

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE NEWSLETTER

August, 1994
No. 26

ISSN 07285531

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Published from: Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, Parkville VIC 3052
Subscription: \$10.00 in Australia, \$14.00 outside Australia (including postage)



NOTES AND NEWS

FOLKLORE CENSORSHIP

A number of readers responded to our remarks in the last issue (No.25) concerning Phil Burrows, the teacher in Western Australia charged with 'indecent dealing'. (See the letter on p.17) Burrows has been a keen photographer, and an enthusiastic recorder of the play traditions of children. One of a series of fieldwork books recording play rhymes, with photos, showed a group of girls performing the actions to the rhyme 'Firecracker, Firecracker' - adapted by these children as 'Flintstones, Flintstones':

Flintstones, Flintstones, yabba yabba doo!
(repeat)
Fred does the bow,
Wilmur does the curtsy,
Pebble shows her knickers,
We all go 'Wow'!

Five little girls were recorded playing this game, and three displayed their underpants when lifting their skirts at the second-last line.

On the strength of this one photo Burrows was charged with three counts of indecent dealing, suspended from teaching, and smeared as an actual or potential child molester in the media.

As we commented in the last issue: 'Never before has it been suggested that researchers, collecting such material from children, are engaged in salacious or illegal activities.'

Finally, after 6 months of poverty, smear and innuendo, the case was brought to court - and promptly thrown out by the magistrate. Her critical

remarks on the case included the following:

Clearly in this case the evidence is tenuous, weak and vague, almost to oblivion... Is there sufficient evidence to go to a higher court? I would say unequivocally and absolutely not... It would appear that all the evidence and investigation has been taken out of context. I have a great deal of concern when people like this are being prosecuted.

So have we. Quite apart from the central civil liberties issues (Burrows was arrested on the basis of an anonymous phone call during a police campaign urging people to name child molesters; his accuser was never identified nor required to give evidence), and the scandalous conviction-by-media prior to trial, such cases force us to recognise that research and writing about childhood is not without its dangers.

Burrows has been cleared of all charges. The WA Education Department has paid him the salary owing for the six months following his suspension, but he has not been able to return to teaching. He writes: 'The Education Department has not found me a suitable location which would facilitate my recovery. I am currently on sick leave.'

Meanwhile, the editors of the *ACFN*, who were prepared to give evidence - had there been a trial - concerning the validity and importance of field research in the study of children's folklore, reflect on the Burrows' case and what it tells us of our society.

What, for instance, are the social and cultural pressures which give rise to patterns of censorship, such as the regular attempts by individuals across the country to force school libraries to remove copies of 'unsuitable' books - including collections of children's playground rhymes? Have we entirely escaped the punitive and puritanical ethos of officialdom in the 1960s, when the publishers of Australia's first uncensored collection of children's play rhymes, *Cinderella Dressed in Yella*, collated by the historian Ian Turner, were for a time unable to use the normal book preferential postage rate because a postmaster declared the book to be obscene?

We would be interested to hear from our readers - including those from overseas - about any inhibitions, restrictions or other difficulties encountered in the study or presentation of folklore, particularly children's folklore. Who makes the rules, who sets the limits?

CAN WE, SHOULD WE TEACH TRADITIONAL GAMES?

A reader has sent us a copy of a letter published in the English family magazine, *People's Friend* (9 April, 1994). Miss M.D.R. of Sheffield described a school in Poole, Dorset, where children were being taught 'old-style' games. Apparently, this 'experiment' is regarded as a great success:

The children are mixing better, enjoying the companionship, and actually saying that they prefer skipping and other traditional activities to the stress and loneliness of playing with computers.

The teachers find that interest levels, manners and general attitudes are all improving since the introduction of the games.

It's an interesting venture, similar to the experience outlined in the article on p.15 and with some similarities to the research undertaken by Heather Russell in Melbourne in 1984 and recorded in *Play and Friendships in a Multicultural Playground*. But are the improvements noticed by the teachers in Poole the result of paying positive attention to children - well

known to achieve good results almost regardless of the content of the activity - or is there something special about traditional games? And how can we tell?

Whatever the answers, we rather like Miss M.D.R.'s final paragraph:

So all those 'Golden Oldie' grandparents can leap into action. You have something of real, educational value to pass on to the young ones, something that money can't buy!

CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

The Merchant's House, 43 George Street, the Rocks, Sydney, was officially opened on 28 January, 1994. A rare 1848 Georgian townhouse, it operates as a home for the National Trust of NSW's Australian Childhood Collection and as a museum with a focus on young people. The exhibitions and activities cover history, architecture, visual arts, science and geography.

The 1994 program includes *Childhood Past and Present* (in association with Fort Street Public School), *Treasures of the Merchant's House* (archaeological material found on site), a *Cultural Fiesta* at Easter for family groups and *Pixie O'Harris - Murals for Children*. For further information contact Jim Logan, Curator, tel. (02) 241 5099 or fax (02) 241 5320.



VISIT FROM CAROLE CARPENTER

It was a great pleasure to welcome to Australia Carole Carpenter, President of the Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society. Carole was a keynote speaker at the Sixth National Folklife Conference, held in Melbourne in July 1994, with the theme *Tradition and Tourism: the good, the bad and the ugly*. Her speech was entitled *Use it or Lose it: Conservation of Traditions through Heritage Planning for Tourism*. As the Director of the Ontario Folklife Centre (one of her many responsibilities), Carole Carpenter in 1993-4 prepared an intangible heritage conservation strategy for the Muskoka region of Ontario as part of the municipality's Archaeological Master Plan. Carole's argument in her paper was that in this case, tourism presented an opportunity rather than a problem in heritage conservation, specifically of intangible heritage.

The Sixth National Folklife Conference was a smashing success, not least due to the organisational skills of Susan Faine, the Assistant Director of the Victorian Folklife Association, which hosted the conference on behalf of the Australian Folk Trust. One hundred and fifty people attended, representing about one third each tourism, folklife and cultural planning interests. The conference was opened by Sir Geoffrey Henry the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, with a grand Cook Island welcome of dance, song, drums and conch shells. The conference proceedings are being published, and will be available before the end of 1994.



By Nadia Taib

LEARNING HOW TO JOKE:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRE-SCHOOL
CHILDREN'S VERBAL HUMOUR
AN AUSTRALIAN STUDY AND REVIEW
by Gwenda Beed Davey

Gwenda Beed Davey, was for a number of years an educational psychologist and then a lecturer in psychology.

In this article she discusses an area of child lore about which there has been little cross-disciplinary research.

The following jokes were told by Melbourne pre-school children at three different suburban pre-schools in 1984:

Emily (Carlton): Knock, knock!
Who's there?
Lettuce.
Lettuce who?
Lettuce in!

Amelia (Carlton): What's a person that's not black and white? A postman!

Michael (Carlton): What do you call an elephant that flies? A jumbo jet.

Madeline (Carlton): What is something that is purple, red and gold, silver and grey, and is so little you can hardly see it, and it has a mother? A baby coloured ant.

Leah (Bayswater): Why did the chicken cross the road? To pick up all the eggs.

Sacha (Bayswater): Why did the orange stop in the middle of the road? Because he wanted to play squash.

Caroline (Mt. Waverley): How did the bird cross the road without any legs? He took a train.

The above selection is fairly representative of the entertaining and often bizarre nature of pre-school children's humour. In 1975 Michael Halliday wrote a definitive work about child language called *Learning how to mean*, about the development of young children's ability to use language to communicate intent, purpose and significance. 'Learning how to joke' might also be considered

one of the developmental tasks of this age period, and it can also be considered one of the most interesting of the expressive arts.

Jokes such as the above are not the earliest jokes, since children below two years of age can initiate a joking communication with another person. The following examples of verbal humour of children below two or three years of age were collected by post-graduate students at the Institute of Early Childhood Development (now University of Melbourne, School of Early Childhood Studies). They do not involve structured jokes such as the riddles or 'knock knocks' used by the older pre-school children, but all involve a form of joking which is dependent upon the use of words. The incidents are as reported by the students:

Girl 1yr 11 months (Irymple, Vic 1982): The child put socks on her hands as she was getting dressed and said to her mother 'Ook, ook! Glubs!' with a great big smile on her face.

Girl 2yrs 8 months (Mulgrave, Vic 1980): Fiona picks imaginary item from the floor and places it in her Grandfather's hand. She says 'lolly' and Grandpa pretends to eat it. She then picks up an imaginary item from the floor and hands it to Grandpa. He pretends to eat it as usual. Fiona then says 'Grandpa, it was a fly'.

Boy 2yrs 10 months (Albury NSW 1982): The child sings 'Yankee Doodle' several times using the normal words, then sings several variations, thus:

'Yankee Doodle went to town
Riding on a bus (or cow etc.)
He stuck a feather in his hat (in the cow etc.)
And called it a bus (or bee etc.)'

Girl 1yr 10 months (Young NSW 1976): Holding a banana to the dog's ear, says 'Hello, hello; goodbye, goodbye'.

Child 16 months (Bronte NSW 1982): The child, fully aware by now that cars go on the road, boats in the sea and aeroplanes in the sky, points to the aeroplane and says 'Car, Car' and dissolves into laughter.

How do young children learn how to joke? And how can these examples of early childhood humour be classified or explained? One major worker in the field is the developmental psychologist Paul McGhee. In his 1979 work *Humour: its origin*

and development, McGhee posed four developmental stages of increasing complexity based on Piaget's stages of cognitive development. Piaget's stages might be simplified as the sensorimotor stage (0-2 years), the stage of pre-operational thought (2-7 years), the stage of concrete operations (7-11 years) and the stage of formal operations (11 years onwards) (Piaget 1952 *passim*). McGhee's stages involve the following features:

Stage 1: incongruous actions towards objects (e.g. putting gloves on foot)

Stage 2: incongruous labelling of objects and events (e.g. calling sausage a snake)

Stage 3: conceptual incongruity; violating one or more aspects of a concept (e.g. putting words back to front, laughing at teacher wearing red nose).

Stage 4: appreciation of ambiguity (e.g. riddles, rude rhymes).

McGhee's central concept is that of *incongruity*, an intellectual construct involving a greater or lesser degree of ability on the child's part to isolate different concepts and to identify their characteristics. In McGhee's schema, humour is the result of the child's intellectual awareness that the rules governing concept formation are being deliberately violated; teachers don't usually wear red plastic noses.

As a contrast to McGhee's cognitive developmental approach, an earlier discussion of children's humour based on a psychoanalytical orientation is that of Martha Wolfenstein in her classic *Children's Humour: A Psychological Analysis* (1978). Wolfenstein examined children's humour chronologically, and stated that:

The devices of joking vary with age. The requirements of what constitutes a satisfactory joke are different for children and adults, and subject to change through different stages of childhood. (p.13)

The changes which Wolfenstein noted were those related to Freud's psychosexual stages of children's development. These stages are broadly the oral stage (0-18 months), anal stage (2-3 years), phallic stage (4-7 years), latency period (7-11 years), and the genital stage (puberty onwards). In his book *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* (1938), Freud developed the notion that jokes have latent meanings which express sexual and hostile motives, and his follower Martha Wolfenstein believed that children's jokes,

too, 'have a wealth of meaning, not all of which is evident on the surface' (p.16). She in fact went further than Sigmund Freud, and stated that:

'what Freud called "harmless wit", a play on words whose meaning is neither sexual nor hostile, is ... not so harmless or simply pleasant'. (p.63)

In terms of Freud's psychosexual stages of childhood development, Wolfenstein concerned herself principally with the phallic stage, where she saw spontaneous joking as the norm, and the latency period where ready-made jokes such as riddles are more common. She stated that:

Play on the ambiguities of words draws upon two basic ambiguities, those of sex and of emotion. Every individual has bisexual tendencies, and children especially feel that sex is indeterminate, that a boy could be changed into a girl or a girl into a boy. As far as emotion is concerned, every relationship partakes of some ambiguity: there is an admixture of hate in every love, and conversely love tends to infuse hostilities. (p.63)



It is regrettable that both McGhee and Wolfenstein, the two major figures in the psychological analysis of children's humour, took such uni-dimensional views. One of the few more recent workers in this field, Francoise Bariaud, commenting on McGhee's schema, emphasised that 'the experience of humour cannot be reduced to a purely cognitive process, be it a one- or two-stages process. It is also an affective experience' (1988, pp 20-21). But is even a two-dimensional view enough?

Catherine Garvey took a different approach to children's humour in her 1977 book on *Play*. The chapter on 'Play with language' gave a sociolinguist's interpretation and classification of verbal play. She enunciated a developmental sequence as follows:

- A. Play with noises and sounds
- B. Play with the linguistic system
- C. Social play
 - 1. Spontaneous rhyming and word play
 - 2. Play with fantasy and nonsense
 - 3. Play with conversation (pp.63-78)

The question must of course be asked as to whether ALL this verbal play involves humour, or whether, like much children's play in general, it is serious business. My answer is that some is used for humorous purposes and some is not; verbal humour is simply a sub-set of verbal play. The repetitive vocalisation of the earliest of Garvey's types of play with language, **Play with noises and sounds**, may be both serious and solitary, as also may be **Play with the linguistic system**. This second type of verbal play is superbly described in Ruth Weir's classic *Language in the Crib* (1972), in which she described and analysed the pre-sleep monologues of her son Anthony, at the age of 2 years 10 months. Real 'humour' is more likely to be found in the third of Garvey's types, namely **Social play**.



In her discussion of one further aspect of social play, namely **Play with fantasy and nonsense**, Catherine Garvey refers (p.61) to the work of the Russian poet, translator and children's writer Kornei Chukovsky, who published *From Two to Five* in 1925. This classic work in the interpretation of childhood did not become available in English until 1963, when the University of California Press published a translation made by Miriam Morton. No discussion of the humour of pre-school children would be complete without a reference to *From Two to Five*.

Chukovsky's first chapter, 'A linguistic genius', discusses the tremendous achievement made by young children in mastering their native tongue, and includes a discussion of imitation and creativity, of children as 'critics' of adult speech and of children's ability to camouflage ignorance. As indicated with regard to Catherine Garvey's discussion of children's verbal play, all these activities may or may not involve humour, and Chukovsky gives examples of both types. In one case, a little boy objected quite seriously to the object being used to sharpen his pencils being described as a pen-knife; 'It should be pencil-knife', he objected (p.11). On the other hand, a child was clearly joking when, on hearing that a woman 'fell into a faint', asked 'with a noticeable twinkle in her eye, "Who dragged her out of it?"' (p.12).

In my views, attempts to find a comprehensive explanation, description or classification of pre-school children's humour within one single discipline (whether psychology or literature) are bound to be inadequate. Child humour, as indeed all humour, needs to be studied from an interdisciplinary perspective. In the case of pre-school humour, the disciplines of linguistics, cognitive developmental psychology and performance theory are all valuable, as are the contributions of literary scholars such as Chukovsky. As regards the psychological theorists, I reject much of the psychoanalytic position, but acknowledge that humour at all ages can sometimes indicate anxiety. Adult 'disaster' jokes dealing with traumatic events such as the Space Shuttle disaster, Hoddle Street massacre or the AIDS epidemic are clear examples of humour serving this function.

Jokes are of course only one type of humour, among children as well as adults. Regrettably, there is little work studying pre-school children's

humour, but among the few exceptions Bariaud (1988, pp.29-33) listed three types of pre-school humour, namely humour in actions, humour in pictures (after four years of age), and verbal humour. In 1989 (pp. 124-139) Bergen described a wide variety of humour types, including expressions of joy in mastery play, humour responses to and performance of incongruous actions, and initiation of interactive 'preriddle', conventional riddle and joking behaviours.

It is my contention that the process of 'learning how to joke' is more than a simple linear development, and involves several processes happening simultaneously. I arrived at these conclusions not only after listening to pre-school children joking and asking them to tell me jokes, but after discussions with the children about jokes and joking in more general terms. In 1984 I spent some time at two Melbourne kindergartens, in Bayswater and Mount Waverley, and the children and I discussed questions such as the following:

Do you like jokes?
Can you tell me a joke?
Who did you learn that joke from?
Can you tell me another joke?
Who did you learn that joke from?
Are there different kinds of jokes?
Are there good jokes and bad jokes?
Can you tell me a good joke?
What makes a good joke?
Can you tell me a bad joke?
What makes a bad joke?
Who is the best joke-teller you know?

There are three aspects of pre-school children's joke-telling which involve different linguistic, cognitive and social skills, namely:

1. understanding the concept of joke-telling (involves metalinguistic awareness, i.e. the notion that language is itself an object which can be played with),
2. accuracy in telling jokes (involves memory and generalisation) and
3. performance ability (involves social-communicative and cognitive skills).

These skills are not sequential but are used simultaneously, and all three are necessary in joke-telling.

Understanding the concept of a joke

Within this aspect of joke-telling, a developmental sequence can be identified, as follows:

1. total incomprehension. Has no idea what a joke is or how to tell one, nor that language is a 'thing in itself' which can provide opportunities for play;
2. partial comprehension. Can state 'I don't know what a joke is';
3. can distinguish a 'real joke' from 'not real' but cannot explain;
4. will attempt to define a joke and non-joke. Explanations (not necessarily accurate) given by the pre-school children included the following notions:

a joke is funny
 a joke makes people laugh
 a joke is permanent, other-created
 a 'not real' joke is when you make it up yourself

Accuracy in telling jokes

Again, a developmental sequence can be identified within this category:

1. knows correct format for jokes e.g. riddles or 'knocks knocks' but content is incorrect, e.g. 'why did the jellyfish cross the road? Because he didn't have any water'.
2. knows correct formats and can give one isolated example with correct content, e.g. 'why did the orange stop in the middle of the road? Because it ran out of juice'. The child may attempt to generalise the formula but is unsuccessful and other attempts are inappropriate as in (1) above.
3. Can give several examples with correct format and content.

Performance ability

This skill involves two separate aspects, willingness to perform and skill in performing; the two aspects may or may not match! Successful performance of a joke requires memory, understanding, fluency and audience awareness. The importance of joke-telling as performance is shown by the fact that the most common 'first joke' children tell or attempt to tell is the time-honoured 'Why did the chicken cross the road?

To get to the other side'. This classic is in fact a non-joke, a parody on the traditional riddle form, since no ambiguity or correct 'punch line' is provided; the joke is told 'for the sake of telling'. Children appreciate jokes as an aspect of human interaction or discourse or expressive behaviour which makes people laugh, well before they can appreciate or engage in complex verbal play such as puns or double meanings, like the orange on the road which 'ran out of juice'. In this sense, it could be said that performance precedes cognitive competence in joke-telling (see the jokes told by Amelia, Madeline, Leah and Caroline in the first list above).

However, I am still reluctant to pose an overall sequential classification of pre-school joke-telling skills, since successful joke-telling by pre-school children requires the three parallel and interweaving skills indicated above, namely metalinguistic awareness, cognitive competence and performance ability. A strong motivation for pre-school children telling jokes is the social reinforcement which they receive from other people's laughter or interest, and in their earliest stages of joke-telling competence they will grasp a formula (and perhaps one correct riddle) and attempt to generalise it, often unsuccessfully (as in Amelia's postman who is 'not black and white'). Pre-school children will construct sequences of meaningless 'riddles', to their own intense amusement. The amusement may also be shared by adults.

Children's humour should be widely encouraged in all educational settings. An American study carried out by Mowrer and D'Zamko (1990) into 'a comparison of humour and directive language in Head Start classrooms' found that in their random sample of twelve Head Start classrooms, teachers appeared to suppress the use of humour and laughter in their classrooms, among both teachers and children. Such a finding is of great concern. Children's humour is of great significance in their intellectual, social, affective and language development. It is one of the most interesting and important of all the expressive arts.

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THE MUSEUM AND MOOMBA

YOU'RE IT! VISITS THE CITY SQUARE SUNDAY, MARCH 13, 1994

by Judy McKinty

The Children's Museum in the Museum of Victoria recently closed their long-running, enormously popular exhibition on children's playlore. 'You're IT!' It is hoped that the much-enlarged space available for the Children's Museum in the new plans for the MOV will enable this important celebration of children's play traditions to return.

Judy McKinty, until recently the person responsible for the Children's Museum, reports here on a late flowering of 'You're IT!' as part of the annual Moomba Festival in Melbourne.

Background

The Museum's involvement with Moomba resulted from a meeting arranged by MoV Programs Officer Bronwyn Thompson, with Moomba organisers and Community Education staff members Judith Penrose and Judy McKinty. The meeting investigated how the Museum of Victoria could participate in and contribute to the Moomba festival.

One of the Moomba programs was a Games Fair in the City Square. It was decided that the Children's Museum would run a program based on the 'You're IT!' exhibition of children's traditional games, and would provide explainer staff to run the games activities from 12 noon to 5pm, on Sunday, March 13.

Environment

The games had to fit inside a 6m x 6m marquee, therefore equipment was kept to a minimum and was chosen carefully to provide a welcoming, attractive and workable environment which would accommodate the needs of visitors - those who wanted to stay and play, and those who were just passing through. Ample seating was provided, and the floor was carpeted so people could sit down and play.

Some improvisation was made using portable display panels, and a small amount of equipment from the Children's Museum's Outreach program was resurrected for the day.

We are sorry that this issue of *ACFN* is so late. Please round up the usual excuses (including the Folklife Conference). There will still be a second issue before the end of the year.

There was also an information area, with a photo display of current Children's Museum exhibitions, and take-home pamphlets on the following:

- Children's Museum
- Planetarium
- Scienceworks
- Great Russian Dinosaurs exhibition
- Museum Education Service program for schools
- Friends of the Museum

The layout was planned to accommodate to both wet and dry weather.

Games

The following games were provided for visitors:

- Inside: marbles, jacks (3 different varieties), string games, tops, cup & ball
- Outside: diabolo, elastics, skippy, hopscotch, throwing tops

Giveaways

Throughout the afternoon, explainers gave away 'You're IT!' badges and posters to children who participated in the games.

Staff in the City Square

Six staff were involved in the project, including two volunteer explainers.

Public Participation

Children's traditional games are universal. Everyone was once a child, and this makes the 'You're IT!' program particularly appealing to people of all ages and all nationalities. In this situation children can become the 'experts', as they allow their adult friends to take a backwards glance into the long-forgotten culture of their own childhood.



These games encourage interaction and the sharing of memories between strangers. They span the generations as easily as they link the countries of the world. It is pure joy to stand aside and watch the connections being made between people who normally may have very little in common.

- The following are images and moments which remain in the memories of the staff who worked 'under the big top':

- The three Spanish women, aged in their fifties, shrieking with delight over each new discovery. First the knucklebones 'with bones from the animals', then the string games, where a woman from Germany came to their aid when they couldn't remember how to finish a string figure. They didn't need to speak the same language. They patiently showed each other how to do it, and laughed together whether it worked out or not.

- The two young men from France, who stood by watching a child work the diabolo. When asked if they'd like a turn, they shyly took the diabolos and proceeded to give a dazzling demonstration of throws, catches and spins. 'It is not hard - all the children in France play this one at school.' These two young men subsequently came to visit the Children's Museum, and brought one of their own diabolos to show us, 'because we enjoy it so much the other day'.

- The boy who came into the tent with his arm in a sling. He started by playing jacks, using one arm, and ended up using the diabolo outside, with both arms working to keep it spinning. He kept returning throughout the afternoon, to have another turn on the diabolo, and by the end of the day had mastered it, and had learned some different tricks. His father and his friend patiently waited until he'd finished.

- The seven-foot-tall stilt walker who played hopscotch, 'Moomba style' - on his stilts! He only fell over while trying to pick up his 'taw'!

- The endless lines of children waiting to have a turn at skippy. The patience and skill of the explainers who made sure that even the littlest jumper succeeded in jumping over the rope at least once.

- The grandmother and granddaughter skipping together.

- The children of other Moomba participants

who kept coming back all afternoon and became friends with the explainers.

- The father who saw the sign which read, 'Welcome to You're IT!', the exhibition where children are the experts', and said to his child, 'Well, this is for you, son. This is your exhibition - you're the expert! You'll have to teach me what to do! Come on!'

- The mother breast-feeding her baby on a chair, while her other child played happily with the jacks.

- The elderly man who confided to an explainer, 'I'll bet you've never heard of some of the games I used to play! How about Clackers? How about Cherry Bobs?' His absolute surprise when he found out the explainer knew just what he was talking about, and, what's more, could talk about the games with him!

- The Chinese man who showed an Australian boy how to spin a peg top, and how to whip it to keep it going. The boy tried several times, finally mastering it, and spent a long time playing.

- The little girl who stood watching for a while, and then quietly asked, 'How much is it to have a go?' Her look of joy and relief when told that it cost nothing but a smile!



INVISIBLE TRACKS: A Study of Australian School Playground by Heather Russell

Heather Russell, whose innovative research in 1984 led to the publication of Playground Friendships in a Multicultural Playground, has recently completed her Masters Thesis on another original research project.

Russell has studied the play traditions of children in a Melbourne eastern suburbs primary school. We publish here an extract from her study dealing with the children's dramatic play.

FIXED STRUCTURES AS AN INSPIRATION AND LOCUS OF DRAMATIC PLAY

The Log

An on-site tour with L. (Prep/M) gave some detail about 'The Spaceship', a huge, sixteen meter-long fallen tree. In parts it has rotted and been hollowed out and has a variety of ants and other insects crawling through it. L. imagined that when he pulled the appropriate lever at one end, it shot all the bombs (ants) out the other. The detail of the key, the computer room and the engine room were all stimulated by the intricate crevices, bumps and nodes on the decaying wood:

L: We play spaceships and we've got guns in here this is one gun, and this is the ginormous gun. John's spaceship is the one with the smaller log with the roots sticking out the back. It fires out here. The smaller spaceship fires out the back.

HR: Is this the engine room - tell me about it?

L: This is where the front rocket goes [right at the end of the log] Pull this out and it shoots all the bombs out. All the guns are coming from the ants, and there's a big bullet thing and it comes out there and shoots the ants out to there and over the fence. So this is where you put the petrol [node on a branch], this is where the ants come out at the end and there's a hole. Here's the lever - that's how you fire it - and there's the motor over there.

The log has been in the playground for about ten years. It appears that the spaceship theme has been handed down to L. by at least one generation of school children. Here a Gd 6 boys recalls his spaceship play of earlier years:

...this massive log - spaceship - see the way it's ripped out on the side? You could hop in when you were younger and smaller... (A. Gd 6/ M)

Beside The Log, three small tree stumps, cut off at a height of 40 cm, had been hollowed out over the years and used as cooking pots - part of a hotel:

This is our hotel. That's where you cook dinner, that's where you make cakes, that's where you mash potatoes up - that's where you cut up things. There's a bed... (C. Prep/F)

Almost all on-site tours included a comment on The Log from boys and girls of all ages. A significant landmark in the playground, it was used for many different games however the spaceship theme predominated.

Fixed pine equipment

Fixed pine equipment (adventure playground equipment in the Big and Little Park) inspired various games. One was a jail, one was a shop, and the newest and largest one in the Big Park inspired play relating to the sea:

We play fishes, pretend we're falling into the shark's mouth - all exciting adventures! Over in the shops [under red roof] we get food to eat... This [platform above slide] is the shark's mouth, and the slide is the shark's tongue. (C. Prep/F)

Using fixed equipment as a site for Chasey games is a common event in school playgrounds. Preps' Chasey games on and off equipment were often embellished with images such sharks, dungeons, shops, Silky's house (from the Magic Faraway Tree), jails etc. It's interesting to compare these images with the Gd 5 Chasey game which occurred on the same site. The Gd 5 occupied themselves with talking and chasing, with no imaginary context.

THEMATIC PLAY

Families

Whilst family members played a role in a variety of dramatic games, only two games centred solely on family themes. The classic Mothers and Fathers game was played by a group of Prep to Gd 2 girls on the sleeper-built steps leading down to the Big Park. As it was a fairly quiet location, the girls could take over the steps using the different levels to help delineate different roles. The other family-based theme was a fascinating game called Lost Babies, played daily by a group of Gd 1 girls. This game, unlike most other dramatic games, ranged over the entire playground. The game begins at the girls' 'home' (four tyres sunk into the ground):

The big dragon burnt it [our home] - he went 'hooooo' and the tyres shrunk. We ran away from home and that's how we got lost... the baddies go after us and we run and we go 'gooogaa goo'. We hide anywhere we want because we are so tiny - we can even fit into a mouse hole! (P. L. and L. Gd 1/ F)

'Lost Babies' is like a Chasey game with nobody playing 'it'. The imaginary baddies chase the two lost babies and their big sister all around the school grounds, where, at various special places, strange and scary things happen.

Curved bars: We pretend that if you fall down you're sinking into the stew. The baddies cut up all different sorts of vegetables and we jump in and start eating them...

Low tree stump: The baddies turn us into a pencil and sharpen us. (L. turns around on the tree stump like she is being sharpened)

Secret hide-out under a gum tree: Each 'baby' has her own bed, and there's a kitchen and a shower.

Doorway into the library: This is where the baddies hang us up with chains and this is the hospital (the metal door stopper).

Benches outside the art room: This is where the baddies turn us into animals. (P.L. and L. Prep/F)

Kissing games

Kiss Chasey to the casual observer may seem like a game of chase where success in capturing your victim requires kissing rather than tugging..however, for a group of Gd 1&2 children Kiss Chasey involved complex plots and counter plots of capture, imaginary dating, pretending to grow up, boyfriends, girlfriends and the inevitable being dumped. Interestingly, the boys' version and the girls' version (as related in separate interviews) of this game/drama are quite different:

The girls' version:

The game's called dating on a horse - it's like dating...we do have a few rules: if the boys are silly they go away. The second rule is they are not allowed to kiss really -they're only allowed to go close up - put your hand in front...it's like we're trying to grow up.. (N.N.D. Gd 2/F)

The girls' game involved imaginary details of a real date:

The boys come when they think its the right time and they make a date and they say Hi! and they meet us at the shop. . .[The game also included details of 'trying to grow up' including working at the office, going out, kissing, dancing, slapping the boys across the face when he made a wrong move, being kissed on the neck, etc] (N.N. and D. Gd 2/F)



The boys' version of Kiss Chasey took quite a different tack. They organised themselves into a military style 'gang', complete with Senior Sergeant, Junior Sergeant, Third Sergeant and guards, in an attempt to trap the girls into their base. The boys' style of operation involved plotting the girls' movements on maps (real pieces of paper), watching their movements from their bases, and then at the right time pressing the buttons/controls so the girls would be trapped:

We make maps to catch the girls...we put lines where we're going - like where the boys' room and the girls' room is - that's where we do the kissing...and where the secret trap is, and the hole... Right down the bottom of the Big Park there's a sort of tree bent over and there are these things [cut off branches] and they control the trap and we go into the girls' room and steal their knickers and bras. (J.,R.,N., Gd 1/M)

The girls' room was a ring of bushes less than two meters high with a grassy patch in the middle forming a room-like space. This was widely known as 'the girls' room' and used by a number of different groups of children. These Gd 1 boys had devised an extremely complex game which revolved around attempting to get the girls into this 'room'.

This game, particularly the boys' version is another example of children's imaginative use of the physical resources around them. In reality, the trap was a hole in the dirt, not even 8 cm deep, and the controls were low, sawn-off branches of a eucalypt. What the boys 'saw' happening in that ring of hakeas is a delightful example of flights of fantasy.

NEXT ISSUE

A fascinating contemporary study
of children's games in suburban
Copenhagen.

AUSTRALIAN FOODWAYS BIBLIOGRAPHY

I am compiling an annotated bibliography of publications dealing with *Australian foodways* - the customs, beliefs and practices surrounding the production, presentation and consumption of food.

The bibliography will concentrate on the folklore and history of food in Australia, covering Aboriginal, Anglo-European and multicultural influences. It will also include major references on bush foods, food specialties, nutrition and cookbooks.

I am seeking the assistance of readers of this notice for any Australian foodways references of which you are aware - particularly small-circulation books and monographs, journal articles, field studies, oral histories, ethnological and multicultural studies, etc.

Your contributions and suggestions are most welcome. Please send relevant details to:
Mark Moravec, 104 Howitt St, Ballarat VIC 3350.

NOTE ON SUBSCRIPTIONS

The *ACFN* depends almost entirely on the subscriptions and occasional generous donations of its readers.

Photocopying and postage costs necessitate a rise in subscription rates. Please note that from your next subscription date the cost will be \$10 in Australia, \$14 for overseas readers (airmail).

We hope the quality of the Newsletter warrants your continuing support. If you know of individuals, organisations or institutions possibly interested in subscribing, please let us know their address.

In Australia, tax return time is upon us. Perhaps you might consider the *ACFN* as a worthy recipient of some part of your tax cheque.

CHILDHOOD PLAY IN BAIRNSDALE IN THE 1940s

by Beatty Blennerhassett

In ACFN No 19, we published some memories of childhood play in rural Victoria by Beatty Blennerhassett. In this issue we publish further recollections from this retired Infant Teacher.

We didn't have much money when we were growing up as Mum was left a War Widow with 5 young children ranging in age from 9 years to 17 months. But we did not realise how short of money Mum must have been. She made our clothes and we always looked nice, she made our toys and dressed our dolls, and my 2 dolls still wear their dresses proudly. She cooked nice meals, and you came home from school to freshly baked little cakes, or biscuits (made with dripping as it was war time and things were scarce, and on coupons). We always went to Sunday School (early in cicada time so that you could pour water down the holes and get them up).

There was no TV, so we made our own fun. We rode our bikes round the town, my brother made a bond-wood boat that we rowed up and down the river. We read books, Mum used to read to us. I remember her reading *Swiss Family Robinson* to us, along with poetry from *A Child's Garden of Verse*. We played games at night, after we had done our homework: 'Race Round Australia' (a board game), 'Snakes and Ladders', 'Clock Chook' - a card game where you had to get varieties of fowl, and you'd hear 'goose for an andalusian, goose for an andalusian' and you'd hand over your card to be given the 'chook died' card, which then you had to pass on. I think you also had to get the swimming pool full - so many ducks on the pond.

Another game was 'Kitty', a game played with cards, a board and boxes of matches - dealing out 5 cards first to get poker, then the rest out, leaving a few to stop runs. The poker winner then started off with the lowest of his/her longest suit, and others followed until the run was stopped. The suspense when you had 7, 8, 9 of the one suit in your hand and the pile had built up to enormous heights - would you be able to play it, or would someone get rid of all their cards before you had the chance to play them? Winner packed up the matches.

We collected film star pictures from a magazine and pasted them in an old exercise book. The paste was made with starch (Silver Star) - no bought clag in our house. We had swap cards. I always was going to be a teacher so I would line up the dolls and bears to teach them what I knew.

We swam each summer. There was a pool built beside the river at Bairnsdale. If you had the penny, you would go and leave your clothes in the girls' room, but if you didn't have the penny you would leave your towel at the Landing, jump in there and swim round to the pool to meet your friends. If you didn't swim there, you went further up the river to the old male swimming square (when they had segregated bathing, the girls went to one area - fenced in by poles in the river - and the boys to the male area further up the river). The boys' area was still there when we grew up, and was known as the DOG HOLE. There was also an area further up the river called THE CUT. You didn't need money to go there.

I remember when you were in a 'mood', Mum would tell you to 'get on your bike and blow the cobwebs away'.



DINNER LADIES HELP CHILDREN REMEMBER PLAYTIME

by Michael Smith

This article, from the British Daily Telegraph (8 Sept. 1993), was sent to us by MARK MORAVEC.

What do our readers think of such adult-initiated folklore activities? Could we adapt this idea to be used in Australian schools?

A PRIMARY school has enlisted its dinner ladies to revive the interest of video-age children in traditional playground games.

The lunchtime duties of kitchen staff at Grange Primary School, Meir, Stoke-on-Trent, now include teaching games such as Farmer's in his Den, Oranges and Lemons and Simon Says.

Children are also being taught modern variants of old favourites. Giants, Wizards and Elves - a cross between Tag and Scissors, Papers and Stone - is proving the most popular.

The dinner ladies, employees of Stoke-on-Trent council, are passing on the basics of the games as part of their lunchtime supervisory role.

As children returned after the holidays, Mr David Barber, deputy head, said 'they seem to have forgotten how to play. They are just too used to getting their entertainment on the television screen, they don't play out on the streets at night any more and the old games we remember from our own childhood are no longer being passed on.'

'It is partly because parents aren't willing to let them play out because of the dangers, and partly because most children have a room of their own with a television and a computer game.'

A £1,200 grant from the Blyth Bridge Rotary Club will help meet the cost of the dinner ladies' time and the play equipment.

'The object is to engender team spirit and co-operation among the children,' said Mr Barber. 'They are not forced to take part. But the games we are teaching them are traditional games and more modern ones adapted to include elements of computer games.'

Mrs Carole Boyles, 40 vice-chairman of the school governors, whose daughter, Janine, 10, is at the school, is one of the dinner ladies giving play lessons.

'For quite some time we have noticed that the children just don't know what to do with themselves,' she said. 'They spend three quarters of an hour at lunchtime just getting bored.'

'The idea of this is just to get them learning how to play. There is an element of competition but we sometimes make the teams that lose do something extremely silly so the losers don't feel left out.'



LETTERS

From Erik Kaas Nielsen, Denmark.

Re an enquiry on a counting out rhyme in *ACFN*, No.25. As to the allegedly Danish counting-out rhyme, mentioned by Katarina Steiner of Cottesloe WA and used by her daughter in 1958, I have the following remarks:

The word *backa* seems more to be Swedish, as it means - in that language: 1) to go back or 2) to back a car. In Danish the word should be spelled *bakke* and it is used only in meaning 2) and could not be used in meaning 1). It also could mean a small hill in Danish, but then it loses the sense of 'unwillingness to return home.'

Perhaps the rhyme could be Swedish if the word *ikke* is spelled *icke*, which in both languages means *not*. The word *bo* in Swedish also means *home*, which it also could mean in unusual and old fashioned Danish. (*Bo* only as noun, not as adverb.)

The rhyme is not a usual or common one in the Scandanavian languages as far I can judge from collections of rhymes in Danish, Swedish and Norwegian.

A 'correct' Swedish rhyme would go:

icke backa, icke backa,
icke backa bo,
icke backa, icka backa,
du gar ut! (Out goes you.)

A 'correct' Danish rhyme:

ikke bakke, ikke bakke,
ikke bakke bo,
ikke bakke, ikke bakke,
du gar ud!

None of the rhymes are correct language, but at least they have a fine rhythm.

PS. By the way: children in Broendby (at one school at least) have started a 'new' chasing game called AIDS: 'AIDS, you've got it!' they cry out, when the chaser touches the chased one. This new name has also been reported from Norway and England.

A long and welcome letter from a regular correspondent, Bill Scott, from Warwick, Queensland.

Dear Gwenda,

Thank you for the latest *ACFN*, (No. 25) and enclosed please find cheque for sub. as requested. Was delighted with the current issue, and especially the notes about the PMG refusal of standard book postal rates for *Cinderella Dressed In Yella* in Victoria. But you failed to mention that in Queensland the book was actually banned (like *Playboy*!) for some time before it became available from booksellers here. Booksellers at Tweed Heads, just across the border from the Gold Coast had an enormous boom in sales for a while until commonsense at last prevailed, and after a newspaper item pointed it out as '... a Gilbertian situation ...' when adults were prevented reading a book of items which had actually been collected from children! In case they became inflamed with desire, one presumes. But it was a sad day for the bookselling community over the border when the ukase was rescinded.

Loved the description of the 'Blackie' game on page 5 - bet that one came from a long way back. Scots people called the Devil 'auld Blackie' or 'auld Horrie', and the chances are that the origins of 'Blackie' go back to kids flirting with an aspect of the 'dark side of the Force', being saved by the Mother aspect of the Maiden/mother/crone trilogy - the White Goddess Herself.

As for Blackie, how many ogres 'ground their bones to make my bread' or even, as in the *Odyssey*, ate their victims raw and didn't even bother with the soup kettle!! What echoes from a simple childrens' game from York! And by the way, York is north of England, isn't it? Close to the Border enough for such a game to travel; and be brought in the mental luggage to Western Australia where nostalgia apparently named the new village after the homeland familiar city.

Was also delighted to find the bit on page 7 about 'boy's germs' and 'girl's' germs'. It does rather confirm my own memories of the very strict division between the sexes in the Caboolture schoolground back in the 30s. Though few of us would have known what a germ was, and an injection was nothing we had ever encountered.

These terms were quite unknown to us, nevertheless the suspicion and rejection of the opposite sex did operate. Must admit also that some of this feeling remained with me until after I had joined the Navy and discovered that girls were a new adventure...

On page 9, the song 'You'll never get to heaven' was one we often sang, though not in two parts, rather as a solo:

You can't get to heaven on roller skates
You'll roll right past them pearly gates,
Oh you can't get to heaven on roller skates
You'll roll right past them pearly gates
And I ain't a-gonna grieve my lord no more.

Chorus

I ain't a-gonna grieve my lord no more
Ain't a-gonna grieve my lord no more
I ain't a-gonna grieve
My lord no more.

I'm quite sure the original was a Negro spiritual which lent itself to parody. There were a number such extant, another being 'Hand me down my walking cane'. 'Found a peanut' of course was universal, I first heard it from my younger sister when she was quite small. All the above in Brisbane.

The 'nicky nacky noo' song on Page 10 was also known to us, though we always sang: 'With my hand on my heart, what have I here?' at the beginning of each verse. There were extra verses not so genteel, (I leave that to your imagination), and I suspect the informant bowdlerised the song by omitting them. Re the rhyme about feline killing on page 17, another familiar from my own childhood was the sectarian:

'Oh Father, oh Father, I've killed a cat'
'Ah well, my child you must suffer for that'
'Oh Father, it was a Protestant cat.'
'My child, you will be rewarded for that'.

We must be grateful that such bitterness that gave rise to such catches seems to have largely died away in our country. Why, it was only in the 30's that Protestant Labour Party was formed in Queensland and actually returned a member to the State Parliament. The P.L.P. was the political wing of the United Protestant Association, which died a natural death during the second World War from the need for united effort and also the fading

away of the power of prelates of various faiths to push their own sectarian aims for power.

From Keith McKenry, Canberra

Dear June and Gwenda

Herewith my subscription for another year. Over the years I regret I haven't contributed a lot to the *Newsletter*, but I do enjoy it immensely, and get a lot out of it. Keep up the great work!

The *Note* in your last Issue (December 1993) re the charging of a primary school teacher - and his suspension *without pay* - for alleged 'indecent dealing' with a group of female students, cannot pass without comment. As you report it, the basis for this charge is that the teacher took a photograph of the students playing the well-known playground game 'Firecracker'. Presumably the photograph captures the 'rude bit' where the girls lift their skirts to show their pants after singing:

Firecracker, firecracker, boom, boom, boom!
Bow to the King, bow to the Queen,
Show your knickers to the football team!

If this is all there is to it, then the charging of the teacher is ludicrous. More than that, however, it is sick, ignorant, contemptible, and dangerous. As folklorists, no less than as ordinary citizens, we need to speak out against such injustice. If we do not, then we invite repression of all studies and publications offensive to the Dr Bowdlers and Mrs Grundys of this world, and all their mindless kin, and arbitrary censorship *generally*.

None of us condone indecent dealing with children, but neither can we condone persecution of researchers (or of non-researchers) interested in the everyday practices of the schoolyard. If ever I was charged with indecent dealing, simply for practising as a folklore collector, I would hope the small community of Australian folklorists to which I belong would rally around and support *me*. I cannot therefore let pass the charging of the schoolteacher. It is a matter of fundamental importance to all of us. If there are special circumstances which warrant the taking of action against him, let us be informed of them: if not, we should raise our voices together in his defence.

AESOP PRIZE

1994 CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The AESOP PRIZE is conferred annually by the Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society on a work that incorporates folklore into a book published in English for children or young adults. English language books published in 1993 or 1994 and nominated by September 15, 1994 are eligible for the 1994 PRIZE. The AESOP PRIZE will be announced at the Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society in October of 1994.

CRITERIA FOR NOMINATION

1. *The use of folklore should be central to the book's contents and, if appropriate, to its illustrations;*
2. *The folklore, as presented in the book, should accurately present or reflect the cultural worldview of the people whose folklore is the focus of the book;*
3. *The reader's understanding of the folklore should be enhanced by its appearance in the book as should the book be enriched by the presence of the folklore;*
4. *The book should reflect the high artistic standards of the best of children's literature and have strong appeal to the child reader;*
5. *Folklore sources should be fully acknowledged and annotations referenced within the bound contents of the publication.*

Please send three copies of nominated titles - one to each committee member:

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