

no. 62, October 2014

Play and Folklore



Playing around in Palmerston North

Establishing a national organisation to promote play

Book review – The Art of Play: Recess and the Practice of Invention

The mystery of the folk doll – some answers



From the Editors

Play and Folklore no. 62, October 2014

This issue of *Play and Folklore* contains four main articles. The longest contribution is an edited and abbreviated transcript of a 1988 interview recorded by actor and comedian John Clarke. The interview is one of a number which visitors to the former Children's Museum's 'You're IT!' exhibition could enjoy while sitting in the famous 'Talking Chair' interactive. This is the fourth of these interviews reproduced in *Play and Folklore*.

We also publish a book review of Anna Beresin's 2014 publication *The Art of Play: Recess and the Practice of Invention*, and a report on Play Australia, a national organisation to promote play. The editors are pleased to offer some enlightenment about the mystery folk doll (featured in issue no. 55), and to thank a number of contributors to the solving of this mystery.

This issue of *Play and Folklore* has been compiled and edited by June Factor and Gwenda Davey, while editor Judy McKinty was on leave.

Gwenda Beed Davey, June Factor and Judy McKinty

Play and Folklore

Editors: June Factor, Gwenda Beed

Davey and Judy McKinty

ISSN (printed) 1329-2463 ISSN

(web) 1447-5969

Editorial address: Dr June Factor,
Australian Centre, University
of Melbourne, Victoria 3010,
Australia.

Phone: +61 3 9499 6151

Email: j.factor@unimelb.edu.au

Two issues per year, published
by the Humanities Department,
Museum Victoria.

GPO Box 666, Victoria 3001,
Australia.

Phone: +61 3 8341 7378.

Email: playandfolklore@museum.vic.gov.au

Available on the web at

<http://museumvictoria.com.au/about/books-and-journals/>

[journals/play-and-folklore](http://museumvictoria.com.au/about/books-and-journals/)

Design Layout: MV Design
Studio and Belinda Smullen
Communication Design.



MUSEUMVICTORIA



Contents

From the Editors	2
Playing around in Palmerston North John Clarke	4
Establishing a national organisation to promote play Barbara Champion	14
Book review – The Art of Play: Recess and the Practice of Invention Gwenda Davey	17
The mystery of the folk doll - some answers	20



Playing around in Palmerston North



John Clarke

Kiwi-born John Clarke is one of Australia's favourite actors and comedians. He was interviewed by Gwenda Davey on 10 October 1988 for the 'Talking Chair' interactive in the 'You're IT!' exhibition at the Children's Museum (part of Museum Victoria), Melbourne. In this interview he recalls his primary school years in Palmerston North, New Zealand.

JC: I was born in Palmerston North, New Zealand, in 1948. I went to College Street primary school, beginning probably in about 1953, and I left that school in 1959, I think. It was a very big primary school, and I spent all of my primary years there. The school wasn't very far from our house, with the result that playing with other children was fairly easy to do, and play was about all we did. I don't remember concentrating very much on schoolwork, although it was a very good school, and we became relatively well educated.

There were almost equal numbers of boys and girls at the school. The school had a very early swimming pool (which is probably now at the Smithsonian Institute!) and we used to spend some of the summer time in there. It had very big grounds, with a back gate through which some people went home. I didn't know where those people went, and I thought about that back

gate a little bit the way I now think of a black hole, it was like a different part of the world. I think the first time I went through that back gate, it was a little bit like the scientific realisation that the world rotates, and that there is another side to things.

When I went back to the school as an adult, the thing that struck was that my sense of size was relative to my size at the time; I now thought the school was rather small, and that the back gate was actually not very far away. I could have reached out and touched it, but as a child it was a vast expanse of territory that I couldn't possibly get across, and there was a very big football oval, a field, and there was a big sandpit. But the size of things seemed to me when I was a child to be absolutely enormous! It was the biggest place I ever went to, as a child. And when I went back as an adult, all my other senses were exactly the same.

The man had just mown the lawn with his big tractor towing his big mowing apparatuses which rattled over the ground, and exactly the same smell of the freshly-mown grass hung in the air. And the wind was blowing bits of leaf, and lunch paper, in exactly the same little eddying circles as it had in the 1950s, and the same sounds were there; the only thing that had changed was the relative size of things.

That's basically where I spent my childhood. We didn't go away a lot, other than in the Christmas holidays, so that that school, and my house, which was a perfectly standard, suburban, Palmerston North house, were the focus of my life.

GD: What did you do in the Christmas holidays?

JC: In the Christmas holidays we invariably went to stay with cousins who lived in another town called Gisborne. There were two groups of cousins, they were related to my mother's family. She was one of three sisters; her sisters' families still lived in that area. One group lived on the farm, and one group lived in this very small country town. Each of the families had three or four children, whereas in my family there was just my sister and myself, and my sister is three years younger than I am. So we were able once a year to get lost in the nonspecific concept of cousinhood, where we would just swarm round the town all summer, and the pressure was taken off and we were just part of the next generation of this wave of the family.

My grandmother lived in this town. I had no other grandparents. Both my other grandmother and my two grandfathers had died before I was born, or shortly thereafter, and I had this one grandmother, who was lovely, and she was the queen bee for all this swarming activity, and she would, I seem to recall, probably spent 99% of her time making apple shortbread and things of that order.

GD: And what sort of things did you do, this swarm of cousins?

JC: Well, there was the beach option. It was a big coastal place, and the weather was very good, so there was the beach option, and the farm option. The beach was very interesting.

On the farm we were frequently doing something which we called 'work', and helping by making the milking take much longer than it would normally take, or by making shearing take much longer than it would normally take, or by following a man around a paddock or following a woman towards a chicken shed, or talking to somebody, thereby delaying the agrarian process.

At the beach we would run around until exhausted and then pester people for drinks and ice-creams. And we would make up games. We didn't play too many structured games, we'd mainly just make up games depending on where we were.

If there was a good hide and seek place we'd be playing that and if there was a good place to go and explore then we'd become some sort of 19th century team of adventurers and off we'd go and do that. That would probably be common, for us to clear off and adventurise in some way, either around some rocks or up some hills or something like that.

GD: Did you like the 19th century adventure games? Did you take on names and roles, or was it just implicit that that's the sort of thing you were doing?

JC: I think it was not implicit, and neither did we have pretend names. I think we were us, and we had our own pecking order. The older kids were kind of in charge, and the younger kids were tagging along. I was up the northern end of the age scale but I wasn't the most senior, so I wouldn't have been in charge, but there wasn't too much questioning about where we were going, and nobody was pretending to be Captain Scott or anything; we were too ignorant to know about all that anyway. We were just adventuring, and it could be on a very small scale. We would imagine ourselves to be somewhere very remote, whereas in fact if we came out from behind a tree and walked 20 yards we could see their house; it wasn't actually terribly bold really. I don't think we imagined ourselves to be anybody else, and neither did we think that adventuring was what we were doing. We were just out, out and about. And that would go on for hours and hours and hours, until

somebody would fall out of a tree and break his ankle, or one of the little kids would cry, or we'd get bored. On holidays we didn't play structured games, whereas at school we sometimes did because you've got to make a game fit a lunch hour, or a playtime.

GD: If we can get back to school and the school playground: what would be some of those lunchtime games that you used to play?

JC: A lot of them concerned fads. I remember as a kid there was a hula-hoop fad, and there was a thing called a twirly-whirly fad, which was a sort of a stick, a thick bit of doweling with a spike with a sharpened end, and a little plastic plate which you spun, at the very top of it, and you could do various exciting things like either spin it, spin it and then hold the spike in the middle so that it sort of spun itself for a while, spin it and then toss it, and then catch it again... And there were yo-yos of course, and they didn't have Coca Cola written on them at the time or a very large American multi-national company name.

There were other things which, like yo-yos, came and went in a cyclical manner, like tops and marbles. We would play with those a lot. We had a little wooden top with a nail-ish spike in the bottom and we would wrap a piece of string round it until it got to the top, and then we would throw it onto the ground, giving it a flick just before it hit the ground, and then it would spin for quite a while. And we would

decorate these things by painting them or by putting drawing pins in the top. I seem to remember that was regarded as protecting them against other vicious people who attempted to split your top by banging theirs down on its centre with a sharpened spike.

There were marbles, and Marbles was one of my favourites. I was quite good at Marbles, and we had various different sizes of marbles. The Marbles game we played had a little hollow in the ground, and you and your opposition threw your marble as close to the hole as you could get. The person who was closest to the hole then had a go at getting his marble into the hole, and at some point one of the two marbles would go in the hole, and that person would then have the right to get his marble to hit the other marble in such a way as to put some distance between him and the hit-ee. Then he had to flick his marble towards the first person's marble, and if he didn't hit it, then the original hitter of marbles got to keep the other fellow's marble. So it was quite an acquisitive game, and it was a game of great skill. Some people were very good at it. I can remember there was only one kid in the school I couldn't beat at Marbles, and I'm still slightly in awe of his ability at Marbles; I can't quite work out what his talent was, I could never beat him. I could beat him sometimes for a bit of the afternoon, but at the end of the day he always had the wood on me, and I can never quite figure out what it was he did.

He used to flick the marbles in a way which his knuckles worked, and he had different hands...I could never emulate what he did, whereas I could beat other people quite easily, but not this guy.

GD: Can you still remember his name?

JC: Yes, I know him; he's a lawyer in Taupo. He stayed with us recently, but I didn't challenge him to Marbles, because he probably would have beaten me.

GD: Was the game you just described, the one you told me was called Miggles?

JC: Yes, we used to call the game Miggles, which was kind of shorthand and slangish and tough-talk for Marbles. We wouldn't use a word like Marbles. Miggles was much more, a much tougher term for Marbles. There were lots of different sorts of marbles; there were smallish ball-bearings ones, moving right up to biggish plastic ones. Plastic was quite new in my era, and plastic marbles, unknown to my parents' generation, came in. And there were marbles called 'aggies', and there were 'cloudies' which were rather attractive-looking cloudish, shot through the glass. There were other marbles which were much coveted, which my parents roared with laughter at because they used to be found in the tops of lemonade bottles.

GD: Did they have a special name?

JC: They may have, but I don't know. They certainly didn't have a special name for them at my school. But I can remember my parents' amusement at how thrilled I was if I had one of these things, which were very common in their youth.

GD: And what did an 'aggie' look like?

JC: An aggie was a glass marble with a coloured splash of something through it. I don't know how those things were made, but it seemed to be something a little bit like the sort of thing you might find in a butterfly's wing or something like that, quite a vibrant, rather attractive colour.

GD: Did you have a favourite marble?

JC: Yes I did, I had a favourite, I had a favourite sort of marble. I think the bigger plastic ones... they were the ones that I was best at, because of the way I used to flick my marbles. The size of those ones was exactly attuned to something about my hands, and I liked those most. When I was a small child I didn't have too many toys because my parents got divorced and when your parents get divorced if you're not there on the day things are being moved out of your house, a lot of your childhood goes to the tip. It just gets lost, and all sorts of things in my life have slipped through the net. But the tin of marbles I had as a kid, I've still got.

And when I look through the marbles, showing my own kids now, I can remember some of the marbles individually; the look of some of them are indelible.

GD: Did any of those individual ones have special names?

JC: No, they didn't. I don't think I would have committed myself to something that romantic about them, because if I played my friend Tony they probably wouldn't be mine for long enough...And I don't know quite what it was about the ones that I liked, that weren't the plastic ones that I liked; perhaps it was the appearance. When I look at them some are a bit scraggy, but they had some special place in my heart for some reason.

There were other games that didn't have anything in the way of props, which we used to play in the lunch hour, during the lunch hour when the ground was relatively dry. Palmerston was a wettish part of the world, so this would probably be a springtime and summertime game. There was a game we used to play called 'Bull-rush'. And Bull-rush was a fabulous game, it was our favourite game. Do you want me to explain how Bull-rush works?

GD: Yes.

JC: Bull-rush works like this. One person goes into the middle of a large section of ground, approximately the size of half a football field. It seemed to me to be all the known world, but I realise in retrospect it was probably not too huge.

All the other kids go and stand at one end, and the person who's in the middle then calls the name of a friend or a foe or anybody, and the person called has to get past the person in the middle, through to the other end of the football field, without running outside the lateral limits on either side. If the person is caught, the person stays in the middle, and the two of them then call the next person.

If the person gets through there is what's called a bull-rush, and everybody goes through and the people or person in the middle try to nab them – by which I don't mean scrag and put to death, I mean apprehend, which is the legal term for it. Those people caught then have to stay in the middle, until you've got a very small number of extremely dexterous youths who have so far eluded capture. And sometimes if you want everybody to come through you just call 'bull-rush'. The game was also sometimes called 'King Dick', and I don't know why it was called 'King Dick' except there was a famous New Zealand politician called King Dick Seddon who was a generation or two earlier, so the name may have come from there. But Bull-rush was terrific, because you needed no props, you could play it with any number of people above about four, and it'll surprise you not at all to discover that invariably there was one boy left, whose name was Tony – my marbles friend.

GD: That no one could catch?

JC: He was very good at all these games. It was a terrific game, because if for instance you were no good at running, you could frequently get through by the sort of politics of working out where, and waiting for a diversion to be caused over one side and scampering up the other side, or going with somebody that you knew the people in the middle would want to catch, so that you knew that when you got close to the middle, everybody'd be after this other person, and you might be able to get through. So there were quite a lot of ways of getting through, and there was also no shame in being caught. So you were with everybody else whether you were in the middle, or not in the middle. And there were good things about being in the middle and good things about not being caught, so it wasn't a game that punished anybody in particular.

GD: John, did you ever play Hopscotch at primary school?

JC: We did, we did a bit, although it was principally a girls' game for some reason. My sister used to play it, and I used to quite like Hopscotch. That was another game that had the advantage of being organisable at short notice, and playable for any length of time.

There were other games at school that had rhymes associated with them. There was a game called 'What's the time, Mr. Wolf?' that the girls used to play a lot.

The rhyme was, 'What's the time, Mr. Wolf?', and then someone would say a time, and 'What's the time, Mr. Wolf?' again, and there'd be another time, and then: 'What's the time, Mr. Wolf?', and then it'd be, 'It's time to have dinner!' and the Wolf tried to clobber everybody in sight and somebody would be nabbed. We didn't play it but the girls used to play it.

GD: John, talking of rhymes, were there other rhymes that you can remember that were either rhymes or chants or insults or taunts, that played a part in your childhood, that you can remember? I can remember we used to say: 'Red, white and blue, you silly cockatoo, sitting on the lamp post', and sometimes it was either 'eating Irish stew', or if you were feeling particularly vulgar you'd say: 'Doing number two'.

JC: Our rhymes didn't go much past two lines, and they weren't very sophisticated. There was one I remember in the swimming pool we used to do... 'The cat's in the cupboard and you can't see me', but I can't remember how it started. You used to bob down on 'can't see me', and you used to stay down for like, you know, a week, before coming up. Oh there were rhymes, and I just wish I could remember them. If you gave me a multiple choice test I'm sure I could tick the ones that we did.

GD: What about Jacks, or Knucklebones, did you ever play those?

JC: Again, that was done by girls. I was always very impressed with Knucklebones. There were some girls at our school whose names I can still remember, and whose skill has never failed to impress me. They were fantastic, they could do fantastic things with the knucklebones, the manual dexterity involved in that was of a very high order. I didn't do it very much, and certainly didn't do it well. Those girls were remarkable.

GD: Talking of manual dexterity, did they do string games at all, did anyone do string games?

JC: Yes, they did and I used to do some of those, too, I think.

GD: What did you call it?

JC: I don't know, I don't remember what it was called. There were things called 'cat's cradle' and 'looping the loop' and 'jumping the wire' and 'fives', and 'fours', and 'threes', depending on how many fingers were involved doing these things. And I knew people who could do quite good tricks with string. I used to do it a bit, but my fingers were nowhere near as dexterous as they needed to be, to do that properly.

There was also a game called 'Rock, Paper and Scissors'. Do you know about that one?

GD: Yes. When would you use Rock, Paper and Scissors? Would you use it for some particular reason?

JC: I think you'd use that because you were in a queue somewhere, and there wasn't any possibility to get up any other kind of more structured game, or a game involving space.

GD: You didn't ever use it for counting out, deciding who was going to be 'he', or 'it'?

JC: No. No, we did foot ones for that.

GD: Oh, how did you do those?

JC: Well, if you were 'picking up sides', as this was called. You 'pick up sides' by the two captains getting about ten feet away from each other. They walked towards each other, one pace at a time in turn, the foot being placed heel directly in front of the toe of the last pace, so the last person to place a full foot in the gap is the person who gets the choice. So you pick up sides doing that, or by doing 'One potato, two potato, three potato, four, Five potato, six potato, seven potato, more', and I forget where that one ends, there's another verse which I never quite knew.

GD: I saw some kids, tiny little kids, in Caulfield North Central School, which is where my own kids went, when I was there recently. The kids were doing a counting out, for a team, which I'd never seen before, and was astonished. They got terribly close in together, and they were so small, that was what got me, I always thought only older kids did this.

Anyway they got in together and they put just one hand on top of the other, and this quick routine, one hand over the other, and then they ended up going: 'Hoi!', in this amazing Russian sort of style, and then they just went "Whsstt!" and disappeared. I couldn't even catch any of them to ask them about it, it was astonishing!

JC: We didn't do that, but the foot thing was a bit like that, you know. This is a shorthand version of that obviously. The other rhyme was: 'Eeny, meeny, miney, mo, Catch a (nearly un-ideological concept) by the toe'.

GD: You did of course say 'A nigger', in those days.

JC: Yes, 'Catch a nigger by the toe, If he squeals, let him go, Eeny, meeny, miney, mo'. I could never remember what it was that was decided, it was either the person who was, or who wasn't, something, but it varied hugely.

GD: Just as a matter of interest, do you know if kids in New Zealand have changed that rhyme these days, on ideological grounds?

JC: I think so, because I in my own case, I was told at home not to say that, quite early.

GD: A lot of kids now say, 'Catch a Tigger'. Which is interesting because it's quite meaningless, but it's kept the rhyme alive.

JC: The other thing I remember was that some bright person, coming to school, and if you put your two forefingers against one another, as in the steeple game, take one of them away and put

someone else's there, so you've got two people's hands facing each other, and their forefingers are together, and one of the two people rubs their finger up and down, you get quite a weird sensation. If you'd do it with me I'll show you what I mean.

GD: Oh, your finger belongs to me! That's what's happening!

JC: Yes, yes. There were all sorts of kids who could fart in their elbows with their hands, and they could fart under their arms – there were kids who could make really good fart noises of various different sorts. Every now and again somebody would genuinely fart and deep embarrassment would cover the whole school, but jokes about farting, were, oh God, they were hilarious. There was a kid called Allan who I'd put up against anybody in the fart-jokes department. If there's a Nobel Prize for fart-jokes I'll bet you they're engraving Allan on it even as we speak.

GD: What sort of things could he do?

JC: He could make fart jokes with any two parts of his body, he could make fart jokes in the backs of his knees, with his hands.

GD: When you say 'jokes', you mean the noises he makes?

JC: Yes, fart noises. He was the first person I ever knew who was capable of finding dirty meanings in things, and he could find dirty meanings in anything.

I think Allan peaked at the age of about eight, and he was wonderful, because there was such joy for Allan, and he didn't even know what half the filth meant, I'm sure. He could make fart sounds, and if the teacher said anything like: 'Shut the door, it's a bit windy today', Allan would be useless for the rest of the day; he'd just collapse in hysterics and roll about on the floor.

The other things that I can remember were the sort of game-ish things that actually had some use, because there were quite a few methods of remembering things. For instance I remember one teacher saying the way to remember how to spell 'friend', which was always a bit of a struggle; there were a lot of people got the e and the 'i' round the wrong way.

GD: What was the method?

JC: His method was, 'Fry your friend, and that's the end', so it's f.r.i, in friend, and it's the end, the end is e.n.d. as in the word-end. 'A piece of pie', was the way to remember how to spell 'piece'. If you ever have to spell a 'piece' of anything, think of it as a piece of pie, write, p.i.e., that's the key to spelling pie.

Then there was 'I before E, except after C'. And there was silly versions of some of these things. There was a very silly version of the one about the months: '30 days hath September, April, June and November, all the rest have 31, save for' something or other. I can never remember.

GD: 'February alone, which hath but 28 days clear, and 29 in each leap year'.

JC: In each leap year, yes. Oh that's right, that's exactly right, but I lost it at 'save'. It seemed to me to be getting a bit sort of Restoration comedy at that point. But the version that made good schoolyard currency was: '30 days hath September, April, June and I wonder, all the rest have bread and marmalade, except for Grandma, she rides a bicycle', which I thought was at least as good. I'm sure there [were] more of those kind of useful-ish ones that were somehow sanctioned by their educational purpose.

GD: Yes I can always remember those spelling things. In my wonderful year at Upwey Higher Elementary School, we had a teacher who taught us how to spell 'parallel'. She used to make us all stand up and we had to flap our arms and behave like chooks, and so we'd sort of be going 'P.a.r.a. (screaming) double l e.l., and I can still remember that.'

JC: Oh yes. Well, 'Mississippi' we used to spell like that – 'M.i. double s, i, double s.i. pee pee i'. And why anybody would need to spell Mississippi I don't know. I've never ever had occasion to use it.

We had autograph books, that was a fad. I've still got my autograph book, and there are autographs in it from a couple of the teachers whose handwriting I've never forgotten – I could recognise their handwriting under any circumstances. They were very nice, our teachers

We used to sometimes go round to their house on the weekend and help do the gardening. Life was good, you know, there was nothing negative about this period of my life at all. In the centre of the autograph book is what was called 'a wall of friendship', and it was the two middle pages divided into small squares like a grid, but not too little, and there was room for you to sign your name in the square. And boys signed their names on one side of the page and girls signed their names on the other, of course with the implication, which was current at the time, that people married if [their names were next to each other].

I should have brought this book along, because some of the little rhymes that are in it are quite fun. Some people have signed the book on the wall of friendship. Some of these people would also sign the book in other places and they would write things like, 'If all the girls lived over the sea, what a good swimmer John would be', which you know, they had no good reason to write, and it was sort of pathetic (laughs). There were a couple of really quite good rhymes in my autograph book. There was one that went: 'Two on a hammock, attempting to kiss, All of a sudden, they landed like this.' It would be written upside-down. That was the height of sophistication, I think, linguistically.

GD: Yes, yes, very titillating, yes, (laughter).

JC: Yes! (laughs) Oh, there were other ones:

2 Ys, U R,

2 Ys, U B,

I C U R

2 Ys, 4 me.

Oh, there was another one: 'How do you write hungry horse in four letters?', which is: 'M, T, G, G'.

There was another one where you folded the corner of an autograph book down, and you wrote across the outside, visible fold: 'For dirty people', and then you'd lift the thing open and it'd say: 'Soap!' This was also highly sophisticated, playing as it did on our deep knowledge of sexual affairs.

GD: Did anybody ever make those magical things out of bits of paper that open up? They never seemed to have a name, they're sort of fortune-telling things.

JC: Oh yes, I can still make those. You need a square piece of paper. I wasn't very good at a lot of things but that was something I always enjoyed. And stationery was a great love, for some unknown reason. My father ran a shop when I was a little boy, a sort of Coles shop, and I can always remember that if ever I took a friend there, the friend would always go to the toy department. I was not in the slightest bit interested in the toy department, I was always in the stationery department.

GD: I'll give you a bit of paper, will you make one?

JC: Yes, I'll make one now.

GD: Did you ever have a name for this gadget?

JC: Just plain and simple – they weren't called anything.

GD: What did you play on the way home from school?

JC: Palmerston North is very flat, and we almost all had bikes. It's a bicycle town, and so we would frequently do bicycle things. If you walked home you'd probably play Hopscotch and Step-on-cracks, and probably a bit of scragging, and general sort of fighting, which probably would be just as fair to call 'cuddling', the way it went on.

GD: That'd be with girls would it, as well as with boys?

JC: Oh, girls and boys. And throwing, quite a lot of throwing. We weren't allowed to throw stones, which didn't stop you from doing it near a river, but you didn't do it round people. There was always a kid at the school who was said to have had his eye blinded by a stone. If you weren't allowed to throw stones you could at least throw macrocarpa berries, which were nice and hard, and various different gum berries and other things. And you could skid – in the winter you could skid on the frost and grass tops, that was great. I could skid nearly all the way home if I got a decent run up – 20 yards in a go. But mostly it was bikes, or "boyks", as they were called, b.o.y.k.s, and we'd call them "boyks", and you used to "royd your boyk", and I used to "royd me boyk", and there was "no hands" – nothing like the sophistication they have these

days with those BMX bikes, but not bad, given the rather crude equipment of the day. And there were skids, and there was up on one wheel. I knew one kid, called John, who was principally famous for riding along on his bike, then he'd see you standing there and he'd come along to you at high speed and he'd get off his bike and stand in your group, at high speed. The bike would probably finish up to 80 yards away, anywhere, and he wouldn't care where, he'd just jump off .

GD: What did you call it, if you gave another kid a ride on your bike?

JC: A dink or a dub. 'Give us a dub', or 'Give us a dink'. I preferred dink, I think. You could have a dink on the bar, or on the carrier at the back, or on the very front. In the case of some dextrous sophisticates they would get up on the very front, and at great risk to life and limb; kudos-wise that was pretty good.

GD: When you got home, after you'd ridden home on your bike, and after you got home, would you play, before tea, say?

JC: Yes. We didn't do anything else.

GD: And what sort of play?

JC: I spent nearly all my time outside – that was what we did. And I would occasionally go swimming, in the swimming pool, in the municipal baths, the myunies, as they were called. We used to go to the myunies sometimes. I was quite an early swimmer.

I was swimming at the myunies when I was eight and nine, went in for swimming lessons and I learned to dive very early and I was quite a good diver. So I'd quite happily shoot away a whole afternoon at the myunies, when relatively young.

Otherwise at home we would muck about playing, or else we would have a day where we did nothing in particular but were outside with some magnifying glasses, setting fire to small leaves by magnifying the sun or in some hideous instances, particularly if I was with Grant who was very given to this sort of thing. We would sometimes burn insects, I'm sorry to say. Or we would burn something on wood. You'd burn a little, you know you would have some grand notion of writing your name on something, but you'd only get to a quarter of a centimetre after a full days' work!

GD: John, did you have any connection with Maori culture, with Maori kids, or any of the special things that Maoris did?

JC: Not much. There were two Maori families at my primary school. Maoris were not very numerous in Palmerston North. It was not an area where Maoris had lived much. The Maori tribes for the area in which Palmerston North is situated tended to be up in Wanganui, or down the west coast further, so there wasn't much of a tribal tradition in this area. And there were really only two families, the Hakarias and somebody else at our primary

school. When we went away on holidays I came into contact with a lot of Maoris because my cousins all went to school around Gisborne; in fact my cousins went to schools where I think the Pakehas were in the minority. And we'd frequently play with Maori kids there, but I didn't go to school with too many at all, so I wasn't too aware of how different or similar their games were.

GD: Are there any other things that you'd like to add, recollections about your childhood?

JC: I don't think I can remember much else. The only things that I've got, physically, from my childhood, are that tin of marbles and a couple of books which have got numbers on the back of them, which come from when, at some stage of primary school, I must have established a library, and (laughs) coded them.

GD: What are the books?

JC: I've got about half a dozen books, at least four of them about words. Books about grammar I suppose they are, and not books that were given to me by my parents that they had at school, I mean books that were published in the '50s. British books called things like 'Words and their Work', or something like that, and they're a little bit like Fowler's English Usage for primary school people. I can remember learning that the 'gerund takes the possessive' before I learnt what a gerund was or what the possessive was.

There's a couple of books that are sort of R. M. Ballantyne books, which I've never opened, but which I've somehow still got, and my children will probably read, or a maybe a Boys' Own book that somebody gave me, and I've never read. I've just never read them, they didn't interest me. I was never a Boy Scout – that didn't interest me. I always thought that knot tying and the goody-goody stuff and tents – I just thought it was bloody awful. Two other things I should say. I went to Sunday School, which people these days don't do very much. I liked Sunday School. I don't go to church and I'm not a believer, but I used to go to Sunday School, which was kind of separate fun. It was with different people, because they didn't all go to my primary school, and I've got a couple of people I've always maintained contact with from my Sunday School, who are deeply un-Sunday-Schoolish now.

I also remember being told about sex when I was at primary school. My father always said: 'If there's anything you want to know, about anything, you can always come and ask me'. My parents were very open about this, and very honest and straight with us. I started hearing rumours, largely from Colin, who was the authority on sex at primary school, about what sex was and what it did, and how it was achieved, and so on. And so I went to my father and I said: 'What's all this?'

'Well', he said (coughing), 'I'm glad you've come to me and asked me this, John', attempting to cover his complete embarrassment. Kids sense embarrassment before they sense anything else on earth, I think, because their understanding of their own parents is so emotionally highly tuned that I don't think you can put too much past them. And my father then gave me a book (laughs), a small pamphletty book of the 1950s type, which featured people, like the man from The Pru, the man from the Prudential Insurance Company, the man in the adverts in the newspapers.

It was terribly straight, with stylistic sort of 1950s commercial artwork. It featured people like that, and didn't tell me anything new at all, since I knew that men had penises and all that stuff. There was nothing terribly revealing about this, although Dad was attempting to be helpful. And Colin and the local filth authorities at school talked about a Frenchy, and everyone said: 'What is a Frenchy?' And of course nobody knew what a Frenchy was. It was revealed that somebody, some kid, had actually gone home and asked what a Frenchy was, and he'd been confined to barracks for three weeks or put in solitary or killed. It was hideous, you know, an unacceptable word. And I remember saying to this group of people: 'Oh I'll go home and ask, there's nothing I can't ask'. 'Well', they said, 'You're mad, you'll be killed, you know, it's a hideous thing, a Frenchy.

You're mad!' I said: 'No, no, no, you don't understand, I can ask my father anything. I've asked him about sex and I can certainly ask him what a Frenchy is. I'll tell you tomorrow what a Frenchy is'.

Well, I was a national hero. There were bands in the street, and people holding swords over me and making arches as I went home, and that evening I confronted my father in a very manly way. I asked him what a Frenchy was. 'Well', he said, 'I'm glad you asked me that, John. I'd rather we spoke about this than you find out this in some grubby way'. And he said, deeply embarrassed, 'I'll tell you what a Frenchy is, it's a sheath (pause)'. 'Oh I see', I said: 'A sheath?' 'Yes', he said: 'Glad you asked me. That's what it is, it's a sheath (coughs)'. So, I went to school the next day and there was this big crowd of people around and they were surprised to see me still alive. I got to this crowd and there was an air of respectful anticipation and they said, 'What's a Frenchy', and I said, 'It's a sheath', and they said 'What's a sheath?', and I said, 'Oh, I'm buggered if I know what a sheath is. Do you want me to ask?' So, yes, so I went home that night and I said to the old man, 'What's a sheath?' 'Well,' he said, 'Son, I'm glad you asked me that. Well, a sheath is...' and he told me what a sheath was, and I had this sort of mechanical description of what a contraceptive male prophylactic does and what it sheaths, and how it sheaths.

And so I went to school the next day and gave a sort of impromptu lecture on the principal of preventing sperm from going into vaginas, basically, which were the terms which I'd learnt of all these things. I'd learnt it as if I was studying to be a gynaecologist, and the half of what I said, the kids at school didn't understand at all, because they didn't know this language. I only knew this language because it was one my father presented to me, in case he had to talk about reality. Briefly, it was a big, big smokescreen for him.

GD: At least you did talk about it! John, I think we'd better stop.

JC: All right.

The full interview ran for 84 minutes. It was transcribed for Museum Victoria by A.F. Rooke in November 2011 and produced 29 pages of transcript. The interview has been edited for Play and Folklore by John Clarke, Gwenda Davey and June Factor.



Establishing a national organisation to promote play

Barbara Champion

Play Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that has been working in the interests of children's play since 1914. Some readers will be familiar with its previous name, The Playgrounds and Recreation Association of Victoria (PRAV). The organisation has been steadily growing over many years and is now operating on a national scale. We are committed to growing the organisation to enable support for play across the country.

Play Australia wants to promote the value of play and inspire active healthy outdoor play opportunities whilst responding to changing needs within the many industry sectors involved in children's play.

There are a broad range of 'sectors' involved in the provision of outdoor playspaces in Australia.

These sectors include providers and managers of play environments – Local Government, schools, early childhood centres and major parks agencies (such as Parks Victoria). It includes the providers and designers of these settings – play space designers, landscape architects, play equipment manufacturers, suppliers of ground surfacing and shade structures. It includes those involved in management of these areas such as risk assessors, auditors and maintenance staff. It includes those involved in research, health promotion and funding agencies.

People are involved in promoting and providing play work in a variety of disciplines, and Play Australia aims to provide support to all sectors throughout Australia committed to play. Recently, more than 40 people attended a meeting in Adelaide to consider how best to assist the expansion

of support for play in South Australia. Meetings of this kind are now starting to take place in states and territories throughout Australia.

Background to current activities

In October 2010, PRAV formally changed its name to Play Australia. Since then, the Committee of PRAV has become the Board of Play Australia, which was the first step in transforming an organisation from one that was Victoria-based to one more reflective of its national membership base.

In February 2012, having long recognised the need for an effective national organisation advocating for play, Play Australia began a project to identify the most effective structure for a truly national organisation and to examine ways to add value to the provision of play in Australia.



A proposed structure was circulated to members in April – June 2013. As a key part of this project the input of members was sought, and significant support was received from members across Australia.

Members supported:

- the advocacy role of the organisation (at both State and Federal levels);
- the expansion of Play Australia as a membership organization;
- advocacy on issues that impact on children's play, building infrastructure to support play, and development of a play work sector;
- the opportunity to identify key partnerships;
- ideas and suggestions for programs and services to further promote play and information sharing; and
- the stronger voice of a national organisation.

The project produced a report which presented proposed governance and organisational models, identified the challenges and opportunities reliant on potential funding sources, and began a transformation plan to guide the Board of Play Australia in the evolution of the national organisation.

Play Australia's purpose is to promote play and support those involved in play. Its primary role is advocacy, and its main activities include connecting people involved in all areas of play, facilitating networks of specific expertise in the provision of play, promoting play, and providing services to members, including information, advice and comprehensive training.

Play Australia aims to promote quality design of play spaces and outdoor natural environments and encourage better planning, design and development of play opportunities for all children.

Play Australia promotes research into the use of play spaces and their value. Through a strong advocacy role, Play Australia always seeks to focus attention on the benefits of play.

Play Australia is the national Secretariat of the International Play Association (IPA) and is strengthening its role of communication between the international play community and Australian members.

Play Australia is represented on the Australian Standards Committee on Playgrounds.

There is currently much activity promoting play at local and state levels across Australia. There are numerous professional state and national bodies that are committed to play and support elements of play within their sectors. However, there is limited connection between these bodies/organisations (and individuals) and activities conducted at a national and state level. Play Australia sees both a need and an opportunity to get everyone involved in play working together to advocate for play nationally.

The Australian Government has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 31 'recognises the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts'.

The benefits of being national

A national organisation has the ability to bring together play communities and stakeholders throughout Australia in order to achieve their agreed vision and purpose. Members and interested parties can be reached more effectively with established points of contact in each state and territory. A well-organised and effective national organisation can:

- strengthen the ability of the play community to advocate for and raise the profile of play at a national, state and local level;
- enhance the advocacy role by having one body to represent the play community to government, stakeholders and potential donors;
- build a philanthropic base through greater capacity and clarity of purpose;
- expand the provision of excellent training, and promote forum and conference opportunities;
- develop synergies between national, state-based and local groups;
- build momentum and capacity for significant partnerships;
- coordinate the provision of national and common services across Australia to maximise the impact of limited resources;
- boost the quality of services and networks for members;
- increase access between important key networks in all states and territories;
- build partnerships with existing individuals and key agencies already committed to children's play;
- enhance the advisory services that draw on experts and expertise nationally and internationally;
- identify specific research needs that can be better designed and coordinated through a national association;
- demonstrate a national commitment to play in international forums; and
- link more people around Australia with membership and activities of the International Play Association (IPA).

Play Australia will be the peak national organisation that promotes the value of play and advocates for healthy play opportunities for children and the wider community. Play Australia will develop a consistent national narrative and conversation about play, its benefits and its importance in developing healthy and resilient individuals and communities.

For further information contact Play Australia:

barb@playaustralia.org.au
www.playaustralia.org.au

Barbara Champion is the Executive Director of Play Australia.
Photographs courtesy of Barbara Champion.



Review: Anna R. Beresin *The Art of Play: Recess and the Practice of Invention*

Gwenda Beed Davey

'We haven't had jump ropes since 2008'

The Art of Play is a recent addition to Anna Beresin's dedicated support for children's creative play. She is the director of *Recess Access*, a project which has donated play materials to a number of schools in Philadelphia, and has also written *Recess Battles: Playing, Fighting and Storytelling* (University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2010). She is an Associate Professor at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

The Introduction to *The Art of Play* begins with an explanation:

From 2010 to 2012 I worked with students from the University of the Arts to donate jump ropes, balls, hoops and chalk – all traditional urban play materials – to nine public schools in Philadelphia.

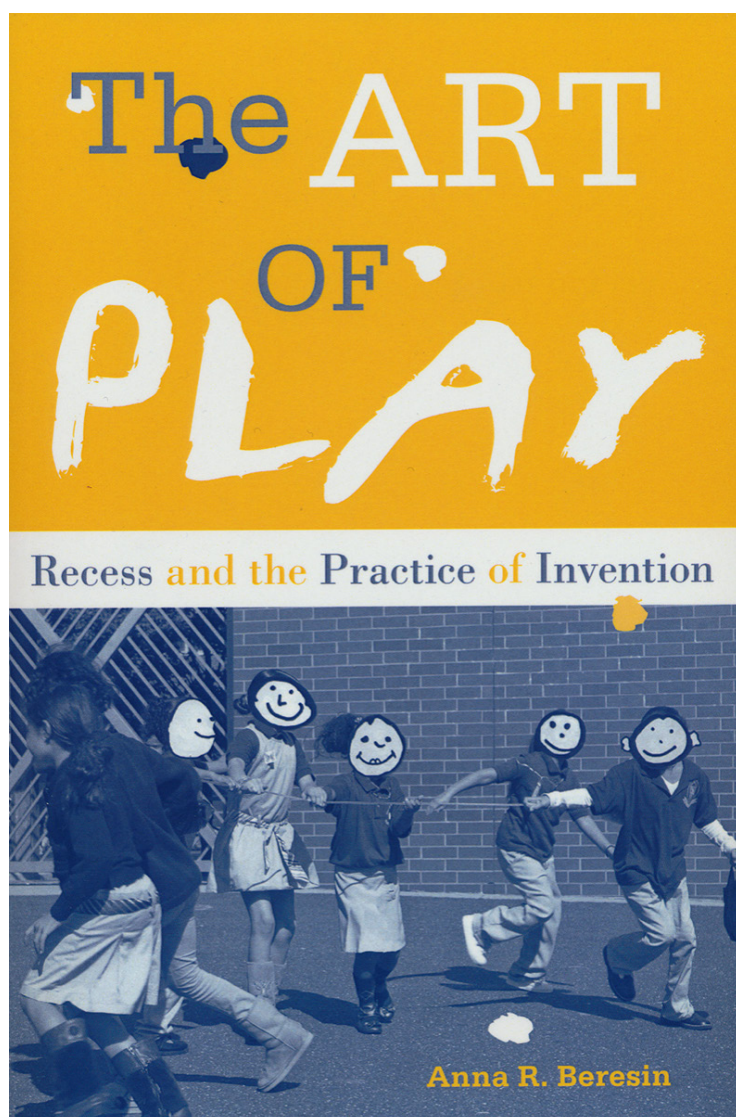
The idea was to make it possible for resource-poor schools to enrich children's time and to support children's expressive culture. We followed our donation with an art activity in four of the schools, where teachers asked the children to paint what they do at recess and how it makes them feel. Art about play became *The Art of Play*. (page 1)

Given that children's art work is the raw material for the book's theory and argument, I find it disappointing that children of all ages (7-10 years) were asked to use the same black ink and brush painting equipment. I can find no explanation for this decision, or why other, finer drawing materials such as texta-colours (ink pens) were not considered. The drawings are not always easy to interpret, and there is only limited discussion of individual drawings in the book.

I am also saddened, but totally understanding, about the

substitution of masks for children's faces in the photographs published. In this project, the practicalities of obtaining parental permission proved an impossible task. I recall a major Australian project in which I was involved (*Childhood, Tradition and Change: 2006-2010*) where we felt obliged to respond to contemporary fears of children being identified by paedophiles, by distorting all images in our final reports and data bases.

Anna Beresin's descriptions of her *Recess Access* teams' visits to some of Philadelphia's impoverished schools are truly heartrending. Lack of play equipment, frequent abolition of recess times, and children's inertia or aggression are common phenomena. Fortunately, too, is children's delight in receiving the balls, ropes and chinks provided by *Recess Access*, and in being given the opportunity to paint about their experiences of play.



Anna Beresin describes the body of art work in this book:

The 155 paintings of recess and their corresponding lore are urban paintings, Philadelphia paintings, with slight variations by neighbourhood...In the poorest of Philadelphia neighbourhoods, there were more paintings of breakfast and food. There were more images of angry children and angry brush strokes at schools where recess had been removed as a punishment. One could say the paintings are an urban summary of icons, portraits and verbs. (page 134)

The drawings in this book are truly a record of a dystopia of social deprivation and mistaken educational goals. But Anna Beresin's particular interest here is in the inventiveness of play, and in the use of art work to express children's experience of enhanced play opportunities. The art work is a graphic representation of the play which has occurred after children have been presented by *Recess Access* with boxes of equipment. The children do not have to be told what to do with the balls, ropes, hoops and chinks.

They immediately organise themselves into games such as handball, dodgeball and football catch. Anna Beresin describes one school where pupils of six and seven years of age are brought outside for recess, and two buckets of play materials are brought outside:

The children realize the materials are for them, and they shout and pour over the buckets like liquid, stragglers zooming like bees to honey. There is an explosion of movement, and in a few minutes the yard is a festival of activity. Jump rope, wall ball, football, catch, and dozens of children just bouncing and catching...The aide says 'I've been here nineteen years and I've never seen them look so happy'. (page 79)

In this larger, qualitative study of children's play, Anna Beresin and her team wanted to include a small quantitative study, comparing children's movement at recess with movement via physical education (gym) classes, through the use of pedometers. For those familiar with Lindsay and Palmer's Australian research in the 1970s, the results are not surprising. In both studies, informal play often outperformed formal syllabus games. Anna Beresin writes that 'The surprise, when the findings were considered, was the magnitude in the difference between recess and gym'. (page 116)

As well as the (superior) role of active movement in informal recess play, Anna Beresin is particularly interested in the contrast between informal play and formal physical education classes.

The indirectness or exaggeration of play is typically eliminated by grown-ups in gym classes. Teams...the order of players...the order of activities and their location...the use of props...the songs they chant...the duration of time of each activity [are all] decided for the children. Whereas outside, in recess, you hear 'Spit, spit, you are not it', with toes and hands in motion as the children count out who will begin and who will be 'it'. There is...no need to sit and wait for adults to reframe the rules. (page 123)

In her discussion of her project, Anna Beresin refers to a number of classic works on children's play and arts, such as those of Jean Piaget, John Dewey, D.W. Winnacott and Brian Sutton-Smith. She particularly acknowledges the psychologist Robert Coles's trilogy, *The Moral Life of Children*, *The Political Life of Children*, and *The Spiritual Life of Children*, which 'used children's art as a storytelling device and inspired the design of this project' (page 131). She also draws on the experiences of a number of adult artists such as film-makers, musicians, actors and choreographers to explore the links between creativity ('invention') and play. All of these artists see play as central to the development of their work.

The Art of Play is beautifully written and full of controlled passion for the Philadelphia children whose lives are so constricted, yet capable of such creativity and inventiveness when opportunities are provided. I hope it has an impact in American society.

References

Childhood, Tradition and Change
Public Data Base. ctac.esrc.
unimelb.edu.au/resources.html

Robert Coles, *The Moral Life of Children* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986a).

Robert Coles, *The Political Life of Children* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986b).

Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990).

Kate Darian-Smith and Nikki Henningham, *Childhood, Tradition and Change* Final Report (2011).
ctac.esrc.unimelb.edu.au/objects/project-pubs/FinalReport.pdf

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

The Art of Play: Recess and the Practice of Invention
Anna R. Beresin
Temple University Press,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122
ISBN 978-1-4399-1094-8
Published 2014





The mystery of the folk doll – some answers

In issue no. 55 of *Play and Folklore* (April 2011), editor Judy McKinty asked for help to identify this folk doll which she found in a second-hand shop in Melbourne. She thought the musical instrument the doll was carrying might help to identify it.

We have now discovered that the doll is carrying a toy gourd mouth organ, a traditional wind instrument, played by musicians in East and Southeast Asia, which has a sound chamber made from a dried gourd with bamboo reeds attached. We have been advised that in northern Thailand the Lahu (or Lahoo) people call it a *nor* or *naw*. Similar instruments are found in Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Borneo.

We would still like to know where this delightful toy was made and how it made its way into a Melbourne op shop!

Many thanks to Wiparat Praditarchip and the National Museum in Bangkok, and also to Dr Kristal Buckley, Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, Deakin University Melbourne.

More information and images of musicians playing various gourd mouth organs can be found at:

<http://arts.cultural-china.com/en/94Arts13850.html>



Folk doll with gourd mouth organ.
Photographer – Judy McKinty