychologist*, 62(2), 95-108. doi: 10.1037/0003-066x.62.2.95
- Keyes, C. (2010a). Flourishing *The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology*: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Keyes, C. (2010b). The Next Steps in the Promotion and Protection of Positive Mental Health. *CJNR (Canadian Journal of Nursing Research)*, 42(3), 17-28.
- Keyes, C., & Annas, J. (2009). Feeling good and functioning well: distinctive concepts in ancient philosophy and contemporary science. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(3), 197-201. doi: 10.1080/17439760902844228
- Keyes, C., Shmotkin, D., & Ryff, C. D. (2002). Optimizing Well-Being: The Empirical Encounter of Two Traditions. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 82(6), 1007-1022.
- Keyes, C., & Simoes, E. (2012). To Flourish or Not: Positive Mental Health and All-Cause Mortality. *American Journal of Public Health*, 102(11), 2164-2172.
- Kjell, O. N. E. (2011). Sustainable Well-Being: A Potential Synergy Between Sustainability and Well-Being Research. *Review of General Psychology*, 15(3), 255-266. doi: 10.1037/a0024603
- Krueger, A. B., Kahneman, D., Fischler, C., Schkade, D., Schwarz, N., & Stone, A. A. (2009). Time use and subjective well-being in France and the US. *Social Indicators Research*, 93(1), 7-18.
- Lippman, L., Moore, K., & McIntosh, H. (2009). *State of the Art of Positive Indicators of Child Well-being*. Paper presented at the UNICEF / OECD / European Commission Well-being Expert Consultation, Washington, D.C.
- Lippman, L., Moore, K., & McIntosh, H. (2011). Positive Indicators of Child Well-Being: A Conceptual Framework, Measures, and Methodological Issues. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 6(4), 425-449. doi: 10.1007/s11482-011-9138-6
- Losada, M., & Heaphy, E. (2004). The role of positivity and connectivity in the performance of business teams: A nonlinear dynamics model. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(6), 740-765. doi: DOI: 10.1177/0002764203260208

- Lupton, D. (1999). *Risk*. New York: Routledge.
- Lupton, D. (2006). Sociology and risk. In G. Mythen & S. Walklate (Eds.), *Beyond the Risk Society: Critical Reflections on Risk and Human Security* (pp. 11-24). Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.
- Lupton, D., & Tulloch, J. (2002). 'Life would be pretty dull without risk': voluntary risk-taking and its pleasures. *Health, Risk & Society, 4*(2), 113-124.
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2009). *The how of happiness: is it possible to become lastingly happier and if so, how?* Paper presented at the Happiness & Its Causes Conference, Sydney, Australia.
- Lyubomirsky, S., Dickerhoof, R., Boehm, J., & Sheldon, K. (2011). Becoming happier takes both a will and a proper way: An experimental longitudinal intervention to boost well-being. *Emotion, 11*(2), 391-402. doi: 10.1037/a0022575
- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin, 131*(6), 803-855. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.131.6.803
- Lyubomirsky, S., & Layous, K. (2013). How Do Simple Positive Activities Increase Well-Being? *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22*(1), 57-62. doi: 10.1177/0963721412469809
- Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing Happiness: The Architecture of Sustainable Change. *Review of General Psychology, 9*(2), 111-131. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.111
- Lyubomirsky, S., Tkach, C., & Sheldon, K. (2004). *Pursuing sustained happiness through random acts of kindness and counting one's blessings: Tests of two six-week interventions*. University of California Riverside. Riverside, California.
- Madge, N. (2009). The Actuarial Assessment and Experiential Reality of Risk in Childhood. *Sociology Compass, 3*(5), 824-835.
- Madge, N., & Barker, J. (2007). *Risk and childhood*.
- Malone, K. (2007). The bubble-wrap generation: children growing up in walled gardens. *Environmental Education Research, 13*(4), 513 - 527.
- Marano, H. E. (2008). *A nation of wimps: the high cost of invasive parenting*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist, 56*(3), 227-238. doi: 10.1037//0003-066x.56.3.227
- Masten, A. S. (2007). Resilience in developing systems: Progress and promise as the fourth wave rises. *Development and Psychopathology, 19*(3), 921-930. doi: 10.1017/s0954579407000442
- McCuaig, L., Quennerstedt, M., & Macdonald, D. (2013). A salutogenic, strengths-based approach as a theory to guide HPE curriculum change. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education, 4*(2), 109-125. doi: 10.1080/18377122.2013.801105
- Moores, A., Akhurst, J., & Powell, J. (2010). Using a card sort to structure and promote enquiry-based learning. *The British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 73*(5), 229-236. doi: 10.4276/030802210x12734991664264
- Murus, P. (2009). Fear and Courage in Children: Two Sides of the Same Coin? [Original article]. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 18*, 486-490. doi: 10.1007/s10826-009-9271-0
- Mythen, G., & Walklate, S. (2006). *Beyond the risk society: Critical reflections on risk and human security*. Open University Press: McGraw-Hill International.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards*. Washington, DC: National

- Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers.
- Niehues, A., Bundy, A., Broom, A., & Tranter, P. (2013). Parents' perceptions of risk and the influence on children's everyday activities. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. doi: 10.1007/s10826-013-9891-2
- Niehues, A., Bundy, A., Broom, A., Tranter, P., Ragen, J., & Engelen, L. (2013). Everyday uncertainties: Reframing adults' perceptions of risk in children's outdoor free play. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 223-237. doi: 10.1080/14729679.2013.798588
- Niehues, A., Bundy, A., Mattingly, C., & Lawlor, M. (1991). Making a Difference: Occupational Therapy in the Public Schools. *Occupational Therapy Journal of Research*, 11(4), 195-212.
- Noddings, N. (2003). *Happiness and Education* (1 ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Norrish, J., & Vella-Brodrick, D. (2009). Positive psychology and adolescents: Where are we now? Where to from here? *Australian Psychologist*, 44(4), 270-278. doi: 10.1080/00050060902914103
- Norrish, J., Williams, P., O'Connor, M., & Robinson, J. (2013). An applied framework for positive education. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 3(2), 147-161. doi: doi:10.5502/ijw.v3i2.2
- Nowicki, S., Jr., & Strickland, B. R. (1973). A locus of control scale for children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 40, 148-154.
- O'Rourke, J., & Cooper, M. (2010). Lucky to be happy: A study of happiness in Australian primary students. *Australian journal of educational & developmental psychology*, 10, 94-107.
- O'Brien, C., & Tranter, P. (2006). *Planning for and with children and youth: insights from children about happiness, well-being and walking*. Paper presented at the INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WALKING AND LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES, 7TH, 2006, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.
- The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. (1986) Retrieved November 25, 2013, 2013, from <http://www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/previous/ottawa/en/>
- Packer, M. (2011). *The Science of Qualitative Research*. New York Cambridge University Press.
- Panter-Brick, C., & Leckman, J. F. (2013). Editorial commentary: Resilience in child development - Interconnected pathways to wellbeing. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 54(4), 333-336. doi: 10.1111/jcpp.12057
- Park, N. (2004a). Character Strengths and Positive Youth Development. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591, 40-54. doi: 10.1177/0002716203260079
- Park, N. (2004b). The Role of Subjective Well-Being in Positive Youth Development. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591, 25-39.
- Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2006). Character strengths and happiness among young children: Content analysis of parental descriptions. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 7(3), 323-341.
- Peterson, C., & Park, N. (2009). Increasing happiness in lasting ways. *Psychologist*, 22(4), 304-307.
- Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: The full life versus the empty life. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 6(1), 25-41. doi: 10.1007/s10902-004-1278-z



- Peterson, C., Ruch, W., Beermann, U., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2007). Strengths of character, orientations to happiness, and life satisfaction. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 2*(3), 149-156. doi: DOI: 10.1080/17439760701228938
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. (2004). Character strengths and virtues; a handbook and classification. *Reference and Research Book News, 19*(3).
- Pollard, E. L., & Lee, P. D. (2003). Child well-being: A systematic review of the literature. *Social Indicators Research, 61*(1), 59-78. doi: 10.1023/a:1021284215801
- Power, A. (2011, June 21, 2013). Thoughts on Surplus Safety. Retrieved from allenpower.wordpress.com/2011/03/08/thoughts-on-surplus-safety/
- Rotter, J. B. (1966). The Internal-External Control Scale. *Psychological Monographs, 80*.
- Rowe, G., Hirsh, J. B., & Anderson, A. K. (2007). Positive affect increases the breadth of attentional selection. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 104*(1), 383-388.
- Rugg, G., & McGeorge, P. (2005). The sorting techniques: a tutorial paper on card sorts, picture sorts and item sorts. *Expert Systems, 22*(3), 94-107. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0394.2005.00300.x
- Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68-78. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68
- Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2001). ON HAPPINESS AND HUMAN POTENTIALS: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*(1), 141. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.141
- Ryan, R., & Huta, V. (2009). Wellness as healthy functioning or wellness as happiness: the importance of eudaimonic thinking (response to the Kashdan et al. and Waterman discussion). *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 4*(3), 202-204. doi: 10.1080/17439760902844285
- Ryan, R., Huta, V., & Deci, E. (2008). Living well: a self-determination theory perspective on eudaimonia. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9*(1), 139-170.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*(2), 1069-1081. doi: 10.1177/1477878509104327
- Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. H. (2008). Know thyself and become what you are: A eudaimonic approach to psychological well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9*(1), 13-39.
- Salzberg, S. (2004). *Lovingkindness: The revolutionary art of happiness*: Shambhala Publications.
- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2007). Categorizing risky play - 'how can we identify risk-taking in children's play?'. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 15*(2), 237-252. doi: DOI:10.1080/13502930701321733
- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2009a). Affordances for Risky Play in Preschool: The Importance of Features in the Play Environment. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 36*(5), 439-446. doi: 10.1007/s10643-009-0307-2
- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2009b). Characteristics of risky play. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning, 9*(1), 3-21. doi: 10.1080/14729670802702762
- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2009c). Children's expressions of exhilaration and fear in risky play. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 10*(2), 92-106. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2009.10.2.92>
- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2010). 'It tickles in my tummy!': Understanding children's risk-taking in play through reversal theory. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 8*(1), 67-88. doi: 10.1177/1476718x09345393

- Sandseter, E. B. H., & Kennair, L. E. O. (2011). Children's risky play from an evolutionary perspective: The Anti-phobic effects of thrilling experiences. *Evolutionary Psychology, 9*(2), 257-284.
- Schiffirin, H. H., Liss, M., Miles-McLean, H., Geary, K. A., Erchull, M. J., & Tashner, T. (2013). Helping or Hovering? The Effects of Helicopter Parenting on College Students' Well-Being. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 1*-10.
- Schmitz, T. W., De Rosa, E., & Anderson, A. K. (2009). Opposing influences of affective state valence on visual cortical encoding. *The Journal of Neuroscience, 29*(22), 7199-7207.
- Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Schwartz, B., & Sharpe, K. (2010). *Practical Wisdom*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Seligman, M. (2008). Positive Health. *Applied Psychology: An International Reivew, 57*, 3-18. doi: 10.1111/j.1464-0597.2008.00351.x
- Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*. New York: Free Press.
- Seligman, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology. An introduction. *The American psychologist, 55*(1), 5-14.
- Seligman, M., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education, 35*(3), 293-311. doi: 10.1080/03054980902934563
- Seligman, M., Steen, T., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: empirical validation of interventions. *The American psychologist, 60*(5), 410-421.
- The shape of the Australian curriculum: Health and Physical Education*. (2012).  
*Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (Draft)*. (2012). (Vol. null).
- Siegel, D. (2007). *The mindful brain: reflection and attunement in the cultivation of well-being*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Siegel, D. (2012). *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Sin, N. L., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2009). Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: a practice-friendly meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 65*(5), 467-487. doi: 10.1002/jclp.20593
- Sirgy, M. J., & Wu, J. (2009). The pleasant life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life: what about the balanced life?. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 10*, 183-196. doi: 10.1007/s10902-007-9074-1
- Sixsmith, J., Gabhainn, S. N., Fleming, C., & O'Higgins, S. (2007). Childrens', parents' and teachers' perceptions of child wellbeing. *Health Education, 107*(6), 511-523. doi: 10.1108/09654280710827911
- Skenazy, L. (2009). *Free-Range Kids: Giving Our Children the Freedom We Had Without Going Nuts with Worry*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Skenazy, L. (2010). *Is freedom too risky for kids?* Paper presented at the Festival of Dangerous Ideas, Sydney, Australia.
- Sleet, D. A., & Mercy, J. (2003). Promotion of Safety, Security and Well-being. In M. Bornstein, L. Davidson, C. Keyes, K. Moore & T. C. f. C. Well-being (Eds.), *Well-Being: Positive Development Across th eLife Course* (pp. 81-97). Mayway, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Slovic, P. (2000). *The Perception of Risk*. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd,.
- Soto, D., Funes, M. J., Guzmán-García, A., Warbrick, T., Rotshtein, P., & Humphreys, G. W. (2009). Pleasant music overcomes the loss of awareness in patients with visual neglect. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 106*(14), 6011-6016.
- Statler, M., & Roos, J. (2007). *Everyday Strategic Preparedness: The Role of Practical Wisdom in Organizations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Stephenson, A. (2003). Physical risk-taking: dangerous or endangered? *Early Years*, 23(1), 35. doi: DOI:10.1080/0957514032000045573
- Steptoe, A., Dockray, S., & Wardle, J. (2009). Positive Affect and Psychobiological Processes Relevant to Health. *Journal of Personality*, 77(6), 1747-1776.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Thoilliez, B. (2011). How to Grow up Happy: An Exploratory Study on the Meaning of Happiness from Children's Voices. *Child Indicators Research*, 4(2), 323-351. doi: 10.1007/s12187-011-9107-5
- Tovey, H. (2007). Playing Outdoors: Spaces and Places, Risk and Challenge.
- Tovey, H. (2007). *Playing outdoors: Spaces and places, risk and challenge*. New York: Open University Press.
- Tranter, P. (2006). Overcoming Social Traps: a key to creating child friendly cities. In B. Gleeson & N. Sipe (Eds.), *Creating child Friendly Cities: Reinstating Kids in the City*. New York: Routledge.
- Tranter, P., Bundy, A., Engelen, L., Wyver, S., Naughton, G., Niehues, A., & Ragen, J. (2012). *Taking a risk with playful places for children: removing 'surplus safety' from the school ground*. Paper presented at the Child Friendly Cities Conference Bendigo, Victoria. <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.14/202697>
- Tugade, M. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). Resilient Individuals Use Positive Emotions to Bounce Back From Negative Emotional Experiences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86(2), 320-333. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.86.2.320
- Tugade, M. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2007). Regulation of positive emotions: Emotion regulation strategies that promote resilience. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 8(3), 311-333. doi: 10.1007/s10902-006-9015-4
- Tugade, M. M., Fredrickson, B. L., & Barrett, L. F. (2004). Psychological resilience and positive emotional granularity: Examining the benefits of positive emotions on coping and health. *Journal of Personality*, 72(6), 1161-1190.
- Tulloch, J., & Lupton, D. (2003). *Risk and Everyday Life*. London: Sage.
- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1974). Judgments under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases. *Science*, 185.
- Twenge, J. M., Zhang, L., & Im, C. (2004). It's beyond my control: A cross-temporal meta-analysis of increasing externality in locus of control, 1960-2002. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 8(3), 308-319. doi: doi: 10.1207/s15327957pspr0803\_5
- Ungar, M. (2007). *Too safe for their own good: How risk and responsibility help teens thrive*. Crow's Nest, N.S.W.: Inspired Living.
- Ungar, M. (2009). Overprotective Parenting: Helping Parents Provide Children the Right Amount of Risk and Responsibility. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 37(3), 258 - 271. doi: 10.1080/01926180802534247
- Ungar, M. (2013). What is Resilience? , 2014, from <http://www.resilienceresearch.org/>
- Ungar, M., Ghazinour, M., & Richter, J. (2013). Annual Research Review: What is resilience within the social ecology of human development? *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(4), 348-366. doi: 10.1111/jcpp.12025
- Veenhoven, R. (2008). Healthy happiness: effects of happiness on physical health and the consequences for preventive health care. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9(3), 449-469.
- Wadlinger, H. A., & Isaacowitz, D. M. (2008). Looking happy: The experimental manipulation of a positive visual attention bias. *Emotion*, 8(1), 121.

- Waterman, A. S. (1993). Two Conceptions of Happiness: Contrasts of Personal Expressiveness (Eudaimonia) and Hedonic Enjoyment. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 64(4), 678-691.
- Waterman, A. S. (Writer). (2008). *Reconsidering happiness: a eudaimonist's perspective*: Routledge.
- Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 28(2), 75-90. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1375/aedp.28.2.75>
- Westerhof, G. J., & Keyes, C. L. M. (2010). Mental illness and mental health: The two continua model across the lifespan. *Journal of Adult Development*, 17(2), 110-119. doi: 10.1007/s10804-009-9082-y
- White, M. (2009). Why teach Positive Education in schools? *Education*.
- WHO. (2013). World Health Organization, from <http://www.who.int/about/en/>
- Williams, P. (2011). Pathways to Positive Education at Geelong Grammar School Integrating Positive Psychology and Appreciative Inquiry. *AI Practitioner*, 13(2).

## Appendix 1

### Card sort attributes

- Able to accept mistakes and learn from them
- Able to make good decisions
- Assertive
- Compassionate
- Confidence
- Courage
- Curiosity
- Independent
- Joy
- Kind
- Passionate
- Power
- Recognition
- Resilient
- Sense of belonging
- Self-content
- Socially just
- Spirituality
- Wealth
- Wisdom

## **APPENDIX 2**

### Statements and questions used to initiate parent interviews

1. Risk can be described as danger or threat, uncertainty, opportunity or challenge. It may simply be an uncertain outcome of a decision or action.
2. Shall we talk about the card sort? What are the three most important attributes you selected for child and why?
3. How might risk be involved in your child achieving your desires for her or for him?
4. The media often portrays parents as over-protective. Do you view yourself as an over-protective parent?

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **Methodology**

The methodology for this study drew on the interpretive traditions of qualitative research focusing on developing an in-depth understanding of parents' perceptions of risk and ways in which these perceptions influence children's opportunities for age-appropriate risk taking, happiness and well-being, and the development of resilience. External stakeholders were used to assist in the development of the card sort attributes. Members of the Participation in Everyday Life research group at the University of Sydney Faculty of Health Sciences, some of whom were parents, contributed to the definition of the attributes used. Two additional parents, whose children had not participated in research studies regarding risk, took part in pilot interviews using the selected attributes. These external stakeholders shared perspectives that enabled the authors to determine essential attributes and to select wording that would be most understandable and meaningful to the parents being interviewed in the study.

Broom (2009) adapted Charmaz's (1990) approach to social analysis to meet the needs of his study of persons using complementary and alternative medicine during cancer treatment. Charmaz's work drew on grounded theory developed by Strauss and Corbin; Broom's work used modifications of this approach to focus primarily on one aspect of grounded theory, i.e., developing an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. Broom subjected the data collected to a series of questions that were based on Charmaz's data analysis. These questions included: (1) "What is the basis of a particular experience, action, belief, relationship, or structure? (2) What do these assume implicitly or explicitly about particular subjects and relationships? (3) Of what larger process is this action/belief, etc., a part?

(4) What are the implications of such actions/beliefs for particular actors/institutional forms?” (Broom, 2009, p.1161). These questions shaped the data as it was collected, focusing attention on individuals’ lived experiences and ways they constructed them, with particular attention to participants’ emotions, actions and situations as they interpreted them. Broom developed emergent categories for conceptualising and making common sense of the data and developing theoretical interpretations.

I chose to use Broom’s adaptation of Charmaz’s work to devise an approach for analysing parents’ perceptions of risk, the ways they constructed risk, and emotions participants shared as they interpreted their actions and situations. The questions I developed grew out of my understanding of risk as defined by the parents and educators whose children participated in the SPP and theoretical conceptualisations of risk presented in the literature. Primarily these questions relate to the technoscientific perspective of risk described by Lupton (1999; 2006). The analytical questions I used to determine the value of content in the transcripts pertaining to the study questions included: (1) How do risk perceptions develop? (2) How do risk perceptions impact decisions parents make? (3) Of what larger processes are risk perceptions a part? and (4) What are the implications of negative and positive risk perceptions on particular actors and institutions?

I compared knowledge generated in the early interviews with each successive interview. The approach was developmental in that knowledge generated in the first interviews was contrasted, challenged, and built upon methodically as data collection proceeded. The process of analysis began with the author reading through transcripts



multiple times, writing memos and discussing ideas with colleagues and supervisors to discover emerging patterns within the data.

One pattern that emerged early was parents' desires for their children to be happy and resilient. Another theme was driven by parents' fears for children's safety, the perception that it is a more dangerous world today, and parents' concerns that they be viewed as capable even though, at times, they felt uncertain. Risk in everyday life was apparent. Both Charmaz and Packer suggested that in qualitative research it is often best to develop the literature review simultaneously with the data collection and analysis processes. I looked to happiness and well-being literature as well as risk and resilience literatures. Moving back and forth between the transcribed data and the literature in this way reflects the continuous hermeneutic circle used to develop interpretations of the data described by Ezzy (2002).

Packer's (2011) view of qualitative data analysis offered an understanding of the hermeneutic interpretive process that I chose to analyse the data collected during semi-structured, in-depth interviews. It allowed a way to create a careful and detailed understanding of parents' risk perceptions and the influence on children's everyday activities. Packer believes that the interviewer and interviewee share in developing a narrative. He suggested that it is important to retain significant portions of the "stories" that emerge in the interviews in order to be true to the meaning that is collaboratively created. This adds to the trustworthiness of the analysis that included narrative, thematic and theoretical lenses for creating a hermeneutic interpretation of parents' perceptions of risk and the influence on children's everyday activities.

The aspects of the data that especially drew my attention included compelling stories that illustrated emotions and actions parents employed as they struggled to create contexts within which their children could experience happiness and well-being

and develop resilience. I looked for a range of parental experiences and reflections that demonstrated a full scope of risk tolerance from protection against risk to tolerating uncertainties to actively approaching and exploring risks with and for their children.

The theoretical lenses I applied to the data analysis primarily included the following: (1) theories of happiness and well-being, especially as described by Seligman as flourishing; (2) the value of positive emotions that can be generated by play as described by Fredrickson in the Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions; (3) Ryan and Deci's theories of self-determination and eudaimonia; and (4) Lyubomirsky's perspectives on ways to develop happiness through the use of creative contexts and intentional activities. Moving from the data as stories and viewing them through these theoretical lenses allowed me comprehend and appreciate emergent themes that pertained to the research questions.