

REMEMBER THE GAMES OF THE OLD SCHOOLYARD

Maree Curtis



Photo Rob Banks - The Sunday Age, 2nd March 1997. Reproduced by permission.

What's the matter with kids today? Once upon a time a tin can and a piece of string would amuse a child for hours. These days they queue up at midnight for the release of the latest computer games.

In the early hours of yesterday, Kmart in Burwood was buzzing with hoopla as the latest big thing in computer games, Nintendo 64, was released in Australia.

While the launch of the \$399 unit will have kids who have missed out whingeing for weeks, a trip to a school playground shows time-honored games that cost nothing are still going strong.

Chasey, hidey, hopscotch, jacks, marbles, elastics and cat's cradles are still keeping children amused and six of the top 10-selling games at Toys 'R' Us around Australia last week have been around for decades, including Uno, Monopoly and Scrabble.

Dr John Evans, a senior lecturer in the faculty of education at Deakin University and an expert on children's play, said that not only did many of the traditional games still exist, but games that may not be instantly recognisable were, in fact, variations on old themes.

'Children are still playing a lot of those old games, they certainly do exist, particularly in playgrounds where they don't have access to computer games. Left to their own devices children are very creative,' he said. 'If more people visited playgrounds they would recognise variations of what we used to play in the good old days.' Nostalgia is one of the things keeping the games alive year after year.

Seven-year-old Sarah's favorite game is cat's cradle: 'My Nanna showed me how to do it when I was about four and I taught it to my brother and cousin and auntie. I also like skipping and I like playing elastics and monkeybars – they're more fun than staying inside at home.'

Sarah's friends, Samara, 7, and Kara, 7, use wool scraps to make their own strings. 'I have a Nintendo but I like cat's cradle better because you can make up tricks and do things with your other friends,' said Samara.

Ms Heidi Edgley, the manager of Toy Kingdom in Dandenong, said parents and grandparents often bought games they remembered playing.

'Marbles and yo-yos never go out completely, jacks are still popular and things like pick-up-sticks never go away,' she said. 'Older people tend to buy these games, they see them and say 'I remember playing that when I was a child'.

The merchandising director of Toys 'R' Us Australia, Mr John Redenbach, said the Barrel of Monkeys was a consistent seller.

'Last week it was the fifth-best seller for the week, it's just one of those things that just sells day in and day out,' he said.

Board games such as Monopoly and Cluedo were popular with parents not only because they remember playing them but also because they were not as intimidating and difficult to learn as computer games.

'There's certainly a bit of mum and dad played it and remember how much fun it was but board games are also a family activity and the rules on good board games can be picked up in 10 minutes,' he said. 'Also, most board games are under \$30 and you can't buy a good computer for under \$3000.'

Mr Redenbach said manufacturers constantly updated games with new versions or variations but the basic principles remained the same.

The assistant principal at Brighton Beach Primary School, Ms Christine Bishop, said it was interesting to see the older style games become favorites for each new generation of children.

'They tend to go in phases but they are always around,' she said. 'When they play with skipping ropes, the chants may be different from those we used because they have been upgraded but they are still skipping rope.'

(Reproduced with permission from The Age newspaper, 2nd March 1997)

News and Notes

For our overseas readers: the 'French Foreign Legion' headgear worn by the two girls on the front page is compulsory uniform for primary school children in many parts of Australia – as part of the national 'Sun Smart' campaign. Australia has, regrettably, one of the world's highest incidences of skin cancer.

Play and Folklore is anxious to update June Factor's *Bibliography of Australian Children's Folklore*, published in 1986. All contributions will be gratefully received.

Melbourne received a welcome though brief visit in December from Peter Lemcke, Director of the German Games Museum (Deutsches SPIELMuseum e.V.) in Chemnitz. The Australian Children's Folklore Collection is now the lucky owner of a number of games, posters and other publications from the Deutsches SPIELMuseum. It's of interest to learn that the Museum is currently engaged with the University of Dresden in an application to the European Union for funding to place the Museum's collections on the World Wide Web. The Australian Children's Folklife Collection is also involved in a similar project – we'll keep you posted!

Allen & Unwin have just published June Factor's *Jumping Joke Book* in their Little Ark Book Series, with great illustrations by Mic Looby. Some selections in this issue!

Both editors of *Play and Folklore* have been invited to be keynote speakers at The State of Play conference in Sheffield, UK, 14-17 April 1998 and are hoping to meet many colleagues there! Inquiries to Conference Organisers Julia Bishop and Mavis Curtis, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN United Kingdom. Email: J.C.Bishop@sheffield.ac.uk

R. Keith Sawyer at Washington University in St Louis, Missouri USA (Department of Education), has informed us of his recently published book on children's play, *Pretend Play as Improvisation: Conversation in the Preschool Classroom*. Inquiries to Prof. Sawyer.

REVISITING THE 'CHILD FESTIVAL':

SOME THOUGHTS ON NEW DIRECTIONS

FOR PLAY RESEARCH IN PRIMARY SCHOOL SETTINGS

Heather Russell

It's 10.30, and the bell goes. Children pour out of the doors. Most have some food in their hands and they run, walk or scream off in three or four different directions, usually in small groups. The school playground equipment fills up rapidly, as the coveted spots on the monkey bar, jungle gym or anything 'off ground' is taken up by the quickest and most agile. Sit, eat, talk, chase, tease, play footy, throw goals, swing, climb, start a game. Can I play? Well... Then the bell goes and the flood of activity that so quickly erupted is sucked back into the building to wait for the next burst of play.

The framing or context of play in a primary school playground is unique as a setting for play. Children in most Victorian primary schools are allowed one or two recesses (usually fifteen to twenty minutes long) and one long lunchtime of up to one hour's playing time. In most instances, children *have* to go out to play – they have no choice. They also *have* to play in a purpose-built environment which has been designed for safety, ease of supervision, maintenance and durability rather than 'playability'. The space is supervised by teachers, who are generally only there to stop any dangerous or aggressive behaviour. The most available resource for play is other children, although schools in more affluent suburbs can afford to provide children with some equipment – usually balls.

Compare this play event with the same children playing at home on weekends, and the context is entirely different. At home there are toys, inside versus outside play, other children (maybe), television, more sympathetic adults (perhaps), much more time, more props and more personal space.

There's no doubt that the primary school playground cues children to play certain games over others – the many variations of Chasey that have been passed on from generation to generation attest to this. Chasey is a perfect game for recess. It can be played anywhere, and all you need is a few other willing children. The game can start virtually at the classroom door. However, there are contextual factors which influence children's play at recess and lunchtime

than the factors of time and space. Consider the following playground rules from another primary school:

- No running around school buildings
- No running or jumping off school buildings
- No fighting that involves tackling
- No climbing trees
- No playing in or under bushes
- No ball games are to be played near the school buildings
- No toys are to be brought from home
- No food is to be eaten in the playground

(Evans, 1993:3)

Other rules from an American elementary school:

- Any child seen to be digging in the ground is guilty of property abuse
- At no time shall a child's head be any less than 180 degrees above his body (ie. no hanging upside down)

(Murphy, Hutchinson and Bailey, 1983:30)

It's unclear whether the list of playground rules is representative of Australian primary schools and their approach to play, as the limitations of play are rarely the subject of play research. However, one could suggest that at the very least, the time constraints and the constraints of the physical setting mean that children's play in school playgrounds occurs within limits defined by the institution, so that children may not always be engaged in the play activity of their choice. They are playing because it gives them intrinsic satisfaction (they could just sit around eat and talk) but their choice of play activity may be more influenced by contextual factors than intrinsic factors. Unfortunately the extent to which external environmental factors and institutional rules limit play and induce children to play in a certain way, is rarely the subject of play research¹.

THE ASSUMPTION OF 'FREE PLAY'

If we focus on the limitations of schools as settings for play, labelling play at recess and lunchtime as 'free' or 'spontaneous' is a misnomer. It is certainly free in comparison to the classroom, but it is a limited freedom. 'Self-organised play' (Roberts, 1988:25) or recreational play (King, 1989:3) is a more accurate description of play in school playgrounds and removes the suggestion that children can play at, or do whatever they like. Play at recess appears 'free' in comparison to the structure of classroom activities, but is it 'free' with respect to children's play potential and play interests at this stage of development? I think not. As Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne (1984a:307) so aptly point out, schools and playgrounds were used by social reformers of the nineteenth century to bring children who were roaming the streets under social control, not to 'free' them, although they did free many of them from working in factories and mines.

Allowing the 'free play' assumption to go unchallenged has inherent dangers, particularly when data from play research in school settings is used to comment on or contribute to theoretical debates about play and child development. Eifermann's (1971) work is a key example. She uses data collected mainly from school playgrounds in Israel to comment on developmental changes in children's play patterns in middle childhood. However, all the play activities that Eifermann observed in her school settings took place in ten minute intervals. Considering children's need to do other things in this time, such as go to the toilet and eat before they even begin to establish a game, is it reasonable to assume that the type of play exhibited by children in these circumstances is really spontaneous, voluntary and representative of children's age and overall development, or is it simply a type of play that is rewarding and 'playable' within the given limitations?

This question must go unanswered; however it provides a warning to contemporary play researchers to take account of influential contextual factors in play behaviour and to be cautious about assuming that play in school settings is representative of play across all settings.

THE PHYSICAL CONTEXT: ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES ON CHILDREN'S PLAY

Unfit for human habitation is the judgement being pronounced by a growing number of parents, students and teachers who see schoolyards as places where kids destroy each other and as places where they *could* play and learn creatively (Moore, 1974: 364).

Such a claim by Robin Moore, a prominent landscape architect and advocate of quality environments for children's play sits somewhat uneasily beside the folkloric and anthropological literature that usually describes play in school playgrounds. Folklorists generally focus on documenting game traditions, not fights, although the Opies comment:

We have noticed that when children are herded together in the playground...their play is markedly more aggressive than when they are in the street or in wild places...

in our continual search for efficient units of educational administration we have overlooked the most precious gift we can give the young is social space: the necessary space – or privacy – in which to become human beings (Opie, 1969: 13).

Landscape architects, town planners and geographers such as Robin Moore and Roger Hart in the United States, Chris Cunningham and Mary Jeavons in Australia, and Eileen Adams in the United Kingdom, leading advocates of school playground redevelopment world-wide, would agree with the Opies that the physical environment has a powerful effect on behaviour and children's play. Designing natural elements into school playgrounds which allows for some exploratory, interactive, constructive play, and providing more personal space for small group socialisation and play are features of school playground re-landscaping advocated by these leading professionals.

SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS AND VIOLENCE

Under the guise of ethnographers, educators and psychologists, and in the name of safety and educational research, we put children in school playgrounds under the microscope and study them intently. Children at play are more studied in particular for the accidents and the outcomes of their play than ever before. 'When school playgrounds become battlegrounds' (Age, 24 January, 1993) summarised the finding of research into intentional violence in Victorian playgrounds. The inevitably alarming statistics² were accompanied by recommendations that children's play in school playgrounds be more closely supervised by teachers to avoid such unacceptable behaviour. Fortunately, the 1994 House of Representatives Standing Committee Report into violence in schools 'Sticks and Stones', recognised the wider issues involved, and recommended a number of strategies ranging from further research into the effects of media and television violence on children's behaviour, early intervention in kindergartens, and a whole school approach to combating violence³.

Similarly, a Department of Employment, Education and Training position paper on gender and violence (1993) recommended the need for schools to recognise the gendered nature of violence, specifically sex-based harassment which often goes unrecognised, and is often experienced at home as well as at school. As well as short-term strategies to stop violence, the report recommended:

in the long term, efforts to stop violence must involve the professional development of all staff with issues being included across all curriculum areas to ensure long term change in attitudes and behaviour (Ollis and Tomaszewski, 1993: 19).

Redefining violence in the context of the 1990s will have a major impact on boys' play, play which over the last hundred years has had a significantly rough element. Historically, formal sports were introduced to curb rough play. Nowadays, rough games like British Bulldog are banned, rules are changed, more balls are provided to focus play on skill development not physical rough handling. A rather 'non-playful' end result of these efforts to minimise violence is evident in the United States, where in many cases opportunities for spontaneous play are limited. Children during 'recess' have to play supervised games and team sports. Play opportunities narrow down to ball games with no provision for creative, dramatic or construction play. This demise of spontaneous play at school is not only regrettable but can be interpreted as an infringement of children's fundamental right to play (Sutton-Smith, 1990: 6-7).

Moore (1974) argues, we need to change our focus away from blaming the children for their aggressive outbursts, and start looking at how adequate or inadequate are the environments we give children to play in. We need to study the relationship between the environment and play and examine the potential for quality play environments to enhance children's development and social interaction. According to Moore, sterile, dehumanising environments suppress and inhibit children's developmental potential, inevitably producing anarchy.

Moore's work as a landscape designer in elementary schools in the United States is marked by the principle of user participation in the design and re-landscaping of play spaces. Children's drawings of favourite places suggest grass, trees and flowers are universally liked features. Moore aims for ambiguous, open-ended, changeable environments which allow children a high degree of individual expression. A quality play environment is one that can be physically and mentally manipulated to suit each child's play needs (Moore, 1974, 1986).

Moore's belief in children's inbuilt or biological need to manipulate and interact with the natural environment leads to a type of play which has not as yet been described in this review. This is not so surprising, as the hallmark of much play in primary school settings is its lack of opportunity for playing with natural elements.

However, as playgrounds are being upgraded and asphalt removed in recognition of the need for more diverse and creative play opportunities (and sometimes in the misguided quest for improved aesthetics which may or may not have anything to do with play), it is important to look at the theoretical basis for this change.

PLAY AND CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Edith Cobb describes children's relationship with the natural world as being at its peak in middle childhood, between the years of five and twelve. According to Cobb, this period of childhood is:

a special period, little understood, prepubertal, halcyon, middle age of childhood, approximately from five or six to eleven or twelve, between the strivings of animal infancy and the storms of adolescence – when the natural world is experienced in some highly evocative way, producing in the child a sense of some profound continuity with natural processes and presenting overt evidence of a biological basis of intuition

(Cobb, quoted in Moore, 1986: 11).

Writers like Cobb (1977), Moore (1986) and Pearce (1980) describe the natural environment as offering children limitless possibilities for new experiences, adventure, fantasy and exploration. Robin Moore in *Childhood Domain* summarised writers' views on the significance of the environment for children's development: 'The environment is not an objective phenomenon, but it is interpreted...reconstructed, never a copy' (Bjorklid, in Moore, 1986: 10).

Cobb (1977) describes play as 'a sort of fingering over of the environment in sensory terms, a questioning of the power of materials as a preliminary to the creation of higher organisation of meaning' (Cobb, 1977: 23).

Viewing the natural environment as a source of playfulness, of plasticity and unpredictability, of infinite possibilities that can be extracted to meet individual children's play needs, all adds up to an argument for ripping up asphalt in primary school playgrounds. This argument is hard to resist. But whilst the principle and the philosophy is convincing, there has been little research on how children actually interpret and use the asphalt and other built features of

the primary school playground. So how do we know which bits to rip up, how much, and what exactly to replace it with? The functional use of flowers, leaves, and vegetation in children's play in school playgrounds has rarely been the subject of play research, although some work has been done in this area (Moore, 1986; Britt Almstrom, 1993).

Excellent ethnographic research into children's sense of place and their playful use of the physical environment *outside the school playground* (in neighbourhood parks, streets and other left over spaces) has been carried out in the last fifteen years by Ward (1977), Hart (1979), Moore (1986), Jeavons (1987), Cunningham (1987). This work is very useful in informing the methodology of investigations into children's use of primary school landscapes.

CHILDHOOD SPECIAL PLACES

There is no doubt that children's perception of the landscape is different from adults'. Children use the environment, play with it and invest a meaning into it which adults do not know about or care to ask about. There may be nothing particularly special about a particular place but 'its importance lies in the meaning with which it has been invested by those who have grown up there (Sobel, 1991:5).

Whilst Cobb (1977) argues that children have a profound biological connection with the natural world, there is convincing evidence that children invest meaning in built structures and that the place-making urge is just as powerful in non-natural settings (Olwig, 1991; Sobel, 1991). Gossow defines place as 'a piece of the environment that has been claimed by feelings...and the catalyst that converts any physical location into a place is the process of experiencing deeply. To experience a place deeply is to bond with a place (Gossow, quoted in Sobel, 1991:12).

What do special places mean to children and what do they look like? Sobel asked one hundred adults and two hundred children about the attributes of their special places and came up with the following recurring descriptors:

1. Special places are found or constructed.
2. Special places are secret – children do not want others to know where they are.
3. Special places are owned by their creators.
4. Special places are safe and feel calm.
5. Special places are organised worlds.
6. Special places empower their builders. Making a special place is a significant personal act

(Sobel, 1991:10).

Australian writers such as Dovey explore the role of special places, defining them as places of peace which enable children to 'survive and thrive with their mental health intact' (Dovey, 1991:13). Cunningham (1993) explored Australian biographies and autobiographies to shed some light on the details of children's experience of place. Especially important were natural settings such as bushland, gardens, trees, water bodies and land forms. Houses and their gardens feature as did shops, trains and trams for city children, underlining the importance of community interaction as well as place interaction in children's lives. Fossicking, finding things, exploring, food gathering, finding private places, making cubbies – using the environment and extracting multiple possibilities from it, summarises Cunningham's search of adults' written memories. These findings are confirmed by Moore (1986) and Jeavons (1987) in their field work with children who list built structures such as sheds, garages, play equipment and streets alongside natural features such as trees, water sources, bushland, private spaces and community interaction such as shops as special places in their local environment. One common finding in this work is that objects derive significance from their use, not their aesthetic appeal. Jeavons (1987:126-128) lists hiding, climbing, finding things, giving shade and providing a landmark, as reasons children gave for liking trees.

Children as place-makers in primary school playgrounds have received little attention. Opie (1993) after a three and a half year observation of elementary children playing in their largely asphalted English school playground, summarises their place-making efforts:

Every feature of the playground is used; the fences (as 'home', or for tying one end of a skipping rope); the ledge outside the largest temporary classroom (for walking along, or as a vantage point, or for a game of 'King of the Castle'); the flat drain covers and slotted drain covers (as sanctuaries or as marble boards); the small cavities at the foot of the 'marbles fence', where the asphalt meets the grit surface of the lane; the dust bowl at the edge of the grass, used for flinging toy cars (Opie, 1993:11).

This small account is a tribute to children's efforts at place-making, despite the sterility of the landscape on offer. Whilst Opie's comment on children's use of the landscape is incidental to her main task of depicting children's play behaviour, she does indicate that children have regular places where certain games are played eg. the ball wall, the drain cover for marbles.

THE ARTIFICIAL ENVIRONMENT: FIXED PLAY EQUIPMENT

Much more research has been carried out into the effects of different kinds of fixed play equipment on children's play than any other physical element in the playground landscape. Safety concerns drive much of the research in this area, research which aims to gather statistics on accident rates, rather than any real understanding of children's behaviour in relationship to play equipment. Pain's work (1993) in this area breaks new ground for safety research because she not only records the location and severity of the accident, but asks children to describe what they were doing, and how the accident happened, thus getting at children's behaviour as a possible cause of accidents, not simply dangers inherent in the equipment.

Safety research is a vital part of play research for obvious reasons. However the end product of much of this work is playgrounds that are 'monuments to misunderstanding' (Evans, 1987:11). Evans argues that fixed equipment was developed to replace the natural environment as a source of self-testing, playfulness and creativity. The adults who devised and built this poor substitute feel guilty when this equipment proves to be dangerous, and children injure themselves. Thus we find ourselves trapped by research evidence which recommends the lowering of fall heights and the elimination of certain exciting and challenging types of equipment altogether, culminating in play equipment that is not challenging enough, mass-produced, non-manipulable (Evans, 1987).

In school playgrounds where bushes and trees are generally out of bounds for play, school councils spend thousands of dollars installing climbing and 'creative' play equipment as a replacement for the natural environment. Those bits of equipment that research has found to be the most popular, those with moveable parts such as swings, flying foxes and roundabouts (Frost and Strickland, 1978), have been banned from Victorian school playgrounds for safety reasons. Unfortunately what is left in the playground are static structures, providing exactly the opposite environment to that suggested by Nicholson's 'loose parts' theory:

in any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility for discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.

(Nicholson, 1971: 39)

Luckily, children in school playgrounds still have each other – the critical 'loose parts' which inspire so much inventive and absorbing play.

Settings for play such as monkey-bars and fixed equipment are an important part of the play repertoire of children, particularly in the early years of schooling (Evans, 1989: 62; Russell, 1986: 37). Traditional equipment such as metal climbing frames and monkey-bars promotes physical exercise, and contemporary adventure playgrounds (those more recently designed to include enclosures resembling forts or cubbies) are used for fantasy play (Frost and Campbell, 1985; Frost and Strickland, 1985).

In Australia, despite the considerable work that is done on setting safe standards for fixed play equipment and the enormous amount of money required to purchase and install such equipment, we have relatively few detailed descriptive accounts of what children at the primary school level do on monkey bars, jungle gyms, forts, climbing frames, so we understand little about the types of play that take place on fixed equipment and their meaning in children's play lives (Evans, 1987). Instead, research such as the studies by Frost and Campbell (1977; 1985), Frost and Strickland (1985), Naylor (1985) and Bruya (1985) study the equipment choices of children by noting the number of times children were observed using different pieces of equipment. These studies give us the popularity rating of different types of equipment but don't tell us much about the meaning or importance of play in this setting. Issues such as playground equipment acting as a social facilitator is hinted at by Moore (1986).

Are there traditions and rituals associated with equipment like monkey-bars that are passed on from child to child? What are the tricks and gymnastic feats that children strive to conquer on fixed equipment? What are the fantasy games that children play on creative playgrounds and how do they interpret the physical structures in their fantasy games? What are the games that children play on fixed equipment? Why are there often territorial disputes?

CONCLUSION

The play literature reviewed above suggests that there is a strong need to revisit the playground and take another look at 'the child festival' (Sutton-Smith, 1990). There are many aspects of the festival that have not yet been documented, and many that need to be looked at with sympathetic eyes.

Play research in primary school settings needs to document play as it occurs within physical settings, both artificial and natural, and document the institutional influences which affect children's play. Particularly at a time when school playgrounds are being scrutinised as a setting for violent behaviour at

the same time as they are being used more extensively as a child care facility out of school hours, it is critical that we understand how children use both natural and artificial elements in their play. Such an understanding will help to tease out the environmental and design elements which enhance and encourage play rather than more anti-social behaviour.

There is no doubt that the ideology of play which underpins contemporary playground design is very different to the ideology which prevailed early this century. Current play ideology promotes children's need for a diversity of play experiences reflecting their different stages of social, intellectual and emotional development. To do this requires diverse play environments, and in primary school playgrounds this involves building in more natural elements into play spaces.

How this ideology translates into the reality of playground design and management is an issue that can only be resolved through well-thought-out ethnographic research which can provide planners and designers with detailed information about what children actually do in various play environments. Instead of seeing play as just the text or content of the play, research must pay attention to describing the context (in this instance the physical context – the social context is another rich area of contextual research) and the meaning children ascribe to these contexts. Such research will reap great rewards for budding ethno-

graphers, not only for its potential applications but also for the surprising richness of hidden meanings and subtexts that lie hidden in the landscape.

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*Special places...
Pembroke Primary
School, Mooroolbark (Vic.)*

*Photos:
Heather Russell*

1 See 'The Playground Environment', Chapter 7 in *Children at Play* by John Evans (1989) for an excellent overview of the contextual elements influencing play in primary schools.

2 The data showed that 'the number of children taken to hospital for injuries caused by violence between them was far more than those with injuries from assaults or child abuse'. 546 children were taken to three Melbourne hospitals in the three year period to 1991. 40% were injured in quarrels, 25% had harmed themselves, 20% had been abused and 8% had been assaulted.

3 Reported in *The Australian*, 25 March, 1994

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RECOLLECTIONS OF GAMES IN TOCUMWAL IN THE 1940s AND 50s

Arthur L. Thomas

BALL GAME

A ball game was played at the Tocumwal Primary School in the '40s and early '50s that, so far as I am aware, had no 'official' name. We called it, simply, 'plain and clappy' and it was played by one or more persons. It was competitive in that each player had to outdo the others in the execution of the 'tricks' and was therefore a game of concentration as well as coordination. The 'tricks' performed were all done in a set order, so memory counted.

The game went like this. The player would stand at a set distance from the wall – a line was drawn by scudding the shoe in the dirt. The player would then toss the ball to the wall and when it bounced back, it had to be caught in both hands (cupping the hands around the ball). Thus 'plainy'. The player then tossed the ball to the wall, clapped hands once and caught the ball. The player continued tossing the ball, performing a 'trick' either while tossing the ball or just after the ball was tossed. Whenever the ball was not caught the next player took a turn, starting off at the beginning. However, the new player to be 'good', had to surpass the previous one.

The 'tricks' were all performed in a set order. I cannot remember them (certainly not in order), but from memory, no player was penalised for 'forgetting' and performing a trick that should be played a sequence or two later. But as the game was played every day the sequences were well and truly memorised.

Sequence 1:

a plain bounce to the wall, catching the ball on the full on its return.

Sequence 2:

'Clappy'. Toss the ball to the wall, clap hands once, catch the ball on return.

Sequence 3:

'Under the Leg'. Raise the right leg, toss the ball under the leg to hit the wall, lower the leg and catch the ball on the full.

Sequence 4: 'Under the Leg'. (Left leg). Same as above.

Sequence 5:

'Spin-around'. Toss the ball to the wall and spin around once, catching the ball on the full.

There would be a number of basic tricks in this first 'round'. Then, when completed, two tricks had to be performed. This would be tossing the ball to the wall 'under the right leg' and then clapping the hands once, catching the ball on the full. Then on to tossing the ball, clapping and then spin-around (NOT spin around and clapping, for that was not the sequence), catching the ball on the full. In effect, putting together 2 tricks from the first game and executing them as 'one trick'.

When this 2nd game was completed, 3 tricks had to be performed as 'one trick' until the sequence was completed without missing the ball.

The game continued: the player would throw the ball on to the ground at an angle whereby it would hit the wall on ricochet and you then had to catch it in one hand (usually the right hand went first, then the left). All the sequences were performed over again, because the bouncing of the ball on the ground to let it ricochet off the wall was the next degree of difficulty.

Once the player began his/her game, they stayed in the game until they missed/dropped the ball. Then they had to wait their turn. So it was possible for a player to go through the basics, then continue straight on to the next 'degree of difficulty', keep playing without missing the ball, and then go straight on to the next game with an increased degree of difficulty, until all the diabolical sequences were completed. The game for a team of (say) 4, would take a long time to complete if all players were good and could go through several sequences.

From memory, I can recall that only one girl only accomplished ALL feats. Her status at the school was similar to our current reverence for the accomplishments of Kieren Perkins and Cathy Freeman, given that this girl would have been aged somewhere between 11 and 13.

It was not a game that was a 'school sport' – rather, a game played before school went in of a morning, or at play lunch or dinner time (12 o'clock till 1 o'clock here). If a player was into their game and the bell rang (either for the beginning of morning lessons or for after play lunch or after dinner time), that player continued from where they left off the very next time the game was played. It would have been heartless to have to start all over again, especially when several degrees of difficulty had already been mastered.

The game seems to have died out by about 1954 here in Tocomwal; it was never played when the boys and girls I knew went to high school.

MARBLES

There was supposed to have been a standardised set of rules for playing marbles and I recall someone having a box of marbles (a cardboard box similar in size to Monopoly or Chinese Checkers) with the cardboard insert with holes in it to hold the marbles (like the Chinese Checkers) with the rules of the game printed on the inside of the lid. The marbles came from England.

But the game we played seemed to have an amalgamation of all the known rules and this was the way we (and every child in the district) played.

A circle was drawn in the earth. This was done by putting your thumb down and drawing the circle with the index finger. For the game of 'ones up', we put one marble each into the circle. Then we went to 'overs', lined up, and 'pinked'. 'Overs' was a line scudded with the shoes and was at a set distance from the ring. This was usually 6 of our foot paces (we were children under the age of 13). I suppose we would be about 6 feet from the ring. By standing on the line (toes must not go over the edge of the line), we 'pinked', that is, gently tossed the marble in our fingers towards the ring. The 'pinkings' was done one person at a time from one end of the line to the other. When everyone had pinked, the closest marble to the ring went first, followed by the second closest and so on.

If the marble of one player hit the marble of another while 'pinkings', this was called 'kissing', so both players picked up their marbles and pinked again. If it appeared that several marbles looked close to the ring, measuring was done by foot, that is, the heel of the shoe was placed on the edge of the ring and the distance from there to the marble(s) was measured. We spat on our finger, and marked the spot on our dirty shoes where the marble was, and repeated this 'measurement' until it was ascertained which marbles were closest to the ring. If it turned out that two marbles were exactly the same distance from the ring, ALL players picked up their marbles and returned to 'overs' and pinked again.

I never understood why all players had to start again. Why not those whose marbles were an equal distance from the ring? But as players whose marbles 'kissed' had to return, I daresay a different rule had to be invented.

And so the game started. The player whose marble was closest went first and 'fired' (also called 'shot') at the marbles in the ring in an attempt to hit one or more out. His marble was not allowed to stop in the ring. If his

marble hit one or more out of the ring at the same time his marble ricochets out of the ring, he kept the marbles he shot out. If he did not shoot any marbles out of the ring, but his own marble stayed in the ring, he picked up his marble and went to 'halves'. 'Halves' was another line drawn between the ring and 'overs' and was used only in such situations. From memory, the use of 'halves' was agreed upon before the game started.

The player, when his and another marble were hit from the ring, continued playing. He could do one of two things. If he was near the marble of another player he could shoot at it and, if he hit it, that owner gave the player a marble. By shooting 'gently', he could hit the other player's marble, receiving a marble on each hit. When the other player lost his own marbles, plus his playing one, he was 'skun' and out of the game. The player continued, either by shooting at the ring and getting marbles out, or shooting at a nearby player's marble and getting a marble for each hit. But if he missed a marble (either any in the ring or another player's), then he missed a turn, and it was up to the next player to have his turn.

The marbles won were those hit out of the ring or those won by hitting another player's. The game was only over when the last marble was hit out of the ring.

I have mentioned a number of marble-playing terms. Others include:

'Dakes' and 'Dooks'. Marbles. 'Dooks' rhymes with chooks, not the dukes.

'Alley'. Marble.

'Aggot' or 'Aggie'. From agate. Some marbles were made from it.

'Glassy'. A type of clear glass with red, or blue or green (or a combination) designs set inside.

'Fenannick' or 'fernannick'. Fudging. This is when the marble is fired from the fingers giving the wrist a slight jerk. It was never permitted.

'Stonkey' or 'Donkey' (but chiefly Stonkey). A clay marble, looked upon with derision. Before a game started, it was agreed (or disagreed) that they could be used. If used, a player who won one would crush it. Often these clay 'marbles' would come from the centres of Chinese Checkers.

'Bot' or 'Bottley'. The bottle green marble that came from the soft-drink or other bottle and was considered a prize.

'Blood'. The most prized marble of all. The 'blood' as I knew it was predominantly burgundy. It would have to be burgundy or alizarin crimson over all to be called a

'blood'. Yet in later years I heard that marbles with the faintest tinge of red were called 'bloods', whereas we would regard those as 'ordinary' marbles.

Chipped and Half Marbles. The rule was that if you could shoot them (fire them), they were playable. Generally, a chipped or half-marble was allowed in the ring, but if a player got one out he would throw it as far away as he could – in long grass, or the river, never to be used again.

'Tombola'. The largest marble of all. It was rarely put in the ring, but certainly used a lot to fire with.

'Steelies'. We used ball bearings too! They would range in size from 'hundreds and thousands' to those a bit bigger than marbles. There was a rule that you could change from an ordinary marble to a tiny 'steely', provided you fired it first. The steelies were also a prized 'marble'. They could be used all the time in a game. If you 'pinked' with one, but then you noticed someone going to fire at you, you could not suddenly change that steely (or even a marble) with a very tiny 'hundreds and thousands' size one. Once it was fired, it stayed as the 'tor' (another name for marble) until it was your turn to fire again. Then you could change it for another.

'Tor'. That word 'tor' makes me remember. 'Tor' was only used as the playing marble. It also can be 'taw'.

'Big Ring' was not often played by us, but we knew of it and what we knew was that the circle was very big, and filled with marbles. One game played was that one player at a time would have a go at getting marbles out of the ring. The ring being so huge it would not be possible for your marble to ricochet out of the ring as in the other marble game. So if you got 'stuck', but hit a marble out, you still played on. Some of us knelt in the ring as well, but I'm not sure if that was legal. Other times I saw 'big ring' played where everyone fired at will at the marbles.

I once saw a different game of marbles played, but I'm not sure if it was made up at the time. A square was drawn, and a hole put in the corner of each square. A marble or marbles were put in the hole (it wasn't deep, and ground out of the earth with the heel of the shoe) and a player would drop a marble from eye-level onto the marbles below. I suppose the idea was to knock the marbles out of the hole, keeping the ones you knocked out. Perhaps your own marble was supposed to bound out as well. You then went onto the next hole (perhaps only after clearing the previous hole of marbles). I daresay your partner got his go when you either missed the hole, or never got any marbles out. I never did make much sense out of it, for I played marbles for keeps, and that was the game mentioned first.

SCHOOLYARD GAMES

The girls played skippy, and the game with two ropes was called 'French and English' (just after World War Two, what other name could it be given!). One rope in the right hand, the other in the left, and the ropes were swung in towards each other with alternate swings.

I never did work out 'Draw a Bucket of Water for a Lady's Daughter' – only saw it once or twice in the school ground. Four players formed a square. Players faced each other, clasped hands so that it looked like #. Keeping their feet firmly on the ground, they swayed backwards and forwards while reciting: 'Draw a bucket of Water, For a Lady's Daughter, One in a rush, two in a rush, Please young lady, pop under'. A 5th player got inside and stood up in the square of arms. The other 4 closed in and chanted: 'Jump, jump, sugar lump'.

The skipping rhymes were plentiful. Apart from 'salt, pepper, mustard, vinegar' and skipping faster with each sentence, there was 'Old Mother Moore, Lived by the shore, She had children by the score. How many children did she have...' The rope was turned faster and faster, and the steps were counted until the skipper got caught up in the rope. And that was how many children Mrs Moore had. I recall that it seemed to me that the 'fastest skippers' had wonderful coordination yet were the clumsiest in school. They would fall over the blackboard or bang into a desk, drop an armful of books...but skipping a rope? Now that was coordination.

There was an unnamed rhyme chanted in the schoolground:

'Fire, fire!' yelled Mr Dwyer.

'Where, where?' said Mrs Ware.

'On the hill,' said Mrs Hill.

'Get the hose,' said Mr Rose.

'Very handy,' said Mrs Sandy...

and on and on it went, mentioning every person in town. I never did get to hear if the fire was put out and if so, by whom!

We learned to spell certain words with the 'missus'...

Mississippi: missus em, missus eye, missus ess ess eye, missus ess ess eye, missus pee pee eye'.

Parramatta: missus pee, missus aye, missus ah ah aye, missus em, missus aye, missus tee tee aye'.

Difficulty: missus dee, missus eye, missus eff eff eye, missus see, missus you, missus ell tee why'.

There was a game called 'French Cricket'. Why, I don't know. The player stood with an upright cricket bag. A person tossed the ball at the bat. The batsman hit the ball upwards and immediately called out a money

value. Being pounds, shillings and pence at the time, the call might be 2/6d (two shillings and sixpence). And so it went on and on. There could be several players and the first one to reach, say, 1 pound, or 2 pounds, was the next to be batsman. You had to catch the ball to score the money value. The 'target money' was agreed on before the game started. Fifty years later I saw another game of French cricket being played in front of a house 200 miles from here. The batsmen certainly stood with an upright bat, but the player with the ball had to hit the batsman on the leg between the knee and the ankle. The batsman would try to ward off the ball. The ball-tosser who hit the batsman's leg was next one in. Now that makes sense to me. 'Our' game was, it then occurred to me, no more than a device to make us learn mental arithmetic!

There was 'Pussy in the Corner' played on the porch on rainy days. One person in each corner and a group (probably mice), and they had to get out without being caught.

There was a poem learned in class for the school concerts. The poem was also used by adults for their 'grown-up' concerts, which were held in the local memorial, Masonic or Mechanics Institute Hall. When a grown-up delivered some heroic epic, and were

introduced, they were called 'monologuists'. I learned years later that if they said they had learned 'ellocution', chances were that they hadn't, for a good elocutionist would tell you how to correctly enunciate the word. I can recall the first two lines only:

'A pound of tea at one and three,
A tin of marmalade jam...'

and on went this shopping list in rhyme form. Occasionally I read in the 'help wanted' columns of newspapers, requests for this poem. So it seems that the senior citz 'elocutionists' still haven't remembered their shopping list...or want to bring back memories of things that were.

I hope that this has been some use to you, I wish you well in your quest – and do go back on air one day to reveal some of the best bits to us.

Sincerely,

Arthur L. Thomas.

(Arthur Thomas wrote these detailed descriptions of games he had played in primary school after hearing an ABC interview with one of the editors of Play and Folklore.

Traffic Jam

When do you get the rundown feeling?
When a car hits you.

Mary had a little lamb,
'Twas awful dumb, it's true;
It followed her in a traffic jam
And now it's mutton stew.

Little dog
Busy street
Car comes
Sausage meat

Why do people fly to Hawaii for a holiday?
Because it's too far to walk.

Why did the man sleep under the car?
He wanted to wake up oily in the morning.

What bird is like a car?
A goose, because it honks.

When is a car not a car?
When it turns into a driveway.

Yesterday my cousin Jane
Said she was an aeroplane
But I wanted further proof
So I pushed her off the roof.

A man stood on the railway line,
He heard the engine squeal.
The guard took out his little spade
And scraped him off the wheel.

What has four wheels and flies?
A garbage truck

(From June Factor's *Jumping Joke Book* 1997)

TWO LETTERS FROM THE OUTBACK



Sue Thomas

16 February 1997

'Tin trucks' are all the rage here at the moment. They are made out of Sunshine Milk tins, filled with sand and manoeuvred around with long pieces of either fishing line or fencing wire. The children are writing about them now. I think the reason they are presently in vogue is a result of the rain. This rain makes the otherwise very sandy ground a bit firmer and allows easier manoeuvrability. The same happens with bikes, they are only used when the ground is more compact. I am really intrigued with the creativity and resourcefulness of kids with very few commercial resources available...

I have managed to get two exciting things on video:

- 1) tin trucks
- 2) an old lady making a doll out of the roots of a pandanus tree.

If we could access some money, I could probably get it together to make a video on children's folklore in the Kimberley or at least at this community.

21 August 1997

At Millijidee at the moment the folklore that is rampant is string games. As children show me the parachute while I'm trying to get them on task, I think of you and the interest in children's folklore you instilled in me. I have asked B. to give you a copy of the book we published earlier this year. I managed to get a donation from some people in Melbourne, we refer to as the Melbourne Mob. This project was most rewarding and we went to Broome where Yangkana spoke in Walmajarri to a whole group of white people, which was a huge effort for her. The whole process has been really rewarding. I am about to embark on the next hunt for funding for another challenge. No rest for the wicked!

(Sue Thomas studied children's folklore at the Institute of Early Childhood Development in Melbourne in the 1980s. She now teaches at the Wulungarra Community School in Fitzroy Crossing WA.)



Millijidee W.A. Kelvin, Hylton, Nellius and Patrick demonstrating their tin trucks.

Photo: Sue Thomas

Moggies and Doggies

What goes tick, tick, woof, woof?

A watchdog.

What do you get when you cross
a dog with a lion?

A terrified postman.

Roses are red,
Violets are blue
The bulldog next door
Reminds me of you.

What do you get when you cross
a dog and an egg?

Pooched eggs.

Why do dogs scratch themselves?
*Because they are the only ones who know
where it itches.*

I wish I had some bricks
To build the chimney higher,
To stop that blasted tomcat
From putting out the fire.

What kind of dog does Count Dracula like?

A bloodhound.

What did the two seasick dogs say?

Ruff, ruff!

I once had a dog
Without any sense,
He ran round the house
And barked at the fence.

What do you call a wet pup?

A soggy doggy.

If a fat cat is a flabby tabby, what is a very
small cat?

An itty bitty kitty.

You're a dog!

Thank you for the compliment.

Dogs bark, bark is on trees,
trees are part of nature, and nature is beautiful.

There were ten cats on the boat and one
jumped out. How many were left?

None. They were all copycats.

(From June Factor's *Jumping Joke Book* 1997)

*The Aboriginal Play and Folklore
Project conducted by June Factor
and Judy McKinty has been
completed, and a final report
presented to the Stegley Foundation
who funded the project. An article
will be included in a future edition of
Play and Folklore*

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