

Play and Folklore



**The Year One Happiness Project:
bringing happiness to others through play**

Playful planners and planning for play – designing children's environments

Child Play Therapy comes to Deakin University, Australia

The hand trick

From the Collection: a Liberian doll

**Review: Valerie Yule, *Inside Children's Minds*
– *Children's stories (told not written) about their drawings***

***International Journal of Play* – Special Issue**

**Brian Sutton-Smith – respected colleague
of four international children's folklorists**

Obituary: Brian Sutton-Smith



From the Editors

Play and Folklore no. 63, April 2015

The editors note with sadness the recent death of Brian Sutton-Smith – pioneering play scholar, author, original thinker, engaging speaker, inspirational mentor and knowledgeable guide to students of play over many decades. One of our editors, June Factor, remembers Brian Sutton-Smith with both affection and admiration, and in this issue of *Play and Folklore* we are publishing her tribute to this most influential and erudite play scholar. We also include the obituary shared with his many play colleagues by Brian Sutton-Smith’s family.

This issue presents several different aspects of play – play as happiness, play as therapy, play as a part of student design projects and play from a child’s perspective. It is particularly pleasing to include an article by a child, nine year-old Aidan Krivitsky, who describes and demonstrates his hand trick.

We also have a new segment, ‘From the Collection’, which introduces one of the items from among the treasures in the Australian Children’s Folklore Collection. We intend to make this a regular feature in *Play and Folklore*, to reveal in more detail this unique archive of childlore and play.

Gwenda Beed Davey, June Factor and Judy McKinty

Play and Folklore

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The Year One Happiness Project: bringing happiness to others through play

Simone Kentley

At Princes Hill Primary School, authentic learning experiences are designed around key concepts, big ideas and understandings that are being explored at the whole school level and at the neighbourhood¹ level. In 2014, the school embarked on an Inquiry into Change.

The Year One² neighbourhood began the year by exploring what the children already knew about change. We started by asking the children what change meant to them. One child said, 'You can change your mistakes'. Another said, 'When you feel sad your feelings can change to being happy'. This prompted us to explore how we can change our responses to situations and make positive choices. We investigated how we can make changes that have a positive impact, that improve our lives and the lives of others, and how people's level of happiness can be changed through our actions. Some questions we asked ourselves were:

- How can we improve our happiness and the happiness of others?
- What action can we take or are we already taking to bring happiness to ourselves and others?

When we asked the children what makes them happy, they mostly said presents, toys, games and playing with their friends. In response to the children's understandings and thinking, the teachers developed learning provocations that allowed the children to use some of the many forms of expression to develop the following key understandings:

- We can change the way we feel through our choices.
- Happiness can be different things to different people.
- We can impact how other people feel.

Some children joined a project group learning how to express what they knew about happiness through drama, another group explored their ideas through music, and another group helped to design and construct a 'Happy Shop' where the children made 'happy' things to sell to each other, also learning about value, counting money and running a shop. We discussed the idea that money can't always buy happiness.

We decided to look into what happiness means a little further. We had many parent speakers talk to us about what makes them happy, and if this has changed since they were children. The parents shared that what makes them happy is mostly being with family and helping other people.



Children lining up to play in the games arcade.

This led to more questions:

- Why do we do things to help others?
- How does volunteering help to create positive change in our community?
- What kinds of things can we volunteer for?

We learned that many things make both children and adults happy, and that we can't be happy all the time. We explored how being in nature and doing things to help others or care for the environment can make us happy too. We extended these ideas by visiting community establishments where volunteers help to create positive change in the community. Along the way, we reflected as teacher researchers on the children's developing understandings. We realised that volunteering is quite an adult concept and may be too far beyond their realm of experience for them to deeply connect with. We needed to find a way for them to emotionally connect with the idea of why and how children can create positive change in the community.

We stumbled across the *Kid President* YouTube videos³. This young American boy uses humour to tell children that they must be the change they want to see in the world. Amongst the laughter, the idea started sinking in – change starts with YOU.

Soon after, we found another YouTube video called *Caine's Arcade*⁴ about a boy in the United States who created his own games arcade out of cardboard boxes⁵. The children's first viewing of the video had them begging to watch it again and again. They were overwhelmingly inspired by his creativity and the idea of making something so brilliant out of cardboard. They went home and watched it with their parents. They got it! They got that play makes them happy; they got that play can make everybody happy. As teachers we also had a 'light bulb' moment. The children weren't being superficial at the beginning of our inquiry when they said that presents and toys make them happy – of course they do. Toys and games lead to play and play is essential to all humans for happiness! This could be the way that change can start with US.

We had begun a whole-school mini-inquiry into sustainability with the tagline: *Places: who cares, what matters?* and the idea of creating our own Year One arcade fitted in perfectly. Arcades are places that bring children and adults much happiness, as they tap into the universal human need for play, laughter and happiness. We asked them, 'What if we created our own Year One arcade to bring happiness to our whole school community at our school Bazaar?' The excitement was palpable! So began their journey into the collaboration, design, construction and decoration of their very own games arcade.

The idea of making games solely out of recycled cardboard led to a lot of discussion into sustainability and our interdependence with the earth and each other. The children themselves came up with the idea of using their unused toys for arcade prizes, so we discussed waste and they audited and collected their old toys. The children worked tirelessly with the support of their teachers and families to create labeled diagrams, models, instructions, signage and finally to construct and paint their incredible games. Learning across the curriculum was completely embedded, with purposeful motivation sustaining the children's engagement. The much-anticipated day of our annual Bazaar arrived but, unfortunately, so did the rain. Showing great resilience, the children agreed to postpone our arcade.

The following week we asked the children, 'Should we just play each others' games within the Year One neighbourhood, or should we still find a way to share our games with the other children and teachers from Prep to Year Six?' They were outraged at the thought of keeping the games only for themselves. One child said, 'It would be like we were lying to everyone. We can't break our promise!' Another child said, 'If we don't share our games, the whole school will be very sad, and I thought we were trying to make people happy!' The passionate response from all 75 children made it clear that we have been learning about how to make people happy so this is our chance, and we can't keep happiness from others!

We set up our arcade indoors, spread throughout several spaces, and invited each neighbourhood and the Year One families to come and PLAY. There was no chaos, just happiness and laughter and a great BUZZ. The Year Ones ran their games like professionals, explaining the rules and giving positive encouragement to all. They received many words of praise, but most of all they were rewarded with the knowledge that they had brought happiness to the whole school. They created change in the way people felt – even for only an hour. Change did start with them!

Being part of the world-wide movement for creativity and innovation and creating something that will bring happiness to ourselves and others is all part of being a good global citizen.

The children discovered that, at their age, they cannot really volunteer in the community but there are many other ways to be a good citizen.

We have learned a lot about happiness and how we can change our feelings and the feelings of others. Fun and games are very important to sustaining our sense of happiness and personal wellbeing.

Our Major Inquiry Understandings

- Change starts with me!
- Play can connect us with each other and can bring us happiness.
- Sharing play experiences can change how people feel and help make the world a better place.
- Being a good global and local citizen includes caring for important places like the environment – forests, gardens – and caring for the happiness of ourselves and others (self-sustainability).

Simone Kentley is a Year One teacher at Princes Hill Primary School, an inner-suburban Melbourne school. All photographs courtesy of Simone Kentley.

ENDNOTES

¹ At Princes Hill Primary School, a neighbourhood is a specially-designed learning environment, consisting of a number of teaching spaces and special-purpose rooms, including an art studio, a performing arts space, a science lab and other spaces, shared by two or three classes and their teachers.

² Children in Year One are usually aged 6-7 years.

³ See *Kid President - How to Change the World (a work in progress)*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z7gDsSKUmU>

⁴ See *Caine's Arcade*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=falFNkdq96U>

⁵ The documentary maker had stumbled across Caine's arcade, organized a flash mob of hundreds of people to come and play in Caine's arcade, and was so inspired he formed The Imagination Foundation and established an annual global day of play:

- <http://imagination.is/>
- <http://nirvan.com/cainesarcade>



Some of the colourful arcade games waiting for players.



Enjoying a game of Table Soccer.



A player trying her luck on the Spinning Wheel.



Yes!! Success on the Fire and Magic table.



Year One girls show their designs and rules for the Spinning Wheel.



Playful planners and planning for play – designing children’s environments

Julie Rudner

Introduction

Children and young people have an amazing capacity to play in whatever spaces they can find. Whether it’s street hockey in Canada, cricket in an empty lot in Sri Lanka or hopscotch on the pathway in Australia, spaces can be territorialised and adapted for games, social activity and adventure. Adaptability and flexibility with regard to creating playspaces demonstrate children’s/young people’s agency as well as the environmental and regulatory structures they inherit. These structures are adult-dominated, and grounded in notions of productivity and efficiency. Street-level vitality, achieved through a focus on commercial and hospitality-based activities, has emerged, yet these activities, too, are adult-focused. What do we need to do to change the way in which we plan and design our environments? One part of the solution is to train planners and designers in how to consult with children to elicit their ideas about the places where they live and, importantly, link children’s contributions to established planning and design processes. This short paper provides an example to illustrate how this might be accomplished.

Supporting young planners to learn about children and play

Over the past four years, working with children has become part of the regular planning and urban design course curriculum in La Trobe University’s Community Planning and Development Program.

Staff wanted to address the fact that nearly 25% (ABS Census Data for Victoria, 2011) of the population was excluded from participating in decision-making about their lives. Furthermore, many matters that concern children – such as timing of traffic lights and access to safe median strips, proximity and ability to visit parks frequently and being able to ‘hang out’ with friends – are also relevant to others, including older people, people with differing abilities and new migrants to Australia. The subject Designing Children’s Environments (DCE) was developed to provide students with a different way of engaging in community planning and to meet an emerging professional need.

The students who participate in DCE are in the fourth year of their undergraduate course or first year of their postgraduate course, so they are well-versed in planning and design matters as well as community engagement. However, they are often not very knowledgeable about play and many do not have children in their lives with whom they can play or observe. A big challenge is to create experiences in which the students learn about play, learn how to observe play and, importantly, re-learn to play.

Fortunately, there is a variety of local expertise that supports the planning and design aspect of this subject. Museum Victoria has assisted by sharing knowledge and extensive collections of playthings with students, expanding their knowledge of play and toys over time and across cultures (Figure 1). Of particular importance for students is the value of learning how play is an integral part of children's/ young people's development, and the different ways in which play is enacted. Staff at the Ian Potter Children's Garden in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne, provide a variety of workshops, and through their Learning Landscapes program have introduced students to sensory gardens, and re-acquainted them with the natural environment, construction using loose materials and the creative free flow of ideas and actions (Figure 2). In addition, Mary Jeavons, a professional landscape architect who specialises in children's play space design, conducts a workshop with students. Through this workshop, she highlights the role of materials, and the form, function and structure of play space design, and engages students in critically assessing the features of standardised play equipment 'dropped' into a park compared to play features that are integrated into a broader landscape design.



Fig. 1: A Liberian Bush-child's doll from the Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria.
Photographer: Deborah Tout-Smith, Museum Victoria



Fig. 2: La Trobe students playing at the Ian Potter Children's Garden.
Image: Julie Rudner, 2014

Planning and designing

Once students have gained a better understanding of the theory and practice of planning and design with children, they go into classrooms and work together with children to identify how they view, use and experience their school and neighbourhood spaces. The design process that students conduct with the children is negotiated by La Trobe staff with teachers at participating schools, to ensure methods and materials can be integrated within the school curriculum. It primarily consists of preliminary presentations by staff and other professionals about planning and design, with examples of environments from other places around the world (Figure 3), followed by activities facilitated by the university students. These activities include an on-site analysis (physical and social) using drawings, work sheets and photography, brainstorming, discussion and drawing of ideas and development of design solutions. Council staff of the local government area in which the school is located also attend the school and discuss planning and council operations with the children.



Fig. 3: Slides from a presentation showing environments around the world.
Image: Julie Rudner, 2006-2013

La Trobe University students are required to develop an overall child/youth-centred master-plan for the sites they analyse with the children. The students are supported in this task through the provision of scholarly and professional subject materials about children's/young people's environments, environmental experiences, development, health and play, conducting research with children, policy and risk management. The following provides a brief summary of the outcomes of the master-planning.

In Figure 4, the students in one research group zoned the outdoor spaces of Eaglehawk Secondary College to facilitate their ideas. These students found that while the 'house' structure of the different buildings helped to create a sense of belonging, the mixing of students between houses did not seem to occur as much as it could. They wanted to address the use of inner spaces around the school in a way that promoted social interaction.



Fig. 4: Zoning within the masterplan and explanation.
Image: Hamilton, Tremain and Bowman, 2013

Vision: provide Eaglehawk Secondary College students with a fun, engaging and active outdoor experience.

Aim: to revitalize this area of the school grounds as it is currently 'dead' space.

A major aim of the inner school zone is to address the hollow feel around the central areas and bring the students back to them. A space needs to make students want to be in it and at present there is no drawcard to the space. A giant chess set could be easily implemented on the fake grass and would bring students back to the area. With the addition of native colour-coded shrubs, garden beds and garden art, trees, shade cloths and adequate seating this space could potentially function to its full potential. It is recommended that children and young people get one hour of physical activity a day. Zone 3 will become the active area of the school.

Table 1: Budgeting exercise for design project.

| ITEM | ITEM DESCRIPTION | QTY | UNIT | OUR RATE \$ excl. GST | OUR AMOUNT excl. GST |
|-------------|--|-----|------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1.0 | PRELIMINARY SITE WORKS | | | | |
| 1.1 | Complete setting out of works prior to commencing construction works. - Provide secure fencing as required. - Supply and deliver all labour, plant and materials to undertake the site establishment, dis-establishment and clean up. - Locate and secure all services. | 1 | Item | \$ 1,000.00 | \$ 1,000.00 |
| 2.0 | DEMOLITION WORKS | | | | |
| 2.1 | Removal of path, incl. tip fees | 1 | Item | \$ 3,000.00 | \$ 3,000.00 |
| 3.0 | HARD LANDSCAPE WORKS | | | | |
| 3.1 | Levelled seating on hill/retaining wall | 1 | Item | \$ 4,400.00 | \$ 4,400.00 |
| 3.2 | Pergola/outdoor classroom | 1 | Item | \$ 20,200.00 | \$ 20,200.00 |
| 3.3 | Seating around tree | 1 | Item | \$ 400.00 | \$ 400.00 |
| 3.4 | Deck with stairs | 1 | Item | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 5,000.00 |
| 3.5 | Deck pathway | 1 | Item | \$ 8,000.00 | \$ 8,000.00 |
| 3.6 | Small hut | 1 | Item | \$ 2,500.00 | \$ 2,500.00 |
| 3.7 | Garden beds | 10 | Item | \$ 281.00 | \$ 2,810.00 |
| 3.8 | Shallow creek inc. pump | 1 | Item | \$ 30,000.00 | \$ 30,000.00 |
| 3.9 | Water feature | 1 | Item | \$ 10,000.00 | \$ 10,000.00 |
| 3.10 | Water tanks | 2 | Item | \$ 1,500.00 | \$ 1,500.00 |
| 3.11 | Pond with rock seating | 1 | Item | \$ 15,000.00 | \$ 15,000.00 |
| 4.0 | SOFT LANDSCAPING | | | | |
| 4.1 | Garden edging | 50 | m | \$ 970.00 | \$ 485.00 |
| 4.2 | Plants and shrubs | 150 | Item | \$ 9.00-13.00 | \$ 1,365.00 |
| 5.0 | FURNITURE AND OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE | | | | |
| 5.1 | Timber bridge 1.75 x 0.65m | 3 | Item | \$ 1,200.00 | \$ 1,200.00 |
| 5.2 | Park benches | 3 | Item | \$ 460.00 | \$ 1,380.00 |
| 5.3 | Commercial outdoor BBQ | 1 | Item | \$ 3,000.00 | \$ 3,000.00 |
| | TOTAL CONTRACT AMOUNT (incl. GST) | | | | \$ 111,240.00 |
| 6.0 | CONTINGENCY | | | | |
| 6.1 | Contingency amount to be spent only where instructed by the Superintendent's representative. | 1 | Item | \$ 3,000.00 | \$ 3,000.00 |
| | GRAND TOTAL (incl. GST) | | | | \$114,240.00 |

In addition to the planning and design components, students research the costs of materials, labour and maintenance for their ideas. This provides them with a more realistic understanding of budgets, design decision-making, institutional decision-making, and issues of risk and liability.

Students are often surprised at the actual costs associated with developing, implementing and maintaining even basic play spaces. Table 1 shows an example costing that students completed (Hamilton, Tremain and Bowman, 2013).

When the projects are completed, students present their work and amend their designs following feedback from staff, professionals and other students. As part of their final submission, they provide the amended design and associated report, as well as an explanation of how they amended their designs in response to the feedback.

Value of this approach

The most important outcome has been the students' recognition of the consolidation of their knowledge and confidence in their own capabilities. Although some students feel awkward or uncomfortable working with children, for the most part DCE changes students' perceptions. Overall, students identify a sense of accomplishment, greater self-awareness of themselves as professionals, and a much deeper appreciation of children's capabilities and the importance of play. In addition, they gain a genuine respect for consultation in planning and design processes. For example, one student commented:

I found it both personally satisfying to actively use my knowledge of planning, but more importantly pass it on to students. Like many teenagers they had little understanding of planning. However as they started to talk about what they liked/disliked about their school, what functioned well/what didn't, what needs changing and why, they were clearly enjoying the experience. I was excited to tell them that 'Guys, this is planning! The things we are talking about and thinking about is planning!' It was a good experience to be a student planner dealing with high school students in this scenario.

Leon Tremain, domestic undergraduate, 2013

Other students have been inspired to pursue their interests further by engaging in community projects and identifying future professional pathways.

One student noted:

You will also be pleased to know that I recently used my [DCE] knowledge and research to form part of a protest to my local council, who want to develop an old school site in our area with no provision for open space...(outcome has been they are potentially leaving a little under 10% of the site for open space!).

Rachel Paterson, domestic postgraduate, 2014

While another indicated:

This semester I wasn't enjoying my direct planning subjects as much and contemplating a change in my course but when I did [DCE] I really enjoyed it and didn't quite realise that this was an aspect of planning. Because of this, I now know which direction I want to work in when I gain my degree. Hopefully I can get a job in a field similar to the work carried out in this subject.

Female, domestic undergraduate, 2013

It takes a community...

It takes a community to create long-term cultural change in the way we design environments, and the partnerships we create now provide scaffolding into the future when children's influence on planning and design practice becomes common-place. The opportunity for students to engage with children as part of their curriculum is only possible through the support provided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Education, principals, teachers, parents and children at the individual schools with whom we work. The quality of training for students is enhanced by the participation of professionals at the Museum, the Gardens, and in landscape architecture who dedicate time to the program because they believe in a different future for children, for our environments and for how we do planning and design. Respect for and legitimacy of these types of planning and design projects is reinforced by the contribution of council staff, who try to extend their systems of community engagement to ensure children participate in decision-making activities that affect their daily lives.

Dr Julie Rudner is a Senior Lecturer in Community Planning and Development, Department of Social Inquiry, School of Social Sciences, College of Arts, Social Sciences & Commerce at La Trobe University, Bendigo.

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Toys used in play therapy.

Child Play Therapy comes to Deakin University, Australia

Judi Parson

In March 2015 the first cohort of the Master of Child Play Therapy students commenced at Deakin University. This is the first time an Australian university has offered such a degree. The course is aimed at early childhood educators and health professionals, such as social workers, occupational therapists, paediatric or mental health nurses, art therapists, music therapists, psychologists and practitioners from other related disciplines who work with children. This course is of interest to professionals working with children and families who have experienced developmental and/or emotional trauma, or events that result in or comprise a mental health concern.

Play therapy is a recognised profession in many countries – in Europe, Canada, the United States of America, South Africa, Sweden and the United Kingdom – and it is beginning to emerge as a professional discipline in Australia.

The program examines various theoretical approaches of Child Play Therapy theory and practice, including Humanistic, Systemic and Emerging models. Within each model the Child Play therapist is shown how to engage the therapeutic power of play and to tailor the sessions to specific needs of the child within wider family and community contexts.

The therapeutic powers of play are the core elements to facilitate change within the Child Play Therapy relationship. In play, children discover and explore their thoughts, feelings and desires, and this becomes the means by which a trusting connection is made between a child and the play therapist.

Play is recognised as the child's language of experience and communication and therefore can be used to facilitate communication, enhance relationships, promote resilience and nurture growth and development (Schaefer & Drewes, 2014). This is why the theory of play, play development and play assessment and measurement are important foundational knowledge that needs to be understood so that it can be applied to the therapeutic environment.

The therapist's role is to create a safe, secure and predictable environment to facilitate the child's ability to play. Understanding the 'play' in play therapy is based on the therapist's ability to interact, observe and interpret the child's play within each session. Clinical play therapy practice is illustrated in the following anonymised vignette¹:

Sarah, a six year old girl, was referred to play therapy after her mother unexpectedly passed away. Sarah's father was more preoccupied with caring for the two younger siblings, Thomas, three years, and Harriett, who was only three months old. Sarah showed a change in her behaviour at school, was becoming more and more withdrawn, and refused to engage in classroom activity.

After a review by the Play Therapist it was recommended that Sarah attend twelve Individual Non-Directive Play Therapy sessions. Within this therapeutic relationship she was able to act out her feelings. Sarah used the play space to engage in many activities, including art and craft, expressive mask making, sensory play, sand play, nurturing play and socio-dramatic pretend play. She used the toys in the playroom to play Hide-and-seek, to express that she could not find her mother and did not understand why. Sarah was able to show her feelings of emptiness, sadness and guilt. The therapist reflected Sarah's feelings explicitly to help Sarah understand and integrate her sorrow. In one powerful scene, Sarah asked the therapist to pretend to be her mother, to nurture her, and Sarah was able to say that she did not mean to say that she wanted her mother to go away. She communicated a deep sense of sadness, not only missing her mother but also in believing it was her fault her mother had died.

In another play therapy session, Sarah drew only the left half of herself and the right half was left blank. The therapist hypothesised about Sarah's sense of self and worldview and reflected to Sarah that 'it seems like half of you is missing'. Sarah felt understood and nodded her head. Sarah was then able to make herself whole by carefully completing the other half of her self-portrait.

In session nine, Sarah made a colourful sand memory jar and poured into it what she described as the colours of her mother. She recalled memories of herself and her mother spending time together, and associated specific memories with the colours of the sand. The colourful sand was created by Sarah, and as she mixed sand and powder paint to layer the sand in a clean, clear jar with a secure lid, she recalled memorable moments.

The final session included a review of all Sarah's artistic creations, including the colourful sand jar, the self-portrait drawing and other images to facilitate the experience of a healthy ending. Within a safe and therapeutic relationship, Sarah felt secure to explore and express her feelings. By being in a state of play, anything is possible and hurts can be healed.

In 2015 the teaching team at Deakin consists of three experienced practitioners and academics. They are:

- Prof Karen Stagnitti, who is an occupational therapist with over 30 years of experience working in community-based early childhood intervention teams. Her speciality area is play assessment and therapy, and her work has informed new play interventions with children with developmental issues.
- Dr Jane Edwards, who is a qualified music therapist with international expertise in research and training. Jane specialises in working with children and families. She is the Course Director for the Master of Child Play Therapy.
- Dr Judi Parson, who is a paediatric qualified registered nurse and play therapist with over 20 years of experience working with children and families in acute hospital, community and private practice-based settings. Her interests include medical play therapy, cross-cultural play therapy, the rights of the child, and working with children who have experienced trauma.

REFERENCE

C.E. Schaefer and A.A. Drewes, *The Therapeutic Powers of Play: 20 Core Agents of Change* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2014).

Photographer: Donna Squire, Deakin University

ENDNOTE

1 The vignette is based on a clinical case and some of the information has been changed to protect the child client's identity.



Dolls and sand play are used in play therapy.

The hand trick

Aidan Krivitsky

First you get someone to hold their hands like this:
Ask them a question. It can be about anything,
like 'Do you like ice-cream?' or 'What's your
favourite colour?'



When they answer the question,
tell them to fold their pinky fingers like this:
Ask them another question.



When they answer, get them
to fold their next fingers like this:
Then ask them, 'Do you rob banks?'



When they answer 'No', they'll fold
their middle fingers in.
Then you say, 'Then why are you holding a gun?'



*Aidan Krivitsky is nine years old and lives in Melbourne.
He is in Grade Four and plays this game at school with his friends.
Photographer: Judy McKinty*



From the Collection: a Liberian doll

June Factor

My meeting with the most significant 20th century children's folklorist in the United States, Dr Dorothy Howard, was serendipitous, as for many good developments in my life. In the mid-1970s, while working on the second, enlarged edition of *Cinderella Dressed in Yella*¹, (the first uncensored publication of Australian children's playground rhymes), I asked one of my co-editors, the oral historian Wendy Lowenstein, if she knew anything about Dorothy Howard, the woman to whom the editor of the first edition, Professor Ian Turner, had included in that publication an expression of appreciation for her knowledge and help. Wendy told me she was an intelligent middle-aged American scholar who had visited Australia in the mid-1950s and done some collecting of children's playlore here.

Wendy tended to regard foreign 'experts' with some scepticism, Americans in particular, so her positive account of Dorothy Howard encouraged me to consider contacting this well-regarded foreigner. I wanted to know more about her work, especially the whys and wherefores of her time in Australia. Wendy went for a dig in her papers and found an address in Roswell, New Mexico. It occurred to me that this woman would now be quite elderly, and perhaps no longer in the land of the living. None the less I wrote a polite letter, and quickly received a warm – indeed enthusiastic – response, written in a clear, strong hand with which I was to become most familiar.

Our letters initiated a long, productive and close relationship, including a number of visits to her neat-as-a-pin 'fake adobe' house in Roswell. It was from there that I would often travel home with an extra suitcase, laden with playlore material she had collected in Australia and Mexico as well as in the US. Dorothy Howard's gifts of her research and scholarship became an important part of the foundation documents and material objects of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection. That evocative creature, the Liberian Doll, comes from this rich inheritance.

The bare details of the doll are set out on the Australian Children's Folklore Collection website²:

Liberian Doll

Alternative Name(s): Bush Child's Doll

Wooden doll made by a Liberian man for his daughter some time between 1950 and 1959. The little girl carried the doll in a rag sling on her back (as her mother had carried her as a baby). A USA Peace Corps participant bought the doll in the 1950s, paid the child and paid the father to make her another doll. The doll was then passed onto children's folklore researcher Dorothy Howard. It forms part of the Dorothy Howard Collection, which is incorporated within Museum Victoria's Australian Children's Folklore Collection.



Liberian Bush-child's doll, Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria
 Photographer: Deborah Tout-Smith, Museum Victoria

A simple description, pointing in a number of directions. There is the context: a young American woman (so Dorothy told me), doing 'good work' in a 'backward' country in Africa, shows tact and reciprocity to a Liberian and his small daughter – a poor man, but in this exchange an equal, for the piece of wood with the plaited string is acknowledged on both sides as of value. A moral tale, this, for folklorists and others who forage in foreign lands. (I wonder if the young US Peace Corps woman knew that Liberia was settled by freed slaves from America in the 18th century?) And then there is the loving father, who has carefully smoothed the planes of a cylindrical piece of wood, whittled one area, perhaps to represent a face, and attached five long plaits made of some kind of fibre to the top of the doll's head. Who provided the rag sling? The mother? And what does this plaything tell us about the seeming universality of doll-babies, including in societies where few people can afford the toy-shop dolls? And if it was a beloved doll, was the child a willing participant in the arrangement between her father and the stranger? Would she, could she love the new doll as much as the old?

This modest plaything is silent, but its resonance endures.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Ian Turner, *Cinderella Dressed in Yella* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1969); Ian Turner, June Factor & Wendy Lowenstein, *Cinderella Dressed in Yella* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1978).
- 2 <http://museumvictoria.com.au/collections/items/254211/doll-liberian-circa-1950-1959>

REVIEW: Valerie Yule (ed) *Inside Children's Minds – Children's stories (told not written) about their drawings*

Judy McKinty

Inside Children's Minds grew from the work of Valerie Yule as a clinical child psychologist, schools psychologist and academic in Australia and Britain over more than three decades. It is a detailed study of children's storytelling and what their stories can reveal to a trained and interested listener. While not dealing specifically with play, this book reveals the power of children's imagination and creativity – important aspects of 'pretend' and role play – and their ability to draw on real-life situations, as well as fantasy, in their storytelling. Yule points out that '[i]magination in action can be seen in children's play and storytelling'¹.

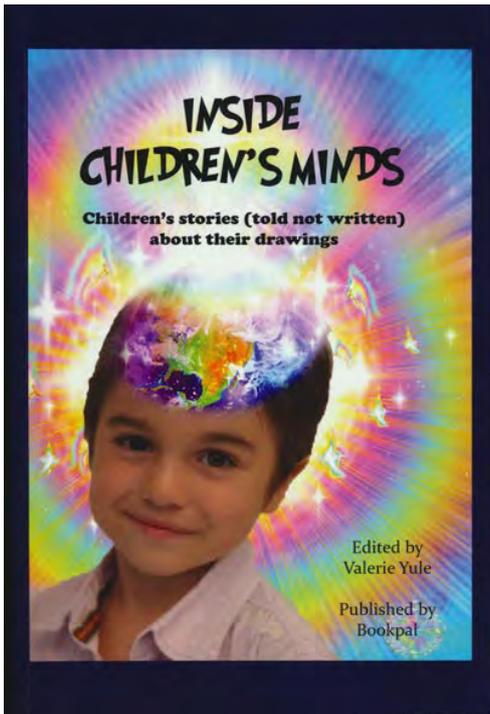
The study also supports storytelling – the spoken word as opposed to the written word – as a valuable way for children with limited literacy or writing skills to express their innermost thoughts and feelings: '...even small children use their uniquely human capacity to symbolise experience they cannot communicate directly. Their use of symbols in many of these stories is in the tradition of all folktale and legend'².

Many of the 375 randomly selected stories in the comparative study were told by children referred to Yule in hospitals, clinics and schools. They came from four sets of contrasting conditions, matched for age and gender:

1. Children perceived by adults as presenting behaviour problems contrasted with those not in obvious trouble.
2. Children living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage or in middle-class suburbia.
3. Children living amid political violence in Belfast, Northern Ireland³, contrasted with children from Australia and Scotland.
4. Australian children living in either intact or single-parent families⁴.

The children were asked to do a drawing of anything they liked. As they drew, they were asked to tell a story about the drawing when they had finished it. Yule says, 'Drawings might be trivial and conventional but the associated stories could be remarkable'⁵.

Many of the drawings and stories in this study are 'the outpourings of children at risk of becoming their generation's outlaws and misfits'⁶. The importance of the society and cultural setting in which a child lives is stressed, and the insidious effects of exposure to ever-increasing violence in children's lives through various media, including computer



games, movies, 'morbid' books and even the clothing they wear is explored. This is no mere 'doom and gloom' pronouncement – each argument is based on Yule's own observations and research over many years, and her work provides compelling evidence of how changes in society can affect the way children perceive the world and themselves.

The book spans more than 460 pages, divided into the following chapters: Children's Symbols, Families, Children at School, Children in an Adult World, Socio-economic Disadvantage, Physical and Mental Disorders, Delinquency, Rejection and Despair, Migrants and Multiculturalism, War in Reality and Fantasy, Fairy Stories: The Users of Enchantment, The Language of Girls and Boys and Conclusions. There are also three appendices: Research Analyses, Short Bibliography and Drawings by Children at a Disadvantaged Primary School.

This book's value to the study and understanding of children in their society, and the effects on children of disadvantage, conflict and lack of opportunities, lies in its detail, the duration and span of the research, the analysis of the material and the voices of the children who are telling their stories.

Stories do not stand on their own for arbitrary interpretation, but can provide key pieces of the jigsaw of a child's inner world...a collection of stories from many children can show how groups of children compare, and what influences them, at different ages and in different places...This in turn can help us to understand the contribution of social environment and culture to the imagination of the individual child.⁷

Inside Children's Minds – Children's stories (told not written) about their drawings

Valerie Yule (ed)

Queensland: Bookpal, 2014

ISBN 13: 9781742844299 ISBN 10: 1742844294

ENDNOTES

1 p444

2 p8

3 An extract from this publication, 'War, reality and fantasy: the imagination of Belfast children during the Troubles of the 1980s', was published in *Play and Folklore* no 57, April 2012, pp13-17. See http://museumvictoria.com.au/pages/35868/play_and_folklore_no_57_april_2012w.pdf

4 p450

5 p3

6 p4

7 pp448-449

International Journal of Play – Special Issue

Lifework and Legacy: Reviewing Iona and Peter Opie's Contribution to the Study of Play

The latest volume of the *International Journal of Play* (Vol. 3 Issue 3, December 2014) is a special issue devoted to the work of Iona and Peter Opie, pioneering UK play scholars, whose publications *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959), *Children's Games in Street and Playground* (1969), *The Singing Game* (1985), *Children's Games with Things* (1997) and Iona Opie's solo volume *The People in the Playground* (1993) are cornerstones for many people who study the social and cultural aspects of children's lives.

The journal features a number of talks and interviews given by the Opies, including 'A Lifetime in the Playground', Iona's inaugural address to 'The State of Play' conference held at Sheffield University in 1998, and a conversation between the Opies and June Factor in Australia. Julia C. Bishop of Sheffield University and June Factor are guest editors for this highly significant issue, which was published in the year that marked Iona Opie's 91st birthday and would have been Peter Opie's 96th birthday.

In other articles, international scholars share their memories and reflections of the Opies' lives and work and give detailed descriptions of their own work, building on aspects of the Opies' research and their deep understanding of children's play.

The International Journal of Play is published by Taylor and Francis for The Association for the Study of Play. More information can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rijp20/current#>.
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Iona and Peter Opie skipping, Liss Junior School, 1953.
Source: <http://www.opieproject.group.shef.ac.uk/>

Brian Sutton-Smith – respected colleague of four international children’s folklorists

June Factor

As a co-editor of the most recent issue of the *International Journal of Play*¹, I wrote an article – ‘Lifework and Legacy: Reviewing Iona and Peter Opie’s Contribution to the Study of Play’ – which included an exploration of some of the international connections of these two remarkable and influential 20th century children’s folklore scholars.

Long before the internet and email, the Opies were part of a network – mostly via letters – that included three important fellow children’s folklorists from three different countries: Dorothy Howard from the USA, Ian Turner from Australia and Brian Sutton-Smith from New Zealand. A small taste of Sutton-Smith’s part in the cordial intellectual exchanges between these five scholars seems an appropriate contribution to our fond and sincere acknowledgement of his lifetime of scholarship and his generous collegiality.

I wrote in the *International Journal of Play*:

Brian Sutton-Smith, a New Zealander who trained as a teacher and a psychologist, had already produced his PhD thesis on the games of New Zealand children when he met Peter Opie in the early 1950s. He was just six years younger than Peter. In an interview in 2012 he spoke enthusiastically about the effect of that meeting on his own work – and, he suggests, on that of the Opies:

*The really exciting thing that came my way was the work of Iona and Peter Opie. I met Peter in a bar in England, when I first went to England in the early 1950s. He and his wife had written books about the history of literature for children...He and I got talking, and I had just finished my thesis...and he said, ‘We don’t have anything about play’, so I talked him into doing play and the Opies came out with the book *The Lore and Language of School Children*. It came out in 1959, and I came out with *The Games of New Zealand Children at the same time, nowhere near the status of theirs, of course. What excited me was the content in their book that fit the six or seven categories that I’ve been talking about. Wow! The way they related the emotions to particular kinds of behaviour derived from their information which had come from all over the British Isles, and mine was mainly from New Zealand. This was a validation that hit me over the head with a big bang.**

So, I joined the folklore people...because I found that I could learn more about gangs talking to folklore people than to psychologists. Psychologists are trapped by their own need for an experiment. Good or bad as it may be, it doesn’t take you to the world, whereas folklore is about traditions wherever they are. (Brown and Patte, 2012)



Dorothy Howard met both Turner and Sutton-Smith during her time in Australia (and briefly in New Zealand) in 1954-1955, and both men in their books offer respectful thanks for her scholarship and her understanding of the social and cultural forces which help shape children's playlore. Sutton-Smith gave Howard a copy of his first book, *The Games of New Zealand Children*, based on his PhD and published in 1959. The inscription, not dated, reads: 'To Dorothy, a fellow gamesman and gentlewoman – compliments, Brian Sutton-Smith'². He was already a professor at the University of Pennsylvania when his second book on children's playlore, *A History of Children's Play: the New Zealand playground 1840-1950*, was published in 1981. Its preface begins:

I want to pay special tribute to the many folklorists of games and play who have preceded me, particularly to Dorothy Howard, whom I came to know personally. In my relative isolation in New Zealand, I found that their work supported my belief that this kind of study was worthwhile. (Sutton-Smith, 1981, p vii)

ENDNOTES

- 1 June Factor, 'Colleagues in the Antipodes: conversations with Iona and Peter Opie', *International Journal of Play* vol 3, issue 3 (2014), 225-226.
- 2 This book was given to me by Dorothy Howard.

Obituary: Brian Sutton-Smith

This obituary was circulated by Brian Sutton-Smith's family, to be shared among his many play colleagues and friends.

Brian Sutton-Smith, pioneer in the study of the significance of play, died March 7 at the age of 90. The cause is listed as complications due to Alzheimer's disease.

Sutton-Smith was one of the foremost play scholars of the last 100 years. His *The Ambiguity of Play* (1987) stands alongside Johann Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1938) and Roger Caillois' *Man Play and Games* (1961) as a touchstone of play theory. For more than half a century, Sutton-Smith led or synthesized all the major advancements in play studies. Sutton-Smith's interdisciplinary approach included research into play history and cross-cultural studies of play, as well as research in psychology, education and folklore. He maintained that the interpretation of play must involve all of its forms, from child's play to gambling, sports, festivals, imagination and nonsense.

His collected works, papers, and personal library are a key element of the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York.

Born in Wellington, New Zealand in 1924, he trained as a teacher, completed a BA and MA, and was then awarded the first Education PhD in New Zealand in 1954. Shortly thereafter he was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship, which brought him to the University of California, Berkeley. Sutton-Smith held professorial positions at Bowling Green State University, Teacher's College, Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania. He remained Professor Emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania until his death.

For combined diversity and magnitude, as well as for impact on the thinking of others, Sutton-Smith's body of scholarly work on play is unparalleled. Sutton-Smith is the author of some 50 books, the most recent of which was *The Ambiguity of Play*, and some 350 scholarly articles. In addition to researching and writing at a feverish pace all his adult life, Sutton-Smith also lectured throughout the world; participated in making television films on toys and play in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States; consulted on a number of children's television projects (including Captain Kangaroo, Nickelodeon, Murdoch Children's Television); participated in numerous scholarly organizations; helped launch what is now The Association for the Study of Play; helped establish the Children's Folklore Society; and secured countless grants and received numerous citations of recognition, including



Brian Sutton-Smith in the 1970s.

lifetime achievement awards from the American Folklore Society and The Association for the Study of Play.

In addition, the New Zealand Association for Research in Education created the Sutton-Smith Doctoral Award, which is awarded annually for an excellent Doctoral thesis by an NZARE member. Sutton-Smith was also the author of a series of novels about boys growing up in New Zealand in the 1930s, entitled *Our Street*, *Smitty Does a Bunk*, and *The Cobbers*. Initially published in serial form in 1949 in the *New Zealand School Journal*, the stories provided a realistic and unexpurgated reminiscence of childhood and created a national furor, as Brian Sutton-Smith allegedly endorsed morally unacceptable behavior in them. Conservative representatives of local Education Boards and Headmasters' Associations condemned Sutton-Smith's depiction of salty language and rough-and-tumble play in his publications, but members of the Labor Party praised them for meeting a national need for stories about the country's children.

Sutton-Smith is predeceased by his wife Shirley and son Mark. He is survived by his longtime companion Deborah Thurber, his daughters Katherine Moyer (Bill), Leslie Sutton-Smith (Mark Blackman), Mary Sutton-Smith (Warren Tucker), Emily Sutton-Smith (John Lepard), and grandchildren Kelly, Wendy,



Robin, Sally, Brian, Olivia, Madeleine, Milo, Alyssa and Clara. Memorial services will be announced at a later date.

For those friends wishing to memorialize Sutton-Smith, the family asks that you make a donation to your local chapter of the Make-A-Wish Foundation, whose work brings the spirit of playful adventures into the lives of suffering children, or to The Strong National Museum of Play, whose work preserves the Brian Sutton-Smith legacy.