

Children's physical well-being: a tribute to Lindsay and Palmer

Gwenda Beed Davey

For a number of years a variety of experts in children's health and well-being have expressed concern about Australian children's poor level of physical fitness. Obesity has been a common target (e.g. 'Puppy fat' a serious risk, says specialist, *The Age*, 26/7/93). Both diet and lack of physical exercise are blamed. Should children be dragged away from their computers and television sets for longer periods of structured 'physical education' as part of the school curriculum, and if so, what should the curriculum contain? This issue was addressed during the 1970s by two Queensland lecturers in physical education, P. L. Lindsay and D. Palmer, in a study which is of unparalleled importance for Australian children. In the introduction to their published report, they wrote

One lesson from a perusal of the history of physical education is that curricula have a habit of being based upon current fads. Not so long ago in Australia the fad was discipline through marching and then drill. This was followed by a comprehensive cadet (Defence Forces) system designed to 'prepare' the future citizens against foreign aggression. At the same time, attention to games would ensure the necessary 'character development' along the lines of the 'muscular Christianity' movement of the nineteenth-century public school system in England. (p.1)

Rather than attempting to devise a new curriculum in physical education based on current fads or fashions, Lindsay and Palmer decided to study the physical characteristics of the games which children traditionally played in the school playground, and

then to compare traditional playground games with existing syllabus games. Their results were published in 1981 as *Playground Game Characteristics of Brisbane Primary School Children*.

Twenty-one State primary schools in Brisbane were sampled, including children from classes I to IV, and 4824 children were observed in a game situation. Not all play activities were considered to be games; rather 'attention was given to physical activities where two or more children with observable rules of conduct proceeded towards a predetermined outcome'...(p.5) The observers studied the following elements of the children's games:

Basic play characteristics: walking, running, skipping, hopping, jumping, dodging, throwing, catching, kicking, striking, rhythm, chanting, guessing.

Play elements: physical, strategy, chance, pursuit, cardiovascular endurance, simulation.

Area of play: open, confined required, confined chosen.

Touch characteristics: momentary, short-term, sustained, spasmodic, regular, frequent, gentle, firm, rough.

Group characteristics: individual v. individual, individual v. group, group v. group, turn taking. (pp. 5-7).

Some of Lindsay and Palmer's findings are of great interest. Overall, there was a high positive correlation between syllabus games and playground games (Pearson Product Moment Correlation = 0.846) with

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both representing the basic physical needs of children. It is however the differences which are particularly striking, and some of these differences are summarised below.

Playground games v syllabus games

Syllabus games emphasised manipulation of equipment.

Syllabus games avoided children touching each other.

Playground games featured strategy, cardiovascular endurance and pursuit.

Syllabus games avoided chanting and rhythmical movement.

Sex differences in observed games

Boys preferred running freely, chasing, dodging, developing a sense of strategy and improving cardiovascular endurance. The games of Red Rover or British Bulldog were most popular.

Younger girls preferred small area games, taking turns and involving rhythm and change. Younger girls were cooperative and helped each other and some momentary touching was common.

Older girls showed similar tendencies to the boys but preferred ball games and avoided collision games.

Girls' games generally involved finer motor skills.

Group characteristics

Cooperation held sway over competition in playground games.

Children were flexible in the rules for playground games to allow for different ability levels.

Group v group characteristics prevailed in teacher-directed syllabus games.

Girls preferred playground games where the process was more important than the outcome, and boys were more concerned with winning.

Adventure playgrounds

Most activities on adventure playgrounds were not really games but more akin to free play using the equipment.

Location of game

Younger girls tended to remain close to school buildings.

The most active playgrounds with the happiest

children were those containing the greatest variety of play areas, open, covered, open grassed, bitumen covered, weather-protected areas.

Some games used the physical characteristics of buildings, eg beams and posts.

Cricket was considered a waste of space where open running areas were at a premium.

The final recommendations made by Lindsay and Palmer are worth reprinting here in full, as they highlight the value of traditional playground games for children's physical, social and psychological well-being. There is an outstanding need for new and additional studies such as that carried out by Lindsay and Palmer, and for a greater appreciation by educators of children's traditional folk culture. Lindsay and Palmer's final recommendations are as follows:



British Bulldog 1996

Recommendations

1. Teachers should encourage children to play spontaneous games. The activities provide an environment wherein children can be children and so satisfy their needs for growth and development. They learn to cooperate with one another in achievement of a common goal for, without cooperation, there can be no play and the game can terminate as quickly as it started. Not only is there a bond established between players, but any teacher or person who shows genuine interest in the games is immediately welcome. No better medium exists through which to establish good teacher-pupil relations than in play. A teacher can learn much about children and the way they think by observing them at play in a child's world.



Bar Tigg 1996

2. Playgrounds should not be divided into play areas on the basis of sex. Children establish their own play areas based upon needs. Sex stereotyping is a thing of the past; children are to be children, unhindered by adult play values.
3. Playgrounds should contain a variety of play areas, viz. open areas, confined areas, walls for ball bouncing, grass-covered areas, artificial surfaces, dirt areas, adventure playgrounds, under school areas, inclement weather play areas, shaded areas. The playground is to be regarded as an effective learning environment such that a variety of play experiences is possible.
4. The characteristics of children's play should be monitored so that syllabus planners and construction engineers can keep abreast of the changing needs of children in an ever-

changing world and can make provision for these in the school environment.

5. The teachers in Queensland should supplement the games syllabus with activities containing the elements of jumping, cardiovascular endurance, strategy and rhythmical movement. In particular, teachers should be made aware of the special needs of girls in Grades 2-4 (p.14).

Reference

P.L. Lindsay and D. Palmer (1981) *Playground Game Characteristics of Brisbane Primary School Children*, ERDC Report No 28, Education Research and Development Committee, Commonwealth Department of Education. Australian Government Publishing Service: Canberra



Elastics 1981

BRITISH BULLDOG

This version of British Bulldog was played by Connie Trifonopoulos in 1990 and 1991, when she was in Years 5 and 6 at Coburg West Primary School, Coburg, Victoria.

A rhyme is used to choose the person who is going to be 'it'. That person is placed in the middle of the ground. The other children are placed against the wall. The children run from one wall to the other. The person in the middle has to chase after them. When there's one person left, he/she has won the game. The others are in the middle with the original 'it' person.

GANG WARFARE

Lisa Phillips describes the game of Gang Warfare, which she played in 1990 and 1991 when she was in Years 5 and 6 at Brandon Park Primary School, Glen Waverley, Victoria.

The person who became 'it' was counted out (using the feet count). 'It' had to count to 100 while the group (usually 20-30) ran off. 'It' then chased around the school, tagging children. When tagged, they became 'it' too.

If you wanted to know if someone was 'it' a sign from a distance was flashed: 'V' - using index and middle fingers - meant 'it', and 'safe' was index fingers crossed.

The aim of the game was to have everyone 'it' by the end of lunch-time.

Play to Order is No Longer Play

John Evans

'Sport and recreational activities are of great importance in today's society, but organized activities cannot without serious consequences replace free and creative play, where children exercise their own initiative'. This was written by Arvid Bengtsson (1979, p.450) more than 20 years ago, but it is just as applicable today as it was then, perhaps even more so. Organised activities, both in and outside school, are replacing free and creative play in ways which should concern everyone interested in the growth and development of children.

Organised competitive sport is one of the most popular pastimes for children outside school hours and there is plenty of evidence to show they are participating at a younger and younger age. Not so long ago the first opportunity for a youngster to participate in under-age sport was late primary, even early secondary school. Prior to this the child had probably spent a good deal of time honing his or her skills with friends in the backyard at home, in the street game, and in the playground during school

recess breaks. With this experience behind them children entered sport with a reasonable grasp of the skills and knowledge required to play the game. What was also important, but usually overlooked, was that the games they organised and played in the street and playground served as important learning experiences in themselves.

As Huizinga (1955) reminds us, 'play to order is no longer play'. In sport, children 'play to order' in the sense that their participation (what they wear, when and where they play, the rules of competition, etc.) is totally controlled by adults. Children are often 'pawns' in the hands of adults who manage the game as if it were a major event and who measure their own performance as a coach by the number of wins achieved by the team.

By contrast, in games children devise and play themselves THEY create the rules, choose the teams, and take responsibility for maintaining the game action. If one person or team is dominating the game, they change the rules. It might well involve a good deal of negotiation and compromise but, as Coakley's (1984) studies have shown, children's quest for a 'fair' game overrides the needs and interests of individual players. What is most important is that the process of game construction provides children with a unique opportunity to learn and practise the social skills that are needed in peer settings. Children who are constantly placed in settings where adults are responsible for organising the activities are deprived of opportunities to make decisions and take responsibility for their own actions.

Today we see children as young as five and six years of age participating in sporting competitions on weekend mornings and weekday evenings. In sports such as swimming and gymnastics, we see children even younger involved in quite extensive training programs.

The 'athletic snowball', as it has been called, is well and truly on a roll here in Australia as in other parts of the world.

Sport is simply one of the many adult-organised activities in which children now participate outside school hours and many people, like myself, are concerned that such activities might now be occupying time which children previously devoted to free and creative play. Without wanting to overstate the issue, there is some cause for concern that children's free time is being eroded to the point where one might reasonably ask the question: 'when do the children play?'

For many youngsters the school playground at recess has been the one place where they have the opportunity to mix freely with other children and play with and on equipment not otherwise accessible to them. Recent



Free play on the monkey bars

research (Evans, 1997) suggests however, that, even in this once sacred time in the school day, children are being given fewer opportunities to construct their own play.

Schools are increasingly being held accountable for the safety of children and teachers are under pressure to meet specified learning outcomes. Together these imperatives have led to changes to the structure and organisation of recess. Many primary schools, for example, have cut afternoon recess, shortened the lunch break, and introduced rules which more clearly define and limit what, where, when and with whom children can and cannot play. Larger schools have segregated playgrounds which effectively preclude mixed age and gender play, and trees and shrubs - in which children once used to play secret games or build cubbies - are now being made off-limits. Equipment and materials which children can move (e.g. swings), build (e.g. cubbies), and manipulate (e.g. sand, water, soil) have been withdrawn because they don't conform to safety standards or have been found to be the cause of accidents and disputes.

Teachers are now required to be much more vigilant when supervising the playground and are actively discouraged from playing with the children while they are 'on duty'. There have even been cases of schools—concerned about the apparent inability of children to occupy themselves during playtime—that have organised games for them to play during lunch times. I recently heard of one school which brought in an adult to teach the children to play marbles and hopscotch!

It is a disturbing sign of the times to hear teachers say that children are finding it difficult to occupy themselves for more than 30 minutes out in the playground. But perhaps we should not be surprised when we insist on filling their time outside school hours with organised activities such as sport. Despite our many attempts to educate people about the importance of play, it is still misunderstood and devalued. We still have to confront the popular view that play is time wasted, and that such time would be better spent in some form of adult organised activity. It worries me, for example, that few objections have been raised to the reduction of playtimes in schools and to the restrictions placed on children's choice of activities. From America and England we hear of primary schools that no longer have any recess breaks. In these schools physical education and sport have become the de facto recess breaks and provide children with brief periods of activity before they are directed to return to class. The whole school day is rigidly scheduled and carefully supervised. This is not a situation we want to emulate.

There is nothing wrong with adult-organised activities, but children need time to themselves. We have lost the balance between free and organised time. We underestimate the value of play and we overestimate the importance of organised activities. The challenge for us all is to encourage everyone working with children to understand that 'play to order is not play'. Sport is not play. Organised activities at recess are not play. Nor should we even think of them as a substitute for play. The involvement of the child and the learning outcomes are quite different in each setting. Play of the child's own making is vitally important—we must resist the temptation to organise every moment of their lives.

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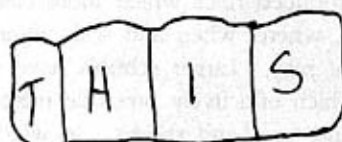
'Play of the child's own making is vitally important.'

Doggie Hand Game

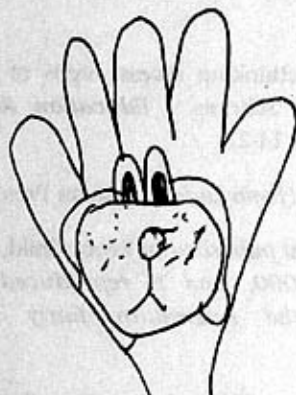
Children's drawing on hands, arms, legs and other parts of the body can sometimes produce new game possibilities. This type of ephemeral body game has not been well documented, partly because all signs of activity disappear without trace in the bath.

We are fortunate that Lauren Chibert, aged 8, has provided a clear description of her hand game, with illustrations.

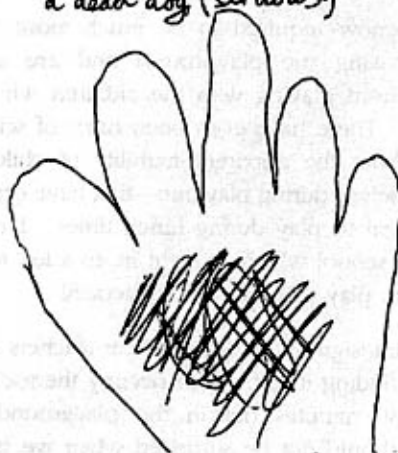
1. Write 'THIS' on your knuckles.



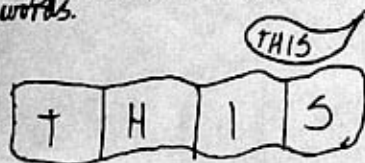
2. Draw a dog on the palm of your hand.



3. On the other hand, draw a dead dog (scribbles).



4. Say 'this' and show the words.



Then raise 'T' & 'H' so it shows is.



5. Take up all your fingers so you show the picture of the dog.



Say 'doggie' 'Doggie say!'

6. Raise the "T" & "S" so it shows "hi". ~~Once~~ While you raise the "T" & "S" say "hi".
Now you should have "This is doggie. Doggie say hi."



7. Raise ~~you~~ all your fingers so you show the dog.
Say "Oh no, doggie die!"
While you say "doggie die" you close your hand with "THIS" written on it and open your hand with the dead dog on it.

'DOCTOR, DOCTOR...'

'Doctor, doctor, I feel like a pair of curtains.'

'Well, pull yourself together then.'

'Doctor, doctor, I keep thinking I'm invisible.'

'Who said that?'

'Doctor, doctor, I feel like a five-dollar note.'

'Well, go shopping then. The change will do you good.'

'Doctor, doctor, I feel like a billiard ball.'

'Go to the end of the queue.'

'Doctor, doctor, I feel like a pack of cards.'

'Sit down, I'll deal with you later.'

'Doctor, doctor, I feel like a spoon.'

'Well, sit down and don't stir.'

'Doctor, doctor, I have a split personality.'

'One at a time please.'

'Doctor, doctor, I keep thinking I'm a strawberry.'

'Hmmm, you're really in a jam, aren't you?'

'Doctor, doctor, I've swallowed the film from my camera.'

'Sit over there and we'll see what develops.'

'Doctor, doctor, I keep thinking I'm a bird.'

'Well, perch yourself there and I'll tweet you in a minute.'

'Doctor, doctor, I think I'm a clock.'

'Don't get wound up about it.'

'Doctor, doctor, I feel like I'm covered in gold paint.'

'Don't worry, it's just a gilt complex.'

'Doctor, doctor, I keep thinking I'm a dust bin.'

'Don't talk rubbish!'

'Doctor, doctor, I keep thinking I'm a dog.'

'Sit down and tell me about it.'

'I can't. I'm not allowed on the furniture.'

'Doctor, doctor, I keep thinking I'm a goat.'

'How long have you felt like this?'

'Since I was a kid.'

Say What?

Hot off the presses is a dictionary of children's folklore called Kidspeak, a Dictionary of Australian Children's Words, Expressions and Games, compiled by Dr. June Factor, Australia's leading expert on children's lore. The book contains almost 4,500 entries, listing 'everyday words and expressions, including slang, used by Australian children and teenagers, now and in the past'. Iona Opie, in her foreword to the book, says, 'Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the dictionary is the picture it gives of the social values of the child and teenage world.'

Judy McKinty spoke with June Factor about the dictionary, which was launched on November 14 at the new Melbourne Museum.

JMcK: June, can you tell me how you came to write the dictionary?

JF: In books like *Far Out*, *Brussel Sprout* and *All Right, Vegemite*, I have a letter inviting children to write to me and send me their rhymes, riddles, jokes, sayings, and so on. I get a steady stream of letters from children and the occasional adult, and the occasional classroom of children if a teacher encourages them to write. These have been arriving since *Far Out* was published just before Christmas 1983. One of the lovely things about getting the letters, and then sending these children Collection Sheets for the dictionary, is that it means I have got material from all over the country - from the most tiny rural community to all the major cities.

I've always been fascinated by the kind of language that kids use, as well as the material they actually send me - the way they write a letter. Somewhere in the early 1990s, I formed the idea that it would be interesting to see if I could collate some of the words and expressions that children use, not only in the letters but also generally. I was interested in the colloquial, in the vernacular. Colloquial generally refers to language that is everyday, unofficial, non-formal, easy-going, slang, (most of it not peculiar to the young - adults speak colloquially as well). Vernacular tends to focus more on place or group. For example you might have the colloquial vernacular of the workplace, or you might say that a particular Aboriginal community in the Kimberley speaks a particular kind of vernacular, or a particular dialect, or whatever. So one tends to emphasise the kind of language and the other tends to emphasise group and

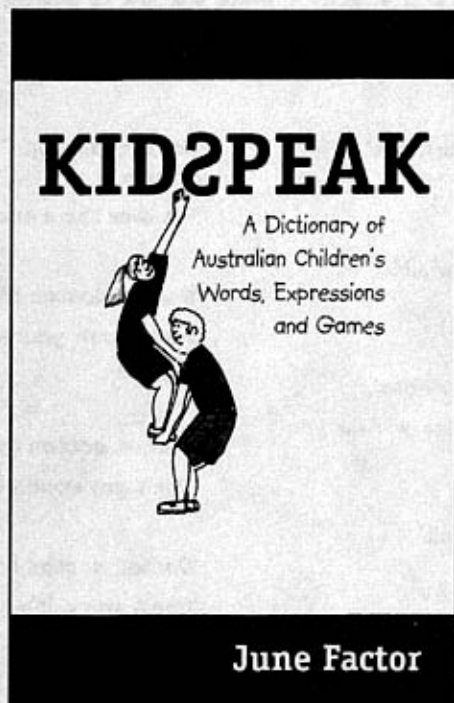
place, but basically they're very closely related. I was very interested in both these aspects.

For a very long time I've been examining what children do when nobody tells them to do anything. I'm also interested in how they communicate in these situations. Long ago I realised that there are many sub-cultures of

childhood, which may be based on something as small as a group of kids who set up a secret society and have a password, or it may encompass a much larger group, for example teenage boys in Melbourne in the mid-1970s. The dictionary reflects both those extremes, and much in between. The only language use I haven't included is what's called idiolect, that is the made-up language of an individual. Children are great language inventors. There are a handful of linguistically inventive children in every classroom, and I think that's great fun and something for teachers to encourage - the more creativity and inventiveness of language, the greater the mastery of language.

But I was trying to find what children had in common. A word

like *cool*, for example, is recognised and probably used across Australia now. Whereas a term like *budju* came from high-school kids in Darwin, and doesn't seem to be used outside the Northern Territory. *Budju*, the children told me, means someone good-looking - a good-looking girl or a good-looking bloke. So you might say, 'I saw you out with a *budju* fella last night'. None of the Aboriginal language dictionaries that I looked at had anything like it, but I had it confirmed by a number of adults as well, and for them it meant sexual intercourse. As sometimes happens, a word which has a very specific



meaning among adults may have a much more diffuse meaning among the young.

Another very good example of this is *poof*. In colloquial Australian, a *poof* is a homosexual. It's generally derogatory - it's a put-down word. However, some children said that *poof* means a fat old man, or a silly old man. It has retained its pejorative flavour, but for some children it has no sexual implications.

My definition of a child, for the purposes of the book, is anyone of school age - about four-and-a-half to about eighteen. Language patterns and traditions may vary according to age, gender, a particular interest, ethnicity, or the accident of locality.

JMcK: *Some of the words have different connotations, and some will be looked on with horror by adults. Can you tell me if you had any problems putting those words in the dictionary?*

JF: My initial publisher, Collins Dove, was very excited about the book, but I think they became worried about the effect that publishing a book of this kind might have on the sale of other of their books, and they withdrew from the project. Melbourne University Press appears not to be disturbed by the vulgar and obscene expressions which are an inevitable part of any honest dictionary of this kind. I will be very interested to see how the book is received. I make the point early in *Kidspeak* that it's not appropriate for someone making a dictionary to act as a censor, and I certainly haven't. I know that there is still a censorial subset of the Australian community. It's small, I think, but it gets particularly excited and uneasy when it comes to children. So it's possible that there will be children who will not be permitted to look at the language of children, because the book will be declared not suitable for children.

When the first major Australian collection of children's playground lore (*Cinderella Dressed in Yella* edited by the late Ian Turner) was published in 1969, it caused a stir: the Melbourne Post Office didn't want to give the publishers the subsidy for sending books in bulk because *Cinderella* was considered obscene. But by the time I co-edited the second edition with Ian Turner and Wendy Lowenstein in 1978, nobody seemed to raise an eyebrow. However, while the censors have been quiet for a time, they always seem to rise again. In particular they have a well-meaning but misplaced desire to shield children from 'bad language'. Not all children use vulgarity. Most come into some contact with it, not all choose to use it. It doesn't, I think, corrupt.

Kidspeak: A Dictionary of Australian Children's Words, Expressions and Games, compiled by June Factor and published by Melbourne University Press, Carlton.
ISBN 0 522 84790 0
RRP \$43.95

There is also a website at
<http://www.mup.com.au/kidspeak>

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Dr. June Factor

Here are some of the words and expressions found in Kidspeak, and their meanings. Many words have more than one meaning. The dictionary lists them in full.

ack attack - a severe case of acne

agatee - testicles

blood real - a marble with red stripes through it

bommyknocker - a seed pod of the liquidambar tree

chucky chicken - name for Kentucky Fried Chicken fast food

flying mackers - stylised drawings of birds which also look like the McDonald's logo

frogs' eyes - cooked sago

king - graffiti term, the best artist

movie star - a girl who is wealthy and arrogant, sardonic

skip - a person identified as being an English-speaking Australian with no other ethnic identity

spaghetti - a hospital term, when intravenous drip lines get tangled or twisted

travis - a person who overestimates his ability

underbum - Elastic term; one of the levels at which the elastic is set

wunyam - cute, appealing. Proper wunyam baby is a Kimberley Creole expression.

yonny - a stone for throwing

Halloween in Melbourne: a commercial trick or a treat for the young at heart?

Heather Russell

Another Halloween has passed. The remnants are lying on my 11-year-old daughter's bedroom floor - lolly wrappers and a slightly fuller money-box.

Tuesday night was Halloween. Six of her friends met at our house to prepare for the evening romp around the streets. This year the dressing-up theme was not witches and warlocks but a young, teen, 'Spice Girls' look. Don't ask me why. I didn't ask. Three hours in the bedroom led to a delightful display of short skirts, hippy trousers, makeup, jewellery, high-heeled thongs and curled hair. Each one had a strong bag to hold the booty and one girl also clutched a pressure can of whipped cream. As I watched them head off down the street I vaguely remembered all the warnings of previous years: 'Don't cross Heidelberg Road', 'Be back in an hour', 'Only go to people's houses that you know'. 'What are you going to do with the whipped cream?' But they were gone.

Next task - go to the milk bar for supplies. Be prepared. Sure enough, within minutes of my return we had our first customer. 'Trick or treat!' 'Trick!' I say. (How mean of me.) 'Oh, we don't have one'. I tip lollies into their open bags anyway. Their faces are triumphant.

Two hours later the Spice Girls return with the booty. Lots of lollies, money (much excitement) and half a can of whipped cream. (Do I really want to know where the other half is?) Neighbourhood gossip, funny stories and much laughter as they spill out the spoils on the kitchen table and make certain the distribution is fair and equitable. Goodness knows how these sassy girls have extracted such spoils from the neighbours. But they are

very pleased with their efforts.

Next morning I hear radio announcers again decrying the state of the nation, as children's celebration of Halloween is reported as yet another example of an American cultural take-over, and what's worse, directing our youngsters to act in morally dubious ways. Troubled parents ring in. This year the Church weighs in, warning teachers against holding Halloween parties. The minister at my mother's church delivered a sermon suggesting that children might be frightened by the notion that Halloween is the night where the divide between the living and the dead is narrowed and the spirits of the dead are supposed to mill around. Should we be exposing them to such scary ideas?

Some years ago I was asked by the Australian Broadcasting Commission to speak about this American ritual appearing more frequently on Melbourne's streets. But before I got to air my views, another historian was found. He said all the things I would have said about the links between Halloween and the festival of Samhain, which marked the end of summer and the beginning of the Celtic New Year. Many of the popular Halloween rituals still celebrated in Ireland, Scotland, Canada and the USA can be traced back to this festival, such as dressing up as witches, wearing scary masks, and going door-to-door asking for food in return for the performance.

This was an informative history lesson, but little was spoken about whether the Halloween tradition was a healthy addition to the Australian children's calendar. Historians are generally not experts in children's folk customs, nor do they explain the reasons behind apparently trivial and 'puerile' customs of our young ones. Listeners to this discussion on Halloween were left with the feeling that yes, trick or treating is an American 'import'. End of story.

On November 1, 1998, the Melbourne 'Age' ran a piece on Halloween, its pagan beginnings, various efforts of the Christian church to 'smother' certain of the more nasty pagan rituals, and dilemmas that living in the southern hemisphere present for modern-day Australian pagans. Again, a great history lesson but not enlightening for a parent who was wondering whether or not she should be encouraging its celebration.



Halloween 1998 - Who's at the door? Witches and ghosts awaiting their treats

The Australian Folklore Association ran a piece in their December 1997 newsletter, written by well known folklorist Graham Seal, called 'The Consumer's Calendar: observations on the commercialisation of tradition'. Halloween featured in the calendar, with Seal describing the connections between Halloween and Christian feasts 'All Saints' and 'All Souls Day', and noting that 'the commercialisation of Halloween began in America but has since spread to the UK and Australia'. Again I ask: What are we to make of this? Do we stop celebrating calendar traditions such as Easter, Christmas or Halloween in protest at the commercialism? Seal gives us no guidance.

In summary, the experts tell us that Halloween is:

- an imported American ritual and therefore unsuitable or inappropriate for Australians to celebrate
- a commercialised ritual promoted to benefit sweets manufacturers
- related to a festival or celebration of the dead, which makes it potentially unsuitable for children.

As I reflect on my own children's experience of Halloween, I don't 'see' potential dangers. What I do see is children having a great time, taking over the streets, dressing up in disguise (which gives license to act out of character, reversing the normal adult/child power balance), being cheeky, offering up 'threats' if gifts are not forthcoming (watch out for the whipped cream!). As I have heard of no media reports in Melbourne of larrikin tricks that injured or offended anyone, I assume children's 'threats' are mild and inoffensive. But children do eat more lollies as a result of Halloween. I spent \$4 on a bag of mixed lollies. Is this dangerous commercialism?

One of the curious things about children's interest in continuing the traditions of Halloween is that as far as I can tell, nobody is telling them to do this. There are no newspapers, radio or television commercials in Australia exhorting children to go out into the streets for Halloween. Where is the commercial push? (Indeed, many neighbours are not prewarned and sometimes don't have supplies at hand!)

I recently grilled my 14-year-old son about how and where he got the idea to go 'Halloweening'. After much thought he said, 'From my friends'. He heard that others were doing it and thought, here's a good one! Dress up in fancy clothes, knock on neighbours' doors and they give you lollies. Sounds great fun. And why not?

The 'bible' of children's folk traditions, Iona and Peter Opie's *The Lore and Language of School Children* (1959)



Halloween 2000 - Trick or treat? It's the Spice Girls

offers some insight into the changes and the continuity of traditions in England and Scotland. They acknowledge that Halloween in the 1950s was widely practised in Scotland and areas of England with a high proportion of Irish, or as they so neatly put it, 'by most English-speaking children who do not, five nights later, rejoice over the death of Guy Fawkes'. The Opies describe 'first hand' children's experience of dressing up in weird disguises, singing for the neighbours, then receiving a gift of apples, nuts or money. This tradition was called 'guising'. Guising songs often contained threats if the neighbours were not cooperative. Traditional games were apple dooking and fortune-telling - for example, throwing an apple peel over your left shoulder. The shape of the fallen apple peel foretells the initial of the man you will marry (p. 268). The fact that these accounts of children's activities are very similar in nature to the American trick or treat tradition is not surprising given the Celtic and Scottish origins of many Americans.

I particularly like the Opies' introduction to their chapter entitled 'The Children's Calendar', as it contains some useful insights for confused parents such as myself. They note that customs such as Halloween are the most living calendar celebrations because they are the most spontaneous, that is, undirected by adults. If they sometimes appear to involve begging, this does not necessarily mean that children of today have become decadent. The Opies remark that 'in the days of "merry England", it was always appreciated that the seasonal ritualist was worthy of hire; that if ceremonial was to be maintained it must be paid for in the street just as much as in the church.' (p. 232) Furthermore, 'it is curious that in these days when parents are habitually indulgent to children in the way of gifts and pocket money, they should take it amiss when - in the hope of reward - children sing a traditional song'. They also point out that curtailing or censoring these activities, mainly through actions by police may ultimately be regretted by adults if they, 'from one year's end to the next [are] never visited by a youngster announcing a new season'. (p. 233)

The Opies' comments are enlightening. Halloween customs played out by my children and their friends may be a copy of the American trick or treat, but all these customs are derived from Celtic and Scottish Halloween traditions. Traditions migrate and change constantly. This is nothing new and certainly no reason for denigration. If it's a good custom, why not adopt it? Maybe over time an Australian variation will emerge.

The nature of trick or treat is that the treat is 'earned' by way of a clever disguise or reciting a rhyme or song. It is not begging. Knowing this, I intend to explain the nature of the trick or treat 'contract' with my children. If the neighbours feel they have been entertained, more effort is likely to be put into finding a treat. This perhaps takes

the emphasis off just expecting to be given gifts, and threatening retribution if the treat is not forthcoming.

Curtailing or denigrating customs which in Australia are quite spontaneous and reassuringly benign may ultimately be adults' (as well as children's) loss. The American import/crass commercialism argument is perhaps another disguise for controlling children's spontaneity, or at the very least being suspicious of it. But it is unlikely to stop the children who chant:

Trick or treat

Smell my feet

Give me something good to eat!

Halloween in England

Mavis Curtis, who teaches at Sheffield University, has sent us an email describing her recollections of Mischief Night:

When I was young in the 1940s, in West Yorkshire, Hallowe'en was not marked in any way; but what we did celebrate was Mischief Night, November 4th, which was enjoyed as much, if not more, than Bonfire Night itself.

On Mischief Night you had the freedom to do whatever you liked, which would normally have been thought of as anti-social. So we could knock on doors and run away, tie dustbin lids to doors so they came off when people answered our knock, take gates off their hinges. Fortunately we were rather lacking in imagination and the things we tried to do often didn't work anyway. You were supposed to be able to tie two doors together so people wouldn't be able to open them when you knocked (this was in back-to-back housing where the houses were very close together) but I don't remember this ever having worked. I think some of our ideas were derived from comics, where tricks always did work!

The idea of being naughty without any come-back from adults was extremely appealing, and I can still recall that tingle up the spine as I set off in the dark with my piece of 'touch' to meet up with my mates. 'Touch' was thick string impregnated with oil which we used to light fireworks, and which our dads brought from the mill. (Most of the adults in the neighbourhood worked in the local woollen mills.)

Mischief Night lasted into the 1970s, when my children were young, but now seems to have been overtaken in the popularity stakes by Hallowe'en. Trick-or-treating is very popular here. Children dress up and can get quite abusive if you don't want to give them anything. Though American cultural imperialism really gets up my nose, I comfort myself with the thought that most American customs originate in Europe.

Know someone who would enjoy

Play and Folklore?

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Please note that from July 2000 there will be a slight increase in the cost of subscriptions to Play and Folklore, which will enable us to cover production costs. The new prices include the GST for Australian readers.

Peach, Pear, Plum

A game of our times?

Judy McKinty

Towards the end of 1996 I was conducting research in Orbost, Victoria, when I came across a game I had not previously discovered. Orbost is a fairly typical Victorian country town, located about 440 kilometres east of Melbourne on the rich river flats of the Snowy River. It has a population of around 3700 people, and relies for its livelihood on agriculture - particularly the growing of vegetables, dairy and beef farming, and the timber industry.

There are three primary schools in the town - Orbost, Orbost North and St. Joseph's, and another primary school is located approximately 10 kilometres away at Newmerella. Orbost Primary School is the biggest in the district, with around 190 children, and this was the school where I first heard of the game, *Peach, Pear, Plum*.

The name of the game appears to be borrowed from a rhyme which has been circulating in school playgrounds for at least 40 years. In 1959, in *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (pp. 115, 386), Iona and Peter Opie listed two rhymes with similar combinations of words. The first begins:

*Each, peach, pear, plum,
I spy Tom Thumb...*

The second is a counting-out rhyme which begins:

*Eachy, peachy, peary, plum,
Throwin' tatties up the lum...*

Ian Turner's compilation of Australian children's rhymes, *Cinderella Dressed in Yella* (pp. 11, 49), published ten years later, gave two examples of rhymes with the same opening line:

*Each, peach, pear, plum,
Out goes Tom Thumb.*

*Each, peach, pear, plum,
I spy Tom Thumb...*

Twenty years after *Cinderella*, the rhyme was still around but had become:

*Inch, pinch, pear, plum,
I smell Tom Thumb...*
(Children's Museum of Victoria, 1989)

Peach, Pear, Plum, as it is played at Orbost Primary School, is a departure from this rhyming tradition. The combination of words is employed in the playing of a very contemporary game. *Peach, Pear, Plum*, simulates a game played on what is commonly referred to as a 'fruit machine' - otherwise known as a poker machine. It is a game for two people, and my 9-year-old informant assured me that it was played all year round, mostly by girls in Grade 3, and was useful for filling in time when standing in line, 'like hand claps'. She also said that the game was not as popular now as it had been in previous years. When asked what the game was about, she said, 'I think it's like those pokie machines, and when you go "Jackpot!" you pull it down like all the money's coming out.'

The game is played like this:

1. One person puts her arms out straight and crosses them at the elbows. She twists her hands around in order to clasp them together, then bends her elbows, bringing her hands together near her chin. (*Her arms are the 'handle' of the 'fruit machine'.*) She stands like this the whole time. The second person stands facing her, and does all the actions.
2. The second person touches her on the right shoulder, then the head, then the left shoulder, counting 'Peach, pear, plum' as she does so. (*A 'fruit machine' has three spinning cylinders with different pictures on them, and when they stop three pictures - often of fruit - are lined up in the display window.*)
3. The first person chooses one of the fruit, say, pear.
4. The count is then repeated, but changes to 'Pear, pear, plum'. Each fruit chosen is paired, and is counted first. The remaining single fruit changes with each turn. (*In a 'fruit machine' players are sometimes able to freeze the picture/s they want to save, while the remaining cylinder/s spin again.*)
5. The player chooses again, say, plum, and the count becomes 'Plum, plum, peach'. (If the second player wants to vary the game, the names of other fruit can be introduced as the last word in the count, in this instance instead of peach.)

6. This can go on for some time, until the first person finally chooses a fruit which is already one of the pair, e.g. if the count is, say, 'Peach, peach, plum', and peach is chosen, this makes a match of three. The count becomes, 'Peach, peach, peach', and the counter pulls the first player's arms downwards while calling out 'Jackpot!'

Pulling down the arms causes pain, and results in a reaction (grimace, 'ouch!', etc.) from the player whose arms were the 'handle' in the game.

Here is the game in sequence. The chosen fruit is in italics:

Peach, *pear*, plum.

Pear, *pear*, plum.

Plum, plum, *apple*.

Apple, apple, *peach*.

Peach, peach, *grape*.

Grape, grape, *pear*.

Pear, *pear*, plum.

Pear, *pear*, pear.

Jackpot!

While trying to discover the history of the game in the district, I learned that it was known only to the children of Orbost Primary School. Children at the other two schools in town and the Newmerella school nearby did not know the game when I described it to them. I could only trace it back for approximately three years (my informant thought she learned it when she was in Grade 1), and none of the local adults I asked had played the game at school.

The use of poker machines was heavily restricted in Victoria until the proclamation of the *Gaming Machine Control Act* in 1991, which introduced 'wide area gaming'. Prior to the Act, Victorians crossed the State border into New South Wales, to use the machines in various gaming clubs in towns along the Murray River. Metropolitan Melbourne had poker machines in only one location, a 'Tabaret', which had opened in November 1990 and was operated by the giant gambling promoter Tabcorp under a special licence.

In July 1992 Tabcorp extended its 'Tabaret' venues across the State, and poker machines rapidly spread into the hotels and clubs of the smallest rural communities. 'Playing the pokies' soon entered the vernacular, and the activity became a regular pastime for adults all over Victoria. With the spread of the machines came advertisements for this 'new' gambling

activity. So poker machines, while familiar enough to many adults, did not intrude into the everyday lives of children in Victoria until after July, 1992, although the machines introduced into Victoria were the latest electronic devices with push-buttons, not handles. This suggests that the origin of the game may lie in another place, with a previous generation of mechanical machines.

Recently, I asked a 10-year-old Melbourne friend if she knew the game. When I described how the game was played in Orbost she remembered playing it at her school 'ages ago' in Grade 3, in 1998. She said that it was mostly played by girls in Grades 2-4, aged 7-9. She also called it *Peach, Pear, Plum*, and played it with a variation. Instead of introducing new fruits into the game, the players had to keep to the original three, which meant that the single fruit changed each time to the one which was not mentioned in the last count. For example (chosen fruit is in italics):

Peach, *pear*, plum.

Plum, plum, *peach*.

Peach, peach, *pear*.

Pear, *pear*, plum.

Plum, plum, *peach*.

Peach, peach, *pear*.

Pear, *pear*, plum.

Plum, *plum*, peach.

Plum, plum, plum.

Jackpot!

The game could also be played using any combination of three related words, e.g. fish, crab, jellyfish, or grass, tree, flower.

I would be grateful to hear from any readers who may have come across this game in the course of their research, or who play/ed this game at school. I am interested to find out if it is an old game revisited, or a product of our times.

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1. Making the 'bundle'



4. Plum



2. Peach



5. Jackpot!



3. Pear

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