THE AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE NEWSLETTER

November 1987   No. 13

Chapters in Childhood
Glimpses into the history of childhood in South Australia

EDITORIAL

The Migration and Settlement Museum in Adelaide, South Australia, has joined the growing number of archival intitutions in this country with programs and exhibitions about childhood. The South Australian contribution, 'Chapters in Childhood: Glimpses into the History of Childhood in South Australia', includes material on Aboriginal and immigrant children, children in institutions, children at work and at school. The attractive poster advertising the exhibition offers the 'rules' of a number of traditional games: Skipping, The Eagle and the Chickens, Sevenses, Poor Pussy, and Hopscotch. Children who visit the exhibition are encouraged to <u>do</u> as well as look. Well worth a visit.

Earlier this year one of the editors of ACFN (June Factor) received a small grant from the Australian Folk Trust. The purpose of the grant was to provide a computer-based compilation of children's rhymes, riddles, jokes — material sent in by children from all over Australia in

enthusiastic response to the children's folklore anthologies, Far Out, Brussel Sprout!, All Right, Vegemite! and Unreal, Banana Peel!

Once all the information (including age, sex, date and place of informant) has been keyed into the data-base, the Folk Trust will be able to provide libraries and other relevant institutions with access to this archive - via a few floppy disks. A list of 'keywords' - e.g. race, humour, etc. - will enable 'readers' to select exactly the material they want without the present tedious manual search. Here the computer acts as a true agent of free intellectual inquiry.

June Factor
Gwenda Davey

Correspondence

Anita Carmody is currently employed at Debney Meadows Primary School in Flemington. She works in the playground as a 'play facilitator', on a project called Socialization Through Children's Play. This project (and Anita's salary) is funded through the Commonwealth School Commission as part of Debney Meadows Disadvantaged School's program. The program has been running for three years and aims to increase children's repertoire of traditional playground games and rhymes, and enhance the status of game playing in the playground. For further information about the Debney Meadow's Playground, copies of the research report Play and Friendships in a Multi-Cultural Playground can be obtained from the Australian Children's Folklore Publications, I.E.C.D., Madden Grove, Kew, 3101.

My time at Debney Meadows Primary feels to me a little like star-gazing. Whenever I am there, and it is only a couple of

afternoons a week, hardly enough time to chart a galaxy, I spot enough stars to pocket for a treasure of folklore. Today, however, I would rate a discovery I've made as close to a constellation.

Although it may be old-hat to others, especially in Turkish circles, I was thrilled to encounter an actual counting-out process to see who would go "he" for chasey in the Turkish class, in Turkish!

Here is how it went:

"*Oh-oh-oh ...
Piti, Piti,
Chikolata sepeti
Terazi lastic
Cimnastik."

* "Oh-oh-oh is done with mouth open and rounded (Indian war-path call style), and the translation is roughly concerned with a chocolate basket, scales, elastic and gymnastic — for no apparent reason than that it sounds good-of-course! (This rhyme was collected with the untiring help of the Turkish teacher, Pembe Somer. As fellow collectors would know, it is no simple process to establish such valuable informants.)

This is not to say that children have been heard to chant such a rhyme in the wilds of the yard or street however, or beyond the end of the Turkish class if and when games are allowed. In fact, the universal counting out process at Debney Meadows (remember the children at this school represent every continent) is "Aw Sum". This is a very efficient process eliminating the need for words at all and preserving the paper, scissors, rock ritual for its absolute efficiency - Aw Sum Rules OK - in Flemington anyway!

Another constellation that I feel can be faithfully charted comes in the form of a red-haired Australian five year old girl, called Peta. We were able to capture on video her version of organizing a skippy session with fellow five year olds. (It became her game because I had lent her my skipping rope. She was quite astutely able to discern between mine being a rope for

playing skippy and the plastic version, which she described as "just for learning to jump".)

Peta readily demonstrated her fluency in quite an admirable repertoire of skipping rhymes acquired during her first year at school.

Her clear renditions of Teddy Bear Teddy Bear; A.B.C.; On the Hillside stands a lady; H.I.T. spells HOT; I bought a little motor-car in 1984; are a rich language model for the children whose languages represent the five continents.

Her patience and readiness to help those who haven't quite refined their skipping style is a delight to behold.

Peta's capacity to maintain an overview of the game, in order to encourage and sustain order, co-operation and a recognisable sequential flow, seems to me to be an essential component of the multicultural playground.

For now I will conclude with a page from a Turkish child's notebook which illustrates a game similar to the "Cat and Mouse" circle game — except that it is played with a rabbit and a dog or is it a wolf?

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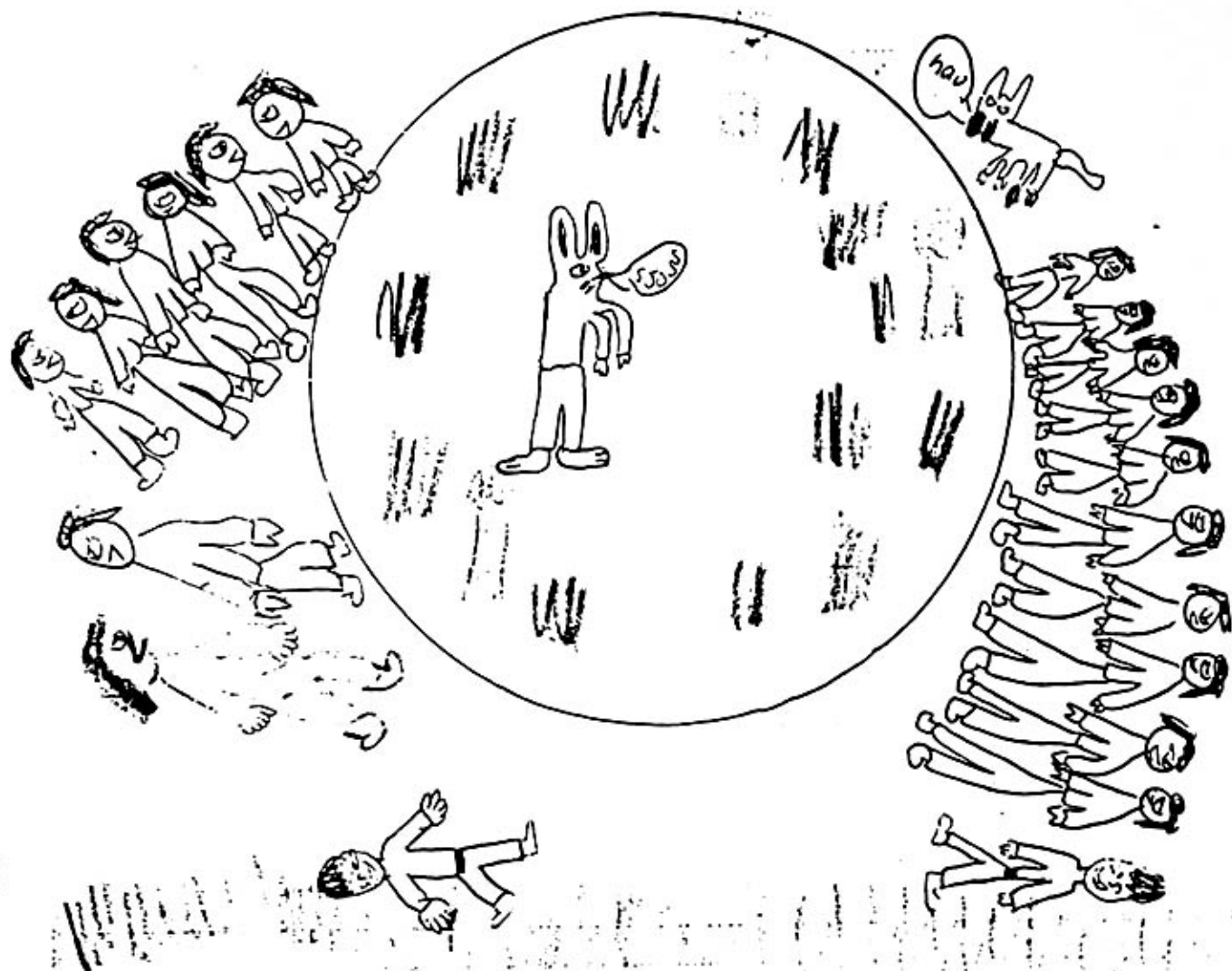
"Learning to play the New Australian way"

This was the headline of an article in the Sydney Morning Herald on 24th June, 1987, which considered an Australian Children's Folklore publication — Play and Friendships in a Multi-Cultural Playground, by Heather Russell.

The author of the article, Peter White, focused on some cross-cultural implications of the study, and noted 'negative racist comments' in the playground, as well as 'little co-operation and few friendships between Indo-Chinese and Turkish children, or Anglo-Australian and Turkish children'.

Heather Russell's response to the article is re-printed below. The issues raised are of importance to educationalists as well as folklorists. We would like to hear from readers with experience in this area.

I was the person responsible for the research referred to in Peter White's article — 'Learning to Play the New Australian Way' (24/6/87). I would like to make the following comments:

Firstly, whilst I found that children from non-English speaking backgrounds did have small repertoires of playground rhymes, it is wrong to infer that children's verbal folklore (rhymes, jokes, taunts, parodies etc.) is on the way out in Australian playgrounds. Children from all ethnic backgrounds are fascinated by the humour, poetry, and vitality of playground rhymes which touch on subjects that are universal, such as school, teachers, love, marriage, sex, etc. Despite the language barrier, immigrant children's interest in this material, and their desire to learn these rhymes (in English), augers well for the survival of this traditional lore.

Secondly, the emotive reference to an 'Asian invasion' of Australian playgrounds cannot be inferred from my research because my study was confined to one playground only, whose population happened to be forty percent Indo-Chinese. Contrary to White's conclusion, customs such as the 'Chinese flick' in marbles were not adopted by Australian children through a 'fear of defeat'. Indo-Chinese children's play skills were seen as valuable and highly innovative additions to existing playground customs.

Finally, I cannot agree with Peter White, when he says that playgrounds may be 'breeding grounds for racial intolerance and hostility'. Children's beliefs and attitudes are largely a reflection of our adult values and attitudes, so it is unfair to suggest that children themselves are solely responsible for racism in the playground. On the contrary, there is much to suggest that children who participate in game playing are fostering positive cultural interchange, and contributing to greater social cohesion.

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P.S. Peter White's article failed to cite the publication on which his article was based. The research report 'Play and Friendships in a Multi-Cultural Playground' by Heather Russell, can be obtained from the Institute of Early Childhood Development, 4 Madden Grove, Kew, 3101.

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Playgrounds and children's play

The relationship between adult-constructed playgrounds and the children who are to use them has not always been a happy one. Officialdom has generally been more interested in neatness and safety than in providing facilities which accommodate to children's play patterns.

As a result children's playgrounds in Australia are, with some honorable exceptions, uninviting amalgams of 'old' play equipment, such as swings and slides, and newer constructions - monkey-bars, so called adventure playgrounds, even the occasional mock playhouse.

Nowhere is there evidence of a thoughtful undertaking of the play ways of the children for whom these expensive playgrounds are intended. No walls for ball games, hard surfaces for skippy, nooks and crannies for hidey and other games. Nothing to push and mould and re-style. Everything hard and fast.

To open the discussion among our readers on 'What should be done', we publish a small research paper by KELLIE MILLER written as part of her study in children's folklore in the 3rd year of her Diploma of Teaching course at IECD. Further contributions welcomed.

DO CHILDREN USE RESOURCES WITHIN THE PLAYGROUND FOR THEIR INTENDED USE, OR AS AN ADJUNCT TO THEIR FOLKLORIC PLAY?

It would seem that adults spend much of their time creating the 'best', the most 'suitable' environments in which their children can play. Much attention is paid to what equipment should be provided, what will best stimulate the most appropriate types of play, what dramatic and/or social potential particular pieces of playground equipment possess. Even more important is the safety factor. How high is too high? What surface covering is most suitable? What surface provides the softest landing?

With so much concern and commitment being put into the area of children's playgrounds, it is intriguing to wonder why it is that children do not usually use the equipment in the prescribed way. Why do they gravitate to unwanted or 'unsuitable' areas for play activities? "Children always seem to be getting into trouble over where they play" (Opie). Why do children play in places where they are not supposed to play, do the things they are not supposed to do?

I observed children in the playground of an inner suburban school in Melbourne. Of 160 children, 125 were of ethnic (i.e. non Anglo-Celtic) origin. Fifty to sixty percent of the children were of Vietnamese and Turkish descent.

The originality of their play was remarkable. They did not run, jump, skip and play house as prescribed by the equipment provided by the school. They devised and implemented age-old practices of children's play, incorporating the resources available to them - including the school building itself. At this school the playtime period was a chance to use the resources in their own original manner, a way which was far removed from the intended method of use.

The game of Elastics was a prime example. The main school building was built off the ground and was supported by many wide cement columns. At playtime, girls would dart from classrooms to 'claim' two spare columns around which they would wind their string of rubber bands or piece of elastic: the perfect supports for their game. As they completed a sequence of the game, the elastic ring would be raised a little higher up the column. Thus all the girls could participate in the game without the need for two to 'miss out' through being required to hold the elastic.

Off Ground Tiggy was another example. The playground was fitted out with pine climbing frames which would normally be

wonderful for 'gross motor development'. A large sand-pit decorated another corner of the grounds, lovely in its deep cement bed. Around the edge of the playgrounds was a gutter wide and high enough for children to stand on. To the children, these were 'safe' places, a place to stand during their game where they could not be tagged. They ignored the climbing potential of the conveniently built climbing frame and the 'kindergarten' pleasures of the sand-pit.

The cement brick walls which stood out stark and bare around the school yard were marvellous stimulus for ball games. Long-ball and Down-ball were amongst the many games which flourished around the building. Balls would bounce in all directions after being 'smacked' against the walls then onto the dull cement ground.

Because the surface of the ground was even and smooth, the children played their games of Marbles on a section of dirt which had long ago been lush green grass. The constant roll of marbles and the scuffing of shoes across the ground to draw a circle had worn the grass away.

In this particular environment, the children did not use the equipment provided in the way which was expected. Folkloric play flourished in the playground and was used to a far greater extent than materials such as cricket bats, basketballs and things which could be provided by the teacher.

by Kellie Miller

# S.O.S Traditional pencil and paper game

Collected by:
Sophie Salouris,
Footscray Institute of Technology,
Department of Teacher Education,
Year III.

° Game may be played by anyone who is 8 years old or over.

° Game may be played by males or females (or a combination).

° Game is played with 2 or more players (recommended 2 players).

Rules

1. Players may write 'S' or 'O' in any go.

2. Every time a player makes an 'S.O.S' he is allotted 1 point.

3. Players may make an 'S.O.S' horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

4. To make an 'S.O.S', each letter must precede the next letter in the next consecutive square.

5. Grid may be of any size - the bigger the more challenging.

6. Squares in the grid may be of any size - the smaller the more challenging.

7. Players are not allowed to cross-over an already existing 'S.O.S'.

8. The player with the highest 'S.O.S' score wins.

9. Game is over when there are no more squares to make an 'S.O.S'.

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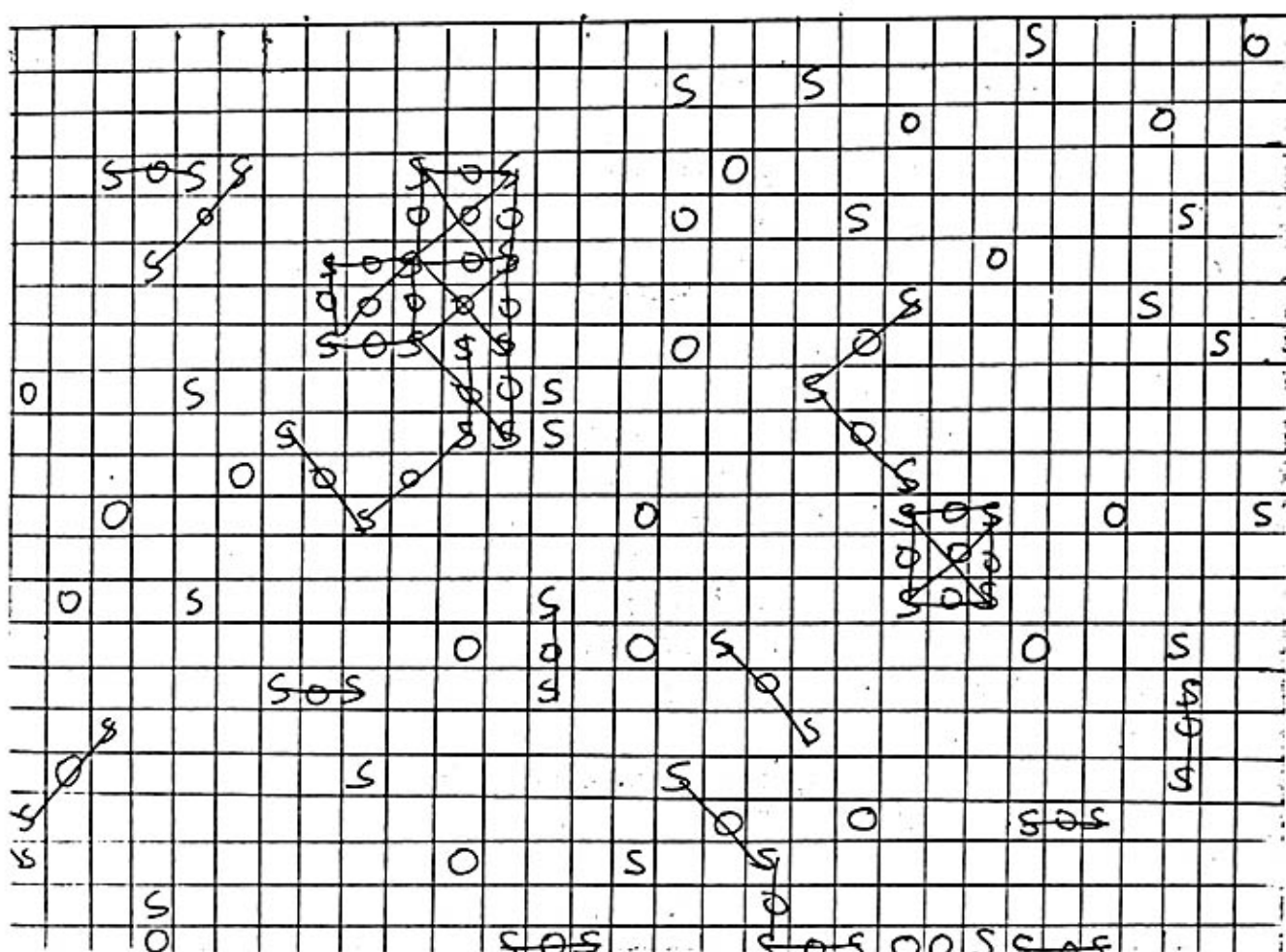
More about Joseph Jacobs

Dr Jacqueline Simpson, Editor of the British journal Folklore, has kindly given us permission to reproduce her comments on the nineteenth century Australian Jewish folklorist, Joseph Jacobs, made in correspondence with Graham Seal. (See ACFN No.10, 'Joseph Jacobs and English Fairy Tales in Australia').

You ask about Joseph Jacobs. I expect there would be information about him in Richard Dorson's The British Folklorists: A History. I don't recall him as being a major theorist, but he was an excellent transmitter of knowledge to the wider public. For instance, his two collections, English Fairy Tales and More English Fairy Tales, though they do "adapt" the texts, have sensible introductions and useful notes pointing back to the sources and to parallels. He was a diffusionist, of the group which saw India as the place of origin for the international folktales; he sounds cautiously sceptical about archaic survivalism in the Taylor/Lang sense, and more interested in the characteristics of the tales-as-we-have-them, e.g. their humour and non-romantic tone. (I suspect that if he'd lived 50 years later he'd have been a fine field-worker, interested in performance as well as texts - but that's a might-have been!)

There will be an article on him by Professor Gary Fine of the Sociology Department, University of Minnesota, in Folklore in Autumn, 1987 (November). I can't tell you in advance what Fine will be saying, but the title will be "Joseph Jacobs: A Sociological Folklorist", and one of the points is that justice has not been done to his contribution because, by the time he died, he had reverted to his other great interest in life, namely Jewish studies, and hadn't written about folklore for a long time. Only one other article on him has so far appeared: Brian C. Maidment, "Joseph Jacobs and English Folklore in the 1890s", in Studies in the Cultural Life of the Jews in England, ed. Dov Noy and Issachar Ben-Ami, Jerusalem, 1975. Fine says it's unfairly dismissive and that Joseph Jacobs was more than just a populariser.

Condom lore

Hazel Hall has sent us a list of synonyms for 'condoms' provided by Canberra teenagers. This interesting example of contemporary verbal lore came from a discussion during an AIDS education session.

The results, listed here, using the students' original spellings, reveal a comprehensive, although not always accurate list of synonyms/euphemisms/brand names:

franger, rubber sheaths, glove, frenchettes, French ticklers, profolactics, durrettes, XXXX, jacket, Lifestyle, Ultrasure, Arouse, Stimula, Vibratils, sock, sack, coat, connie, balloon, slipper, ticklers, durex, checkmate, danger, French letters, duo gold, langers, Johnnies, crocodiles, mystery bags, spoof bags, wad socks, roll 'em on, robbies, roll on robbies, water balloons, water bombs, slipper, dildo, lubras.

The term "water bombs" refers to the alleged 25 litre capacity of a condom.

(Further contributions from readers welcomed.)

Here comes the old woman from Botany Bay

Australian folklorists are conscious of how much local material derives from overseas, particularly British sources. Derivation, adaptation and innovation are the processes at the heart of folkloric transmission.

Recently, a caller to an ABC broadcast reminded listeners of a game played by Australian children, which sounds Australian in origin, but which in fact was known to British and American children in the nineteenth century. The Australian reference probably arises from the interest in those countries in the new colony — an interest which seeped into children's lore and was transported here along with other cultural baggage.

There was a lovely game we used to play inside about Here Comes An Old Woman From Botany Bay. We would sit in a circle and one was the old woman and she went outside and she would come in with a basket and say

"Here comes an old woman from Botany Bay
And what have you got to give her today".

She would stand in front of one person in the ring and that person would give a forfeit, a shoe or a hair ribbon or whatever they had, and it went into the basket. Then she would stand in front of someone else and say

"Here comes an old Woman from Botany Bay
And what have you got to give her today",

until she had collected forfeits all around. And then she would sit in the middle of the ring with her hands over her eyes and somebody would take the forfeits out one by one and say, holding a forfeit over her head,

"Here's a thing and a very pretty thing,
And what's to be done with this pretty thing?"

Then the old woman would say what she wanted such as, "kiss the doorknob three times", "sing a song", "recite", "do a dance", all those sorts of things, and everybody would get something to do. The shy ones would be embarrassed no end when they had to sing a song. I can remember that.

FROM: 'Talking History"
       ABC
       15.1.87

Melodic structures in children's playlore   by Hazel Hall

In 1984 I researched some 613 spoken and sung play rhymes from a Primary Inspectorate in Melbourne. These were classified in a manner similar to that of List (1963). The following classifications were used: parlando, recitation, sprechstimme, nomenclature 'singing', rising and falling two-tone calls, three-tone chants, 'songs' of four, five and six tonal clusters, and finally heptatonic song. In each tonal cluster, range, intervals and major or minor modality were used as variables. Each cluster was numbered according to its initial arrangement of tones, major(+) or minor(-) mode, and the group to which the structure was related. For example, the category 5N+1 indicates a five-tone 'major' cluster of the structure 1 type.

Using a developmental approach, I attempted to show the relationship between one melody and another to see if simple song types showed an extension of spoken intonation patterns. I concluded that although some tunes (especially skipping rope chants) clearly evolved from spoken intonation, others were not, as Sachs

FOUR-TONE CLUSTERS

These refer to tunes with stable sung intonation of a 'tonic' and three inter-related pitches. Although children chant on two or three tones, these are mainly small melodic (and often rhythmic) ostinatos. As the range of stable pitches widen, independent melodies are formed.

Structure 1

From this formula springs the well-known clapping melody 'Miss Mary Mac'. It consists of a stepwise ascending fourth (so–do), followed by a firm emphasis on the tonic by means of repetition, a common device in children's playsongs. Each statement of the ostinato is linked by a falling perfect fourth:

Miss Mary Mac (1981)

Miss Ma - ry Mac   Mac   Mac, All dressed in black black black (etc)

(1962) puts it, "speech born". Furthermore, for some of the songs a developmental approach was not always applicable.

But clearly relevant to the music educator were the types of tunes which were sung. I shall focus this discussion upon a group of these.

Structure 2

There is no four-tone cluster in the data which relates to the relevant second five-tone cluster.

Structure 3

The third structure moves from do to so via three steps and a leap, out-

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lining the first four tones of the common
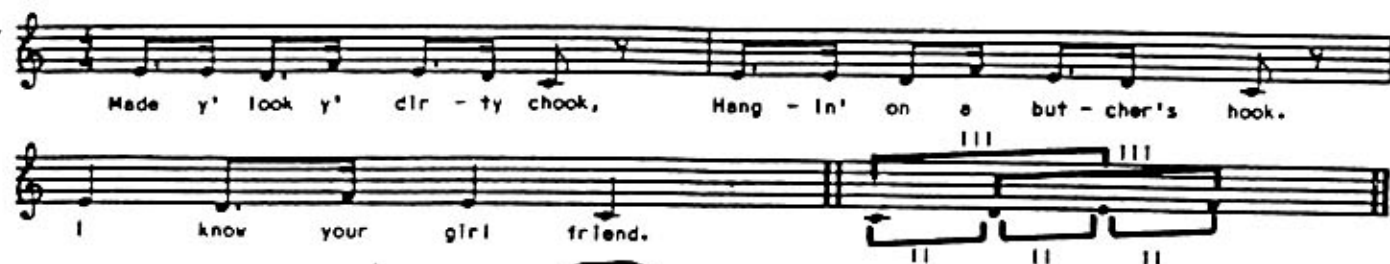pentatonic scale. This structure is found
in the following parody:

Mary had a little lamb (1978)

Ma - ry had a lit - tle lamb, lit - tle lamb, lit - tle lamb,

Ma - ry had a lit - tle lamb, its fleece was black as char - coal

Structure 4 (not included in the data)

In a fourth four-tone structure, step-
wise movement from do to fa is
found, with interlocking major and minor
thirds. There were no examples of this
structure in the present collection. It is
included in this paper because it formed
the basis of chants remembered from my
childhood, long before the introduction of
Kodaly methodology in Australia. The
following formulae illustrates that
structure, demonstrating a rising minor
third on a weak beat:

Made y'look (c1950)

Made y' look y' dir - ty chook, Hang - in' on a but - cher's hook.

I know your girl friend.

MINOR FOUR-TONE CLUSTERS

Structure 2

The fourth inversion of the common pentatonic scale (la do re me so) is suggested strongly in this structure, with so as the only tone missing. Many children are familiar with the following tune, especially the girls who perform the clapping song from which it comes. This particular section is preceded by a recited exchange between one girl and her clapping partner, and continues that exchange in song. The initial leap of a perfect 5th is somewhat unusual in songs of only four tones:

Flea (1978)

Coo- me - la coo-me - la coo- me - la vis- ta O no no no not the vis- ta

Structure 5

This consists of a stepwise la-do progression followed by a major third (do-me). An example of this structure is seen in the song 'There's a place in France'. The simple melody is offset by an outrageous text:

There's a place in France (1978)

There's a place in France where the la--dies wet their pants, and the

men go round with their whee - lers hang - in' out, and the

Japs in the gras- ses stick-in' pea - nuts up their ar- ses.

FIVE-TONE CLUSTERS

These refer to tunes with stable sung intonation of a 'tonic' and four inter-related pitches. Five tone melodies are not necessarily based on the so-called 'pentatonic scale' as exemplified in the black notes of the piano. Other five-tone structures are also used.

Structure 1

The first structure was an extension of a four-tone figure (**so la ti do** with the inclusion of the **supertonic degree re**, which served a decorative purpose. The clapping tune 'My name is Ali Ali' is based on this combination. It begins with an initial stepwide anacrusis from lower **so** to **do**, reminiscent of another clapping song, 'Miss Mary Mac', and typical of many sung rhymes from the collection. (The function of this anacrusis is to prepare and correlate the clapping sequence.) The song also features a pertinacious **do-fa** movement at the beginning and an exchange of major thirds (**ti-so**) in the second section:

My name is Ali Ali (1978)

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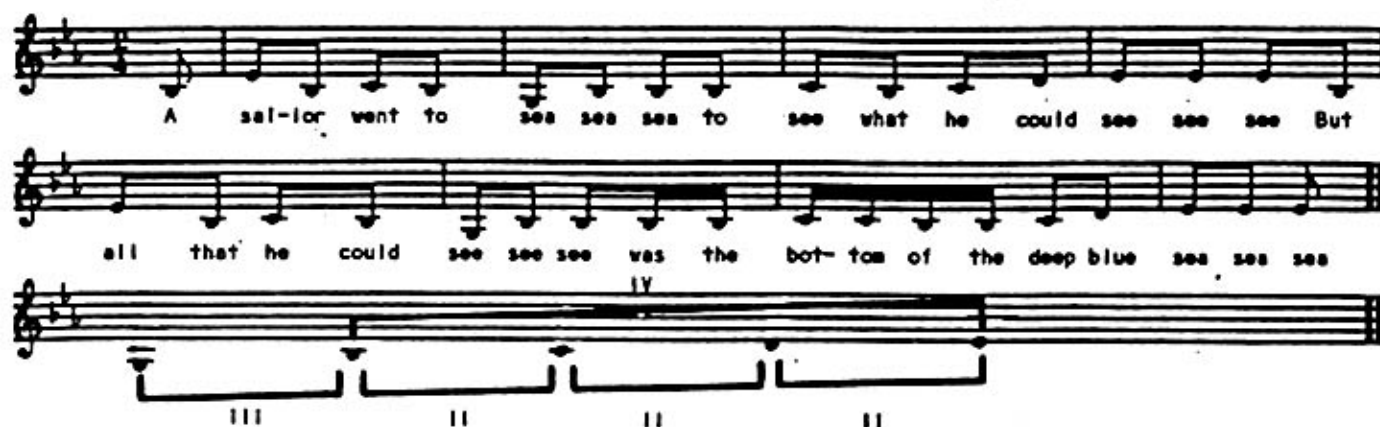## Structure 2

A strong suggestion of the common pentatonic scale (second inversion) prevails in the second five note structure, with the decorative function being now served by the leading note **ti**. The first three tones of the structure form the **so-me-fa** relationship of universal three note children's chants. This is exemplified in the old clapping favourite 'A sailor went to sea sea sea', which contains several important motifs: a stepwise lower **so-do** progression and the vigorous stating of the minor third:

A sailor went to sea sea sea (1981)

This tune or variations on the same, was recorded 25 times and sung to a wide variety of texts. It was well-known, and mostly sung in tune.

Structure 3

This is common to nursery songs. It consists of the tones **do-re-so**. The parody 'Jingle Bells' utilizes this formula. It is characterized by many repeated notes, some stepwise movement, and the descending leap of a fifth:

Jingle bells Batman smells (1978)
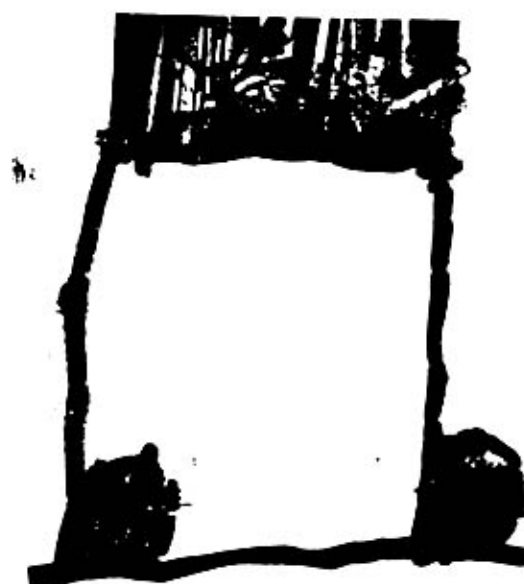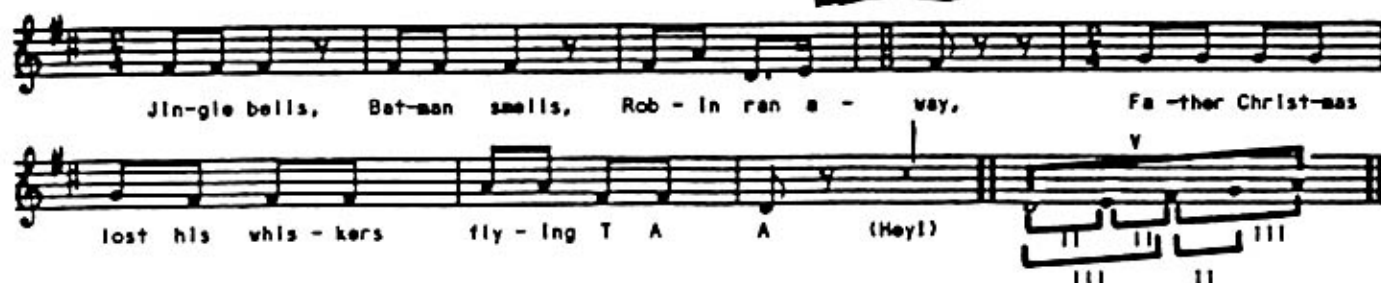
Other five-note tonal structures found in the data are not necessarily suggestive of common childlike melodies, as they are exhibit patterns in extremporization, as illustrated in the following melody, which is based on a lower ti-fa stepwise movement. The opening ascent is followed by descending sequential counteraction, resulting in a tightly knit, somewhat predictable melody. The lower leading note ti is used as a pivot to rebalance the progression and provide the necessary cadence which proves to end on **me** rather than the expected **do**.

My mother told me (1978)

These small melodic structures are part of the 'mother tongue', albeit Western civilization, in an expanding multicultural climate. If we continue to keep our eyes and ears open in the playground there is doubtless much more that our children can teach us.

Those readers wishing to explore the topic of childlike melody further may like to refer to the works of Cullen (1971), Brunton (1976), Clark (1980), and Cooke (1980).

CONCLUSIONS

Small tonal clusters are common musical types in children's playlore. It is useful to view them as part of a general continuum of children's music, ranging from casual speech to song. Major modes are more common, and as in most children's play songs, the relationship between text and melody is syllabic.

I have not wavered from my opinion of 1981, that where possible adults should avoid exploiting the privacy of the children's playworld. Too many texts have already been brought from the playground to the classroom. However, there is no reason why the melodic structures themselves should not be utilized, and many teachers seem to be very capable of writing simple but entertaining texts as are the students themselves.

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*                                   *
*  A video tape, FOLKLORE: TRADITION *
*  AND RENEWAL, is available at a cost *
*  of $25.00 from the Department of  *
*  Production   Services,  Kuring-gai *
*  CAE, PO Box 222, Lindfield, NSW   *
*  2070.  The 25 minute tape in either *
*  VHS or BETA format includes many of *
*  the highlights of the 2nd National *
*  Folklore   Conference,   including *
*  interviews with Bill Scott, Shirley *
*  Andrews, Graham Seal, Gwenda Davey, *
*  John Marshall and folklore students *
*  from  Finley  High  School.   The *
*  programme which is hosted by Penny *
*  Davies  also  features  music  and *
*  dance from the annual Bush Music  *
*  Club Festival.                    *
*                                   *
*                                   *
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