



# Play and Folklore

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Two issues per year, published by History & Technology Department, Museum Victoria,  
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Available on the web at [www.museum.vic.gov.au/playfolklore](http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/playfolklore)  
Design Layout: Carolyn McLennan

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## TWO CELEBRATIONS



This issue of *Play and Folklore* marks two achievements worth celebrating: 25 years of publication (with the same editors), and the award of a large grant by the Australian Research Council.

Launched with the rhyme 'Tic tac toe/ Here we go/ Where we land/ I do not know', *Play and Folklore* began in 1981 as the *Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter*. The newsletter was produced in association with the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at the Institute of Early Childhood Development in Melbourne. That collection is now housed at Museum Victoria, which also publishes *Play and Folklore*, and in 2004 the collection was honoured by UNESCO – listed on its Australia Memory of the World Register as an outstanding, nationally and internationally significant archive of children's playlore.

In July 2006, the Australian Research Council (the country's major funding body for scholarly research) announced the award of a four-year grant for a project entitled 'Childhood, Tradition and Change: a national study of the historical and contemporary practices and significance of Australian



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children's folklore'. The research team will produce the first comprehensive national analysis of the continuity and variation of Australian children's playlore from the 1950s to the present. It is expected to make a major contribution to international playlore and cultural heritage studies, and to Australian histories of childhood.

Partners in the project are academics from three universities, Melbourne, Deakin and Curtin, together with the National Library of Australia and Museum Victoria. The Principal Chief Investigator is Professor Kate Darian-Smith, and Principal Researchers are Dr June Factor and Dr Gwenda Davey - all members of the Reference Committee for the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at Museum Victoria.

We hope to bring you regular reports on the progress of the project, and welcome contributions from scholars engaged in similar research in other countries.

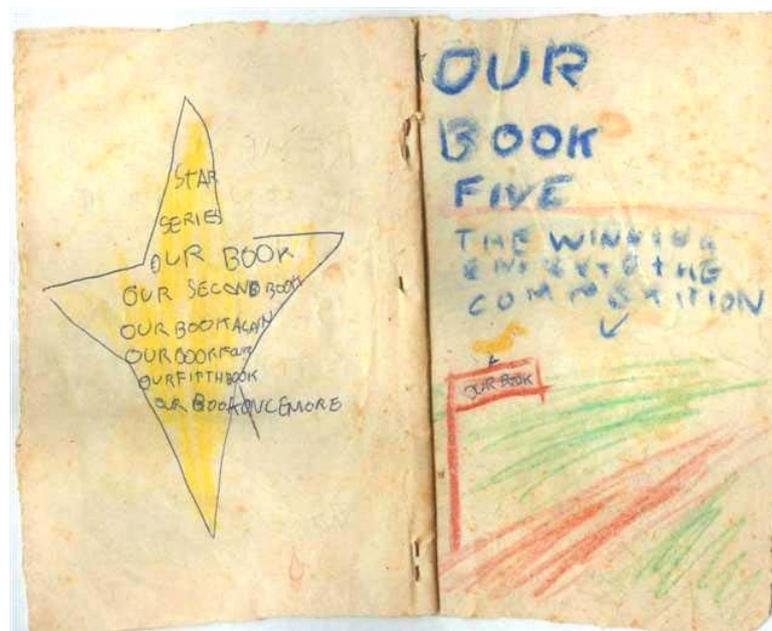
*June Factor and Gwenda Davey*

## 'BLOWN AWAY' BY FOLKLORE

**Jill Watson**

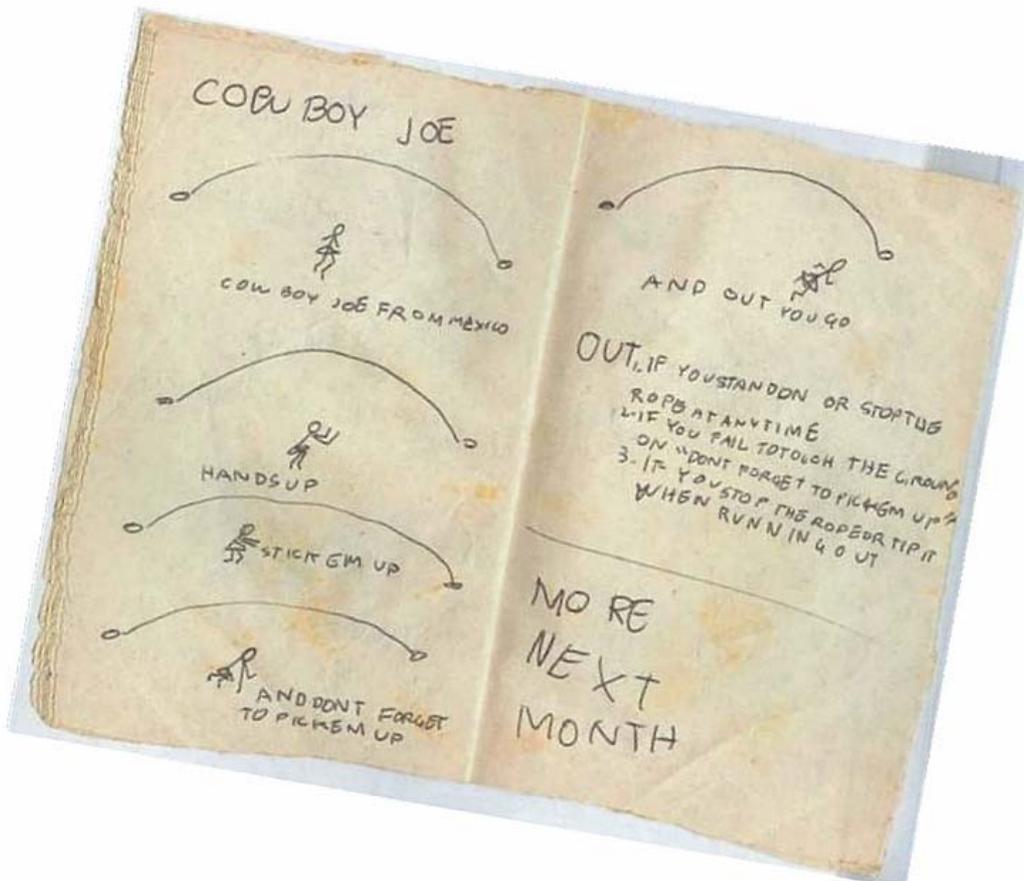
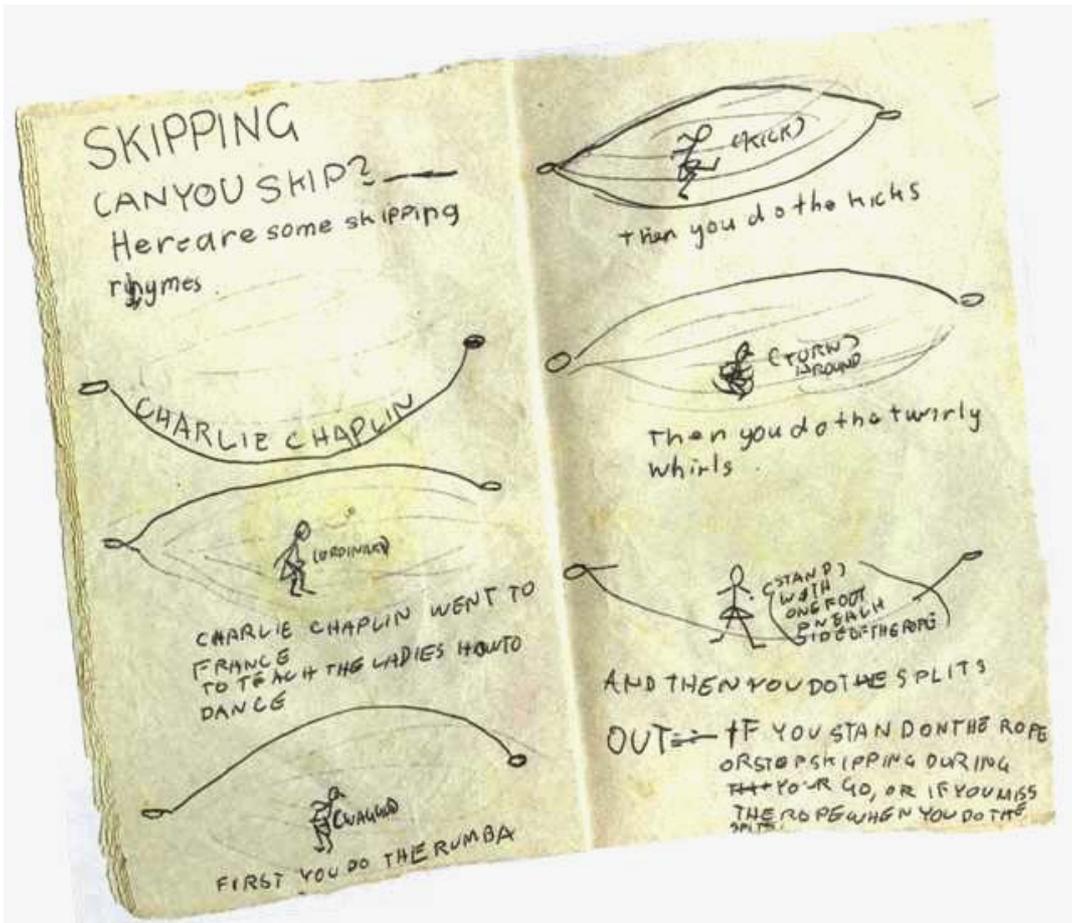
*Jill Watson was 12-years-old at a Melbourne outer-suburban school when she put together a collection of games and accompanying rhymes.*

I made these books over a period of a year or more from sometime in Grade 6 (1966) to Form 1 (1967), and the skipping rhymes are the ones we sang in the playground at Tullamarine Primary School. I'm pretty sure that 'Policeman, Policeman do your duty' was taught to us by an American girl. We had a few American classmates at the time whose fathers were involved in working on building the Melbourne airport at Tullamarine. I think they were what inspired me to start writing the rhymes down, because I was so impressed by the way this playground knowledge (and the jokes we told) had spread around the world as well as down the generations. It was the similarity in many of the words between 'Policeman, Policeman' and 'Charlie, Charlie' (which I knew earlier) that struck me very strongly. Although I didn't have the words to express it, I was totally blown away by the whole concept of the folklore process/oral transmission.



Pages from one of Jill Watson's books, 1966-67





Pages from one of Jill Watson's books, 1966-67



## PLAY IN AN INTERNMENT CAMP

Bruno Werner Weinmann

*During the Second World War in Australia, hundreds of people, mostly men but also some families, were interned as enemy aliens. One of the internment camps, at Tatura, rural Victoria, included a community of German Templars, and German Lutherans from Palestine. One of the Lutheran children of the community, Bruno Weinmann, has written a memoir of his time in Camp 3 at Tatura, which did not end until 1947. The children played with whatever was at hand. The following are extracts from the memoir.*

Once, no doubt when I was old and strong enough to walk, I was allowed to join the whole camp on a swimming excursion to the Warranga basin. I remember my excitement and joy in anticipation. One day earlier my sister joined me in making toy motor vehicles out of a rectangular piece of wood, four circular (and sharp-edged) discs of tin from food cans and a few nails. We took them with us. I recall walking to the basin with the throng, wading in the water, playing with my 'truck', walking home tired with my sister and the rest of the throng and then having a sleep.

Gulls were a source of joy to kids because they could be chased, herded, trapped, out-manoeuvred in cavalry charges and bombed with pebbles and missiles which were either thrown or shot with shanghais (slingshots)... somewhat older boys might have made shanghais called 'Dey-Deys'. These were made of strips of rubber and bits of leather.

Kids older than me used to collect tubes like toothpaste containers and melt them down and then pour the molten metal into moulds carved out of wood, sand and clay. The metal was called lead in my family, but obviously it had to be zinc, or alloy of tin or zinc. My brother made a tiny sword in such a way... One day I swallowed it, resulting in a trip to hospital.

Kite crazes flourished. Because of the windiness all had long tails of tassellated paper. I recall only a few shapes and of these the most common was hexagonal. These were made of three sticks tied at the centres and spaced at the outer sides with string. Paper was pasted to these perimeter strings with glue made as simply as flour mixed with water. I was too young to make them but I often saw them aloft.

I noticed that the older boys played Cowboys and Indians. They shouted 'Darghk, darghk' to simulate gunshot noises. They made shooting irons out of wood. I was too small to be involved in that.

Once I was taken to a magical, Disneyland construction which older boys had built of the always extensive firewood dumps. It was a castle, complete with towers, redoubts and crenellated linking walls. The whole thing was much taller than toddler size. I was a toddler and so its effect on me was enchanting, fable like, magical, romantic. I could actually go into each tower and stand and peer out of the loopholes! Sadly it didn't last more than a few hours for interests of safety, and the voracity of the cooking and water heating furnaces decreed its razing, like Titus flattened the temple. My father was employed to stoke those furnaces and he had huge leather gloves to protect his hands to do it effectively. I bet he was one of the band of savage barbarians who laid siege to and tore our crusader castle to the ground.



You might think that my infancy was unusual, abnormal, exciting, strange, weird, etc. I assure you that well into my teens, I did not think so. From a lifetime of teaching children I have learned that unless children are extremely badly treated, especially by their families, they tend to think that their lives are usual, normal, ordinary, mundane, etc. As an infant in camp I was surrounded by a close-knit, loving community with carefully developed and exemplary standards of nurturing, education, responsibility, welfare, ethics, justice and honesty. Besides that, our jailers, the good people of the Australian army and their employees, behaved with such unerring decency towards us that they deserve to be treated by today's generations as honoured heroes and as a worthy example to the rest of the world. So it is no wonder that as an infant I was entirely happy, content and comfortable.

Bruno Weinmann's memoir, 'A Schoolboy's Memories, Life in Camp 3, Tatura', is available from the Tatura Museum, Hogan Street, Tatura, Victoria 3616

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## WHAT'S HAPPENED TO RECESS: Examining Time Devoted to Recess in Pennsylvania's Elementary Schools

Michael M. Patte

### **Introduction**

Recess time has been a staple of the elementary [primary] school day in the United States for generations. Playing games like Kick Ball, Four Square, Knock Out, King of the Hill, Freeze Tag, Kick the Can, Dodge Ball and Capture the Flag provided hours of unstructured fun in the sun. The colors, sights and sounds experienced during recess etched lasting memories and impressions still vivid today. Such experiences offered a break from the rigors of the school day and provided the physical, cognitive and social rejuvenation that our developing bodies and minds longed for. But are these experiences available for children today, or are they no more than a faded memory from the nostalgic past?

While fond memories of recess abound for grown-ups, many elementary school children today will have very different memories. Many school districts in the United States are reducing or eliminating time devoted to recess, due in part to increasing school and teacher accountability for student performance on US state-mandated standardised tests and the belief that time is more wisely spent on academic subjects. This trend is not new. Doris Bergen in *Play as a Learning Medium* (1974) espoused similar concerns over thirty years ago:

*When early learning is defined as being only academic learning, play is often taken out of the curriculum to achieve these goals. The elementary school years have traditionally valued work in the classroom and have relegated play to recess time only. Kindergarten [prep grade] teachers are reporting that with increasing emphasis on accountability for reaching early academic objectives, there is now less time for play in their classrooms. And often the movement toward educational content in the preschools is interpreted in ways which cause downgrading or even abandonment of play time in preschools as well.*



Since 1990, 40 percent of the nation's 16,000 school districts have either modified, deleted or are considering deleting recess from the daily elementary school schedule due to increased pressure from numerous sources to improve academic achievement (American Association for the Child's Right to Play, 2004). Of particular significance is the *No Child Left Behind Act*.]

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) into law. This legislation provides school districts with options for spending federal education dollars, in exchange for setting standards for student achievement and holding teachers and schools accountable for results. NCLB is designed to hold all students to high academic standards. States disaggregate data for students by poverty, race, disabilities and limited



Source – Michael M. Patte

English proficiencies to ensure that no child, regardless of background, is left behind. The law is intended to create an environment in which every child can learn and succeed. But does reducing or eliminating time devoted to recess benefit academic learning? Or can recess actually improve student academic success in school?

Recent studies challenge the belief that reducing or eliminating recess will improve children's academic achievement. For example, Healy (1998) found that excessive periods of academic instruction may impair our ability to learn and retain material. Similar research reported by Jarrett et al (1998) found children's attention to be greater on the days when they had recess. According to Skrupskelis (2000), the phenomenon of reducing time for recess has no credible research to back it up, and is actually counter-productive to increasing the academic achievement of students. Further, a series of studies conducted in Canadian schools by Martens (1982) speaks to the importance of recess as a vehicle for improving academic success. The schools in the studies increased the time children spent engaged in physical activity to one-third of the total school day. Though the students spent significantly less time on academic subjects, scholastic achievement levels increased.

Each semester, as I read my undergraduate early childhood field experience journals, I noticed student comments referencing a lack of free time devoted throughout the school day for children to play in many of their field sites. The journal entries exposed a culture where students were stressed-out and overwhelmed by the demands for academic success. These experiences were similar to the ones I encountered in the later stages of my twelve-year elementary school teaching career. In my school, many of the extra-curricular activities that provided freedom and outlets for both students and faculty were eliminated in favour of additional time for structured academic learning.



In response to the comments from the field journals and my own elementary teaching experience, I developed an action research project for undergraduate early childhood education students to carry out in school districts throughout the state of Pennsylvania, to discover just how widespread were the practices endangering recess.

## Results

The action research project sought to document teacher and administrator perceptions about the importance of recess in each of their schools. A combination of 60 elementary school teachers and administrators, representing 60 public elementary schools throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, responded to a 12-question recess survey. Responses to the recess survey questions have been synthesized here into categories denoted by the questions which head each section.

Do you believe recess is a necessary part of the school day?

An overwhelming 98 percent of participants believed recess was a necessary part of the school day. The variety of reasons justifying their position mirror studies highlighted in the literature review and are explored in the next section.

Do you believe recess contributes to child development?

Ninety-eight percent of participants believed recess contributed to the cognitive, social and emotional development of children. Participants found plenty of opportunities on the playground for cognitive development, including 'engagement in thought-provoking activities, implementation of strategies, development of problem-solving skills, experimentation with assimilation and accommodation, enhancement of auditory, perceptual, and visual skills, and opportunities for discovery, exploration and investigation'.



Source – Michael M. Patte



In addition, many participants believed that recess breaks throughout the day improved children's attentiveness and decreased restlessness, a finding in line with Jambor's (1994) surplus energy theory. One teacher said that 'recess provides the children with time to expend energy without which the children would be unable to concentrate on afternoon lessons'. Another remarked that 'recess is the time when students can let all of their stress from academics out into the open and relieve their minds of work. They feel relieved and fresh to learn more and be more focused after their recess time'. Yet another teacher expressed the growing frustration felt by many as schools decrease time for recess in favor of additional time preparing for standardized achievement tests:

*Children need a break from learning at times. It allows them to get their energy out and simply be a kid, instead of just putting their nose to the grindstone to measure up to some testing standard.*



Source – Michael M. Patte

Participants in the study also found daily recess important because such open-ended experiences provided opportunities for diversion from boredom and increased on-task attention, an assertion also advanced by the novelty theory (Jambor, 1994). One teacher explained:

*The students need a break throughout the day, otherwise instruction would be ineffective and students would be off task.*

Other teachers expressed similar sentiments:

*When children are given a short period of time to exercise and get fresh air, they are much more willing and able to concentrate in class.*

*Most kids need a brain break throughout the day.*



Providing opportunities for social and emotional development were additional reasons the educators believed recess was a necessary part of the school day, a position also supported by Jarrett and Maxwell (2000). Teachers commented that 'children learn how to solve problems on the playground'; 'children need recess for developing social skills'; 'interacting with diverse groups of people is a by-product of daily recess'; 'developing conflict resolution skills outside of the classroom is a social benefit of recess'; 'practising morals and learning right from wrong are life lessons learned on the playground'; and 'developing empathy and peer mediation skills are valuable social skills honed through daily recess'.

An additional benefit of recess identified by participants was improved classroom behavior. One teacher summarized this idea: 'Children need time to let loose and play so they don't do it in the classroom.' Another teacher agreed: 'Recess makes a huge difference in how children behave for the rest of the day!' A school principal expressed similar feelings: 'Recess gives children time to burn off excess energy with their friends, energy not needed in the classroom'. These school personnel believe recess may minimize disruptive classroom behavior, a finding consistent with that of Bogden & Vega-Matos (2000).

Does your school devote time for recess each day?

Ninety-seven percent of the Pennsylvania school districts represented in the action research project offered daily recess. Most of the recess time took place directly following lunch period in the late morning or early afternoon. This finding is encouraging in the present-day climate of increasing teacher and school accountability for student academic performance and the downgrading of daily recess. Further, the 97 percent of Pennsylvania elementary schools included in the action research study that offered recess was several points higher than the 90 percent of schools offering recess in a 1989 survey conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (Pellegrini, 1995).

How many minutes are devoted to recess each day?

The average time devoted to daily recess among the 60 Pennsylvania school districts represented in the action research project was 20 minutes. This daily recess time was in line with the schools included in the 1989 survey conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals which reported an average of 15–20 minutes devoted to daily recess (Pellegrini, 1995).

How many minutes do you believe should be devoted to recess each day?

The participants believed an average of 30 minutes should be devoted to daily recess in their schools. This represents an increase of ten minutes on the average time presently offered throughout the 60 Pennsylvania school districts included in the action research project. How does 30 minutes of daily recess time compare to the time devoted to daily recess in other countries? According to Pellegrini (1995), some British primary schools have three recess periods a day – 15 minutes in the mornings and afternoons and 80–90 minutes at lunch. Japanese schools have 10–20 minute recess periods between 45–minute lessons or 5–minute breaks between lessons, with a long play period after lunch (Lewis, 1995). In Taiwan, schools have several recess periods throughout the day, including a 5–minute transition period after recess before they are expected to settle down to their assigned work.



Has the time devoted to recess in your school decreased/increased recently? How many minutes was recess decreased/increased?

Fifty percent of the Pennsylvania school districts represented in the action research project decreased daily recess time recently, while none of the schools increased daily recess time recently, according to the participants. Of the schools that decreased daily recess time recently, an average of 15 minutes was lost and reassigned to academic tasks. This finding correlates with the results of a 1989 survey by the National Association of Elementary School Principals which found 40 percent of our nation's 16,000 school districts have either modified, deleted or are considering deleting recess from the daily school schedule (Pellegrini, 1995).

To what do you attribute the decrease/increase in time devoted to recess?

According to participants, the school districts that decreased daily recess time felt pressure to do so due to increased school and teacher accountability for student performance on state-mandated assessments, and due in part to the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, a finding echoed by Skrupskelis (2000). This explanation was also advanced by Jambor and Guddemi (1992) and Pellegrini (1995), who identified an argument school districts use to justify the reduction or elimination of recess: there is no time for recess because more instructional time is needed.

The following participant comments highlight the pressure to perform on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessments (PSSA) test: 'The only reason we were asked to decrease recess time is to allow more preparation time for the PSSAs'; 'Our recess time decreased due to an increased focus on teaching the state academic standards in class to prepare students for success on the PSSA'; 'Recess seems to be an endangered species, at one time it was central to education and now it is being pushed aside in favor of test preparation'; 'Teachers are also experiencing the burden of reduced time for recess because less time on the playground means more time spent in the classroom'; 'I am often put in the position of having to skip my afternoon recess unless all of my children had a great day and accomplished all of their learning activities'.

Pennsylvania school districts certainly felt pressure to reduce or eliminate daily recess time due to the Federal *No Child Left Behind Act*. 'The *No Child Left Behind Act* has pretty much cut the time for all in school extra-curricular activities like recess in favor of more academic tasks'; 'Since the passage of NCLB our school district is under pressure to promote academics ahead of other areas of child development'; 'Recess in our school district is on the ropes due to the NCLB legislation'; 'I find it hard to believe that even though there are plenty of studies and research proving recess is essential for learning, schools are being forced to eliminate recess time because of the NCLB Act'; 'Since the passage of NCLB, recess has been taken out of our curriculum'; 'The elimination of recess in our district stems from the panic of NCLB and the pressure administration is putting on our faculty and staff'.

Was the decision to decrease/increase the time devoted to recess in your school made collectively or unilaterally?

Ninety-three percent of Pennsylvania school districts that reduced daily recess time made the decision to do so unilaterally, without input from the teachers or parents. Only 7 percent of school districts involved other stakeholders in the decision to reduce daily recess time.



Do you believe eliminating/reducing time for recess is a mistake?

One hundred percent of the participants viewed the elimination or reduction of time devoted to daily recess as a mistake to be avoided.

Do you believe eliminating/reducing time for recess will have negative implications for children?

One hundred percent of the participants believed that eliminating or reducing time for daily recess would have negative implications for children. A summary of the negative implications provided by teachers included: 'lacking social interactions possibly leading to personality disorders'; 'lacking the proper social skills to get along with others'; 'becoming antsy and being unable to concentrate'; 'lowering the self-esteem of children who are non-academic'; 'decreasing classroom energy and enthusiasm for learning'; 'becoming bored and just going through the motions'; 'reducing the quality of student work'; 'becoming academically burned-out'; 'impacting the development of the whole child'; and 'increasing problem behaviors in the classroom'.



Source – Michael M. Patte

Do you believe eliminating/reducing time for recess is based upon solid research?

Ninety-seven percent of the participants did not believe eliminating or reducing daily recess time was based upon solid research, but rather due to pressure demanding increased school and teacher accountability for student academic performance. A sample of teacher responses summarizing this notion include: 'I have not found any research that shows how eliminating recess correlates to improving our test scores'; 'It's amazing how adults are manipulating other adults to believe something is true when



there is little to no research supporting the elimination of recess'; 'It is more like scare tactics. In order to meet annual yearly progress goals, schools are forced to increase instructional time and decrease non-instructional time'; 'The people making policies affecting classroom practice and causing us to decrease recess time are not connected to the classroom and do not have a clue as to how drastically eliminating recess is hurting children'; and 'I don't see how it could be, because children learn a great deal at recess'.

Do you believe eliminating/reducing time for recess is politically motivated?

Ninety-two percent of the participants believed eliminating or reducing daily recess time was politically-motivated. This political pressure was exerted by the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act and its call for greater school and teacher accountability for student academic performance. Participants held strong views about the short-sightedness of a philosophy that de-emphasized daily recess time: 'I believe NCLB has many falsehoods that have been sold to the public by the media through politicians'; 'The elimination of recess is politically motivated and driven by intense competition as schools reach for the title of best district with the highest test scores'; 'Absolutely, NCLB may sound good on paper to our politicians, but very few of them have ever taught'; 'If President Bush sat in my classroom for one day and observed how the children react to school work without recess, then he might have a different view of appropriate amounts of instructional time'; 'Sure, even real estate firms tout the school districts with the highest test scores as the most attractive places to live'; 'Yes, it is definitely political when policies are made based upon scores from one test'.

## **Implications**

Emerging from this action research project are several implications for teachers and schools.

### **Advocate for Recess at the local, state, and national level**

An overwhelming 98 percent of the action research participants believed recess was a necessary part of the school day as it contributed to the overall well-being and development of their children. However, many felt powerless to turn the tide of the recent trend to reduce daily recess time in favor of increased time for academic activities. School administrators and teachers alike face mounting pressures from federal and state policies demanding increased teacher and school accountability for student performance on standardized achievement tests, leaving little time or energy for non-instructional activities.

Families and communities across the United States concerned about the elimination of daily recess enacted a grass-roots movement to reclaim recess as a regular part of the elementary school day. Ninety-seven percent of parents in a national survey advocated guarding the right of recess for their children (Cromwell, 1998). Many states have yet to see the results of this movement. According to Johnson (1998), 'School districts in Atlanta, New York, Chicago, and New Jersey are opting to eliminate recess, even to the point of building new schools in their districts without playgrounds'. However, advocacy efforts in Michigan, Virginia, and Connecticut have resulted in statewide mandated recess (State of Connecticut, 2004; State of Michigan, 2000; State of Virginia, 2000).



When individuals and organizations committed to a cause join forces, advocacy efforts gain momentum and strength. There are many existing resources to support those who advocate the necessity of play as a vital part of the elementary school day. For example, The American Association for the Child's Right to Play maintains a web site ([www.IPAUSA.org](http://www.IPAUSA.org)) presenting timely research about the benefits of play, links to various organisations' position statements, lists of 'recess advocates' by state, and 'recess news' from across the United States.

In response to current trends to limit or eliminate recess in elementary schools, many national organizations have issued position statements highlighting the benefits of recess to the development of the whole child (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2001; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1997; National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, 2002). The responsibility for all early childhood professionals to advocate for daily recess in the lives of all children is highlighted in the preface of AECI's position statement on play titled: 'Play: Essential for All Children' (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2004):

*Decades of research has documented that play has a crucial role in the optimal growth, learning, and development of children from infancy through adolescence. Yet, this need is being challenged, and so children's right to play must be defended by all adults, especially educators and parents. The time has come to advocate strongly in support of play for all children.*

### **Document the Positive Outcomes Associated with Recess**

Ninety-eight percent of the participants in the study believed that recess contributed to the development of the whole child, while 97 percent found the elimination/reduction of daily recess time was not based upon solid research. Both findings suggest that educators have a wealth of knowledge grounded in research concerning the positive outcomes associated with offering children time to engage in daily recess. Teachers need to share this knowledge with parents, colleagues, principals, superintendents, school board members and policy makers to ensure the staying power of recess as part of the school culture/educational landscape, and to prevent its elimination because of current political interests.

### **Initiate Public Discourse Concerning Recess**

One hundred percent of the project participants believed reducing/eliminating daily recess time was an error with negative implications for children. Such a finding suggests that the participants held strong feelings about the importance of recess in each of their school districts. Yet when decisions affecting the amount of time devoted to daily recess were made, only seven percent of the participants had a voice. As stated previously, in 93 percent of the Pennsylvania school districts that reduced daily recess time, the decision to do so was made unilaterally, with no input from community members, parents or teachers. Any school decision affecting such a large number of children and families should be debated in an open forum, with opportunities for all sides to share their positions before a final decision is made. Such a forum would bring the issue out into the light of day, validate the feelings of all of the stakeholders and apply some political pressure to those making the final decision.



## **Hold Public Officials Accountable for Policies that Impinge Upon Daily Recess**

Ninety-two percent of the participants believed the movement to reduce/eliminate daily recess time was politically motivated and due in part to various aspects of the *Federal No Child Left Behind Act*. Teachers participating in the study identified a disconnect between themselves and politicians – the latter with little or no classroom experience enacting policies the teachers viewed as detrimental to the overall development of their children. In the United States, teachers can endorse candidates for local, state and national public office who support a balanced approach to educational reform and high academic standards, but also include recess as a vital part of the school day.

## **Conclusion**

The primary impetus for this action research project was a curiosity about the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the importance of daily recess in Pennsylvania elementary schools at a time of heightened demand for teacher and school accountability. The results suggest a chasm or disconnect between the positive attitudes and beliefs held by the participants concerning recess, and the dwindling amounts of time devoted to recess in some of the Pennsylvania elementary schools. Those who believe recess to be a frivolous activity and schools as places where children are prepared for adult life undervalue the human spirit. Interview data from this study, along with my twelve years of elementary school teaching experience, testify to the importance of providing children with daily, voluntary, unstructured time for recess so that children may learn the importance of being playful throughout their lives, especially in the current educational climate of accountability at all costs.

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## RUST HOPSCOTCH

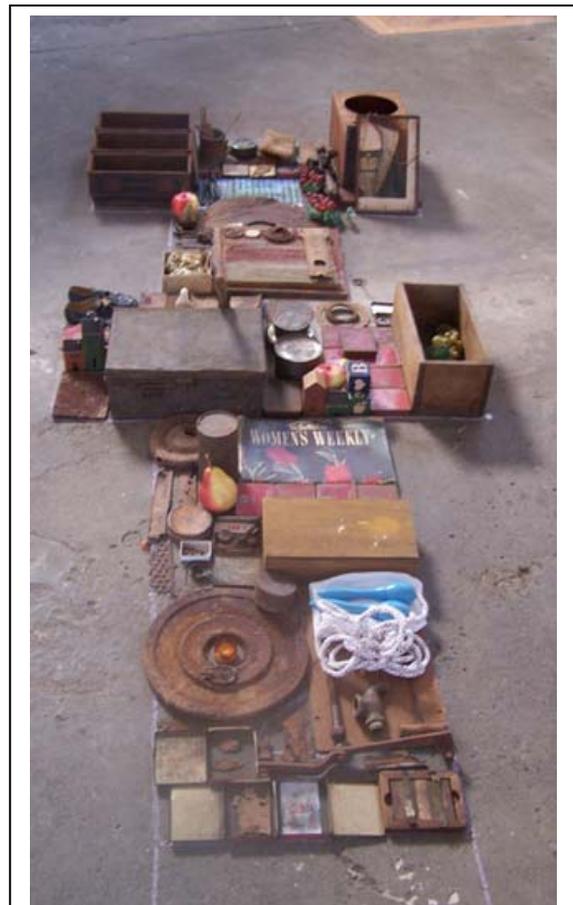
Karryn Argus

Rust Hopscotch is a collection of wooden, rusted metal, paper and plastic items assembled in the shape of a child's hopscotch. Initially the reason for collecting many of the pieces was not clear to me. I was not conscious of why I was collecting cigarette tins or old tools, but eventually many of the pieces surprised and delighted me as they prompted my 'dormant memories'.

Whilst casually collecting and finding pieces over several months, I began to remember and visualise events and times from my childhood. Memories of living in Yarrawonga, spending long hot summer days at my Nana's house over the border in Mulwala, and most of all memories of playing in my Nana's side paddock.

I remembered that weathered wood and rusted metal, a passion of mine which features in much of my artwork, was everywhere in the side paddock where my siblings and I had played as youngsters.

Long forgotten memories returned of clambering on the antique rusted tractor that no longer housed a seat and of exploring



Rust Hopscotch  
Source – Karryn Argus



the tumbling remains of a bench saw which Pop and Dad had once worked and on which my grandfather had lost one of his fingers. I recalled the chook pen that had once housed hundreds of chooks. The same pen where the famous brown chook that 'talked' had lived. It did not occur to me at the time that the brown chook only spoke when my second cousin Terri was visiting. There were fences of barbed wire and decayed wooden posts and pieces of rusted metal scattered everywhere.

All these dormant memories flooded into my consciousness as I collected tins and wooden boxes from markets, pieces of metal from the side of the road, a holy card from dumped rubbish at my local park and special items such as the rusted metal-first aid box from a rural garage sale. Not all items in Rust Hopscotch are newly found. The *Women's Weekly* dated the exact day and year of my birth I had found some years earlier for \$2 in a second-hand shop in Daylesford.

Although I was casually collecting these pieces I had not considered exhibiting them as an installation. Deciding to do so only occurred during the final stages of preparation for an exhibition, 'Dormant Memories', featuring paintings and 3D work around the theme of 'rust'. The individual pieces almost had a life of their own as I began placing them in association with each other. It was in this unconscious, organic way that the hopscotch shape emerged. The hopscotch felt very fitting as I remembered this children's game being one of the many games we played, drawing our eight squares with a stick in the dirt and gravel of Nana's driveway.

With the emphasis on rust in my artwork encouraging my once dormant memories, the title Rust Hopscotch seemed suited to the assemblage.

Just prior to my exhibition I gave a talk about my art to a group of students learning English as a second language. I discovered that seven members of the class, all coming from different countries with diverse cultural and language backgrounds, knew and had played hopscotch as children. This childhood game connected us all.

At times in my life I have been concerned that I don't have many memories of my childhood outside of family events that were photographed. One of the exciting aspects of producing Rust Hopscotch is that the dormant memories that arose while gathering and collecting these pieces were not the sort of memories captured in a black and white snap and framed on the mantelpiece. They are memories prompted by the often unconscious association of a small rusted piece of metal or a wooden box or a piece of plastic fruit. They are memories connecting me to a joyful and spontaneous childhood of play and adventure. Rust Hopscotch connects me to family, my grandparents, and to a sense of my history and my 'place'.



Rust Hopscotch and other artwork by Karryn Argus can be viewed at <http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/kmtargus/web/index.html>

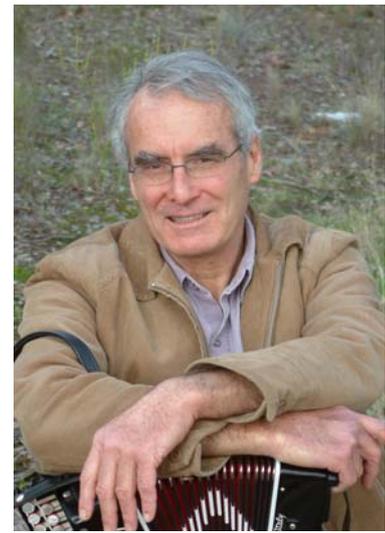


## ANYONE REMEMBER THIS?

From Dave de Hugard

*Dave de Hugard is one of Australia's best-known performers and folklorists, although he prefers to be known 'as a person who is involved in acquiring knowledge of the music of the Australian (mostly) tradition – in the sense of knowing more about its origins and its dynamic processes. I carry on as if the tradition is still alive. And this I believe it to be.' He grew up in Bundaberg, Queensland, and has sent this poem which he learned from his next-door neighbour, Mr Arthur Wagner, in 1950.*

*A kid in our house this morning  
Drove his parents nearly mad:  
He swallowed a bob,  
'So help me bob',  
It was the only bob they had.  
Father flew into an awful rage  
And Mother gave a shout,  
And I've been trying to shake the kid  
To get the money out.  
We're getting it by degrees,  
We're getting it by degrees;  
And every now and then  
We give him a bit of a squeeze.  
We've only got ninepence up till now,  
But we're getting it by degrees.*



Dave de Hugard

*Dave describes the poem as 'Victorian and sort of music-hallish', and comments that 'it must have been in pennies, ha'pennies and farthings with the odd threepence thrown in because if it was a shilling they would have got it in one go. As well as squeezing they could have held the 'kid' upside down and given him a bit of a shake!' Dave de Hugard also queries the origin of the expression 'so help me bob' – or is it 'Bob'(ed)?*

## 25 Years of Publication

