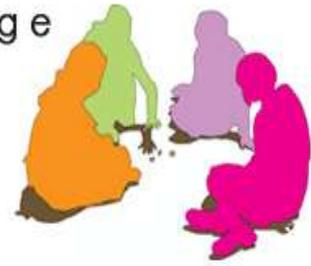


Childhood, Tradition and Change

A national study of the historical and contemporary practices and significance of Australian children's playlore



FINAL REPORT OF THE CHILDHOOD, TRADITION AND CHANGE PROJECT
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Previous Studies	4
Research Team	6
Schools We Visited	7
How Were the Schools Selected	7
What We Did	9
‘Ethnographic’ Fieldwork in Australian Schools	9
A Week in the Life of a Fieldworker	11
Influences on Data Collection	13
Data Storage and Reporting Back to the Schools.....	13
Types of Games Played	14
What Have We Learned?	16
The Need to Run and Play Chasey Crosses All School Contexts	16
Sport as Play	17
Language Play Featured in Much Physical Play and Games of Skill	17
Playing with Equipment/Props/Toys.....	19
Fieldworkers Described Seventy-Five Forms of Imaginary Play	23
Music Play and Dance Games	24
Quiet Games.....	24
Shooting Games	25
Forbidden Games	25
The Importance of Popular Culture in Play	26
Technology and Computers	28
Cultural Diversity and Play	28
Age and Gender.....	31
Weather and Seasonal Differences	32
School Size and Playground Space	34

Landscapes of Play	37
School Rules and Philosophies of Play	40
Childhood Obesity and Adult Interventions in Play	42
Schools as Community Property	43
Conclusion	45
Publications and Conference Papers	47

INTRODUCTION

Childhood, Tradition and Change is a national project that was funded by the Australian Research Council in 2007-2010, with assistance from the National Library of Australia and Museum Victoria. A multidisciplinary team of scholars from the University of Melbourne, Deakin University and Curtin University have collaborated to produce the first national account of continuity and change in Australian children's playlore in primary school playgrounds since the 1950s. Data collected in 2007-2010 will be analysed with reference to previous similar studies conducted in the 1950s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

Eight fieldworkers were sent, in pairs, to nineteen primary schools across every state and territory in Australia to record the activities of children during periods of free play. Schools were selected with an aim to record diversity of experience, as case studies, rather than as a statistically representative sample. Several schools were chosen because they featured in previous studies of Australian children's playlore across the twentieth century.

The fieldworkers documented and described nearly 400 games, using video and sound recordings, photographs and text descriptions. The data represents a significant addition to pre-existing collections of children's material, cultural and ephemeral heritage in the National Library of Australia and Museum Victoria.

This final report, prepared by Kate Darian-Smith and Nikki Henningham, provides an overview of activities undertaken by the project team and outlines the project's scope, methodology and some preliminary findings. The research team will continue to analyse the data that has been collected in greater depth and to publish work on this material.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

There are four major previous investigations of Australian children's playlore that the *Childhood, Tradition and Change* study builds upon. In 1954-5, American children's folklorist Dorothy Howard visited Australia as a Fulbright Scholar to study Australian children's contemporary play customs and to collect information about the play traditions of earlier generations from adults. Howard travelled throughout Australia, visiting thirty-one schools, and corresponded with pupils and teachers at more than seventy. Her large and unpublished research archive of file cards, correspondence, visual and material culture, and papers is held in Museum Victoria; her published papers have been edited in a scholarly collection (Darian-Smith K. and Factor, J. (eds), *Child's Play: Dorothy Howard and the Folklore of Australian Children*, Museum

Victoria Publishing, Carlton, 2005). Howard's fieldwork research was the first and most extensive study of children's playlore undertaken in Australia, and has provided both a theoretical and an experiential basis for subsequent research in the field.

Since the 1950s a number of folklorists, educationalists and historians have undertaken children's playlore research. Some of these studies have been wide-ranging, while others have focused on particular facets of children's informal play lives. These projects include a large study in 1975-6 by Peter Lindsay and Denise Palmer on physical well-being, which visited twenty-one Brisbane primary schools and observed nearly 5,000 children, describing and photographing 255 different playground games (Lindsay, P.L. and Palmer, D., *Playground Game Characteristics of Brisbane Primary School Children*, Canberra, 1981). In 1984, Heather Russell studied an inner-city, multicultural primary school playground in Melbourne. Her detailed report highlighted the influences of immigration and cultural diversity on play activities and schoolyard friendships (Russell, H. *Play and Friendships in a Multicultural Playground*, Australian Children's Folklore Publications, Melbourne, 1986). Another study relevant to this project includes fieldwork research for the Moe Folklife Project in 1994 where children's games were observed in schools in a large country town in Victoria (Davey, G., *The Moe Folklife Project: A final report prepared for the Department of Communication and the Arts and the National Library of Australia*, National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, April 1996).

Background historical research for ***Childhood, Tradition and Change*** can also be found in more general investigations of children's language and play, including the first comprehensive edition of Australian children's verbal lore by Ian Turner (*Cinderella Dressed in Yella*, 1969), followed in 1978 by an enlarged edition with co-editors Wendy Lowenstein and June Factor and a collection of the 'improper' rhymes of Australian children by Wendy Lowenstein (*Shocking, Shocking, Shocking*, Melbourne 1974). June Factor published a social and cultural history of Australian children's folklore in 1988 (*Captain Cook Chased a Chook: Children's Folklore in Australia*, Melbourne).

Further analysis of the fieldwork data in ***Childhood, Tradition and Change*** will aim to chart in greater detail the change and continuity of Australian children's schoolyard games and activities from the mid twentieth century to the present, and will explore contemporary playlore in comparison with these earlier studies.

RESEARCH TEAM

The research team for *Childhood, Tradition and Change* is a multidisciplinary team of scholars and industry partners with internationally recognised research strengths in Australian social and cultural history, folklore studies and cultural heritage. It includes:

- Professor Kate Darian-Smith (Director, The Australian Centre, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne) – Project Leader
- Professor William Logan (UNESCO Chair of Heritage and Urbanism, School of History, Heritage and Society, Deakin University)
- Professor Graham Seal (Director, the Australian Folklore Research Unit, Curtin University of Technology)
- Dr Gwenda Davey (Research Fellow, Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, Deakin University)
- Dr June Factor (Research Fellow, The Australian Centre, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne)
- Dr Richard Gillespie (Manager, History & Technology Department, Museum Victoria)
- Ms Margy Burn (Assistant Director General, National Library of Australia)
- Dr Nikki Henningham (Project Officer, The Australian Centre, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne)

The research team also included the eight fieldworkers who collated data and conducted observations in the schools: Graham Dodsworth, Gordon Dowell, Jennifer Gall, Sally Grant, Ruth Hazleton, Judith McKinty, Olya Willis and Robert Willis.

The research team were assisted in their task by many people, including members of the partner institutions. In particular, we acknowledge the generous assistance of Kevin Bradley, Curator, Oral History and Folklore and Director, Sound Preservation at the National Library of Australia and Deborah Tout-Smith, Senior Curator, History and Technology Department, Museum Victoria.

SCHOOLS WE VISITED

The project team visited schools in every Australian state and territory.

State/Territory	Number of Schools Visited
Australian Capital Territory (ACT)	2
Northern Territory	1
New South Wales	4
Queensland	2
South Australia	2
Tasmania	1
Victoria	5
Western Australia	2

Fifteen of the schools visited were government schools, compared with four non-government schools. Of the non-government schools two were in Victoria, one was in Queensland and one was in the ACT. Two of these non-government schools could be broadly defined as 'alternative' schools in their educational philosophy.

Two single-sex schools were visited and both of them were non-government. One was located in Victoria, the other in Queensland. One school was all boys and the other all girls.

One of the non-government schools was founded, and continues to operate, in the Anglican religious tradition. Another was a member of the Presbyterian and Methodist Schools Association. No other religious schools took up the invitation to participate.

HOW WERE THE SCHOOLS SELECTED

Selection of the schools for the fieldwork was dependent on a range of factors. While the relatively small number of case studies was never intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the play of Australian children in schools, nonetheless the project methodology aimed for a representative sample that included schools from each Australian state and territory, located in a range of socio-economic and cultural communities, and situated in inner-city, suburban and rural areas. The project study design aimed for a 'snapshot' view of children's schoolyard play in a range of locations.

We were keen to include some schools in the sample that had been visited by fieldworkers in previous studies, so that we could compare records of children's schoolyard play over time. Eleven schools visited were featured in Dorothy Howard's

study conducted in the mid 1950s. One school was included in the Lindsay and Palmer study of Brisbane schools completed in the 1970s. Another was the subject of extensive research for a postgraduate degree by Heather Russell in the mid 1980s, while another was included in a general study of folklife and culture conducted by Gwenda Davey in Moe, a town in regional Victoria, in the mid 1990s.

A further five schools were selected as case studies of particular areas of interest to the investigators. One was a school in a tropical environment, another was a new school in a newly developed suburb on the outskirts of a large metropolitan city. We also visited a socio-economically 'disadvantaged' school where play practices were integral to the management of student behavior. Another school was selected because of its tradition of consistently high attendance across family generations and another school was chosen for its 'alternative' philosophies on play and education.

‘ETHNOGRAPHIC’ FIELDWORK IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Fieldwork for the *Childhood, Tradition and Change* project was undertaken in accordance with Human Research Ethics procedures as approved by the University of Melbourne and state and territory government departments. Previous fieldwork projects in Australian schools were conducted prior to the introduction of Human Research Ethics Committees and other regulatory bodies run by state and territory governments aligned to state and territory education departments. It is unlikely, for instance, that any of the children Dorothy Howard took photos of in the 1950s were asked for their permission, let alone given the opportunity to restrict further access to, and subsequent use of, the material that features them! Projects that were conducted in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s were similarly ‘regulation free’. The only stipulation might be that pseudonyms be adopted, and that the name of the school not be disclosed.

The research environment has changed substantially in the twenty first century and the methodology adopted for this project was negotiated within this changed environment. Each state and territory department of education must give its permission for researchers to approach school principals with invitations to participate. Some state education departments were quite reluctant to let this national study proceed, and this reluctance seemed to trickle down to some principals and teachers under their authority. However, the majority of education departments and school principals initially approached to participate were excited by the opportunity and were delighted at the focus the project placed on children’s expertise.

A number of factors influenced school selection. Each state and territory regulatory authority required precise information about the schools we planned to invite and an explanation why. Because the investigators opted for an approach that would reflect national and regional diversity, specific ‘case studies’ were selected, in numbers that reflected population density, with schools in Victoria and New South Wales being represented the most and Northern Territory and Tasmanian schools the least.

Many schools were invited because they had featured in previous studies, and so therefore offered opportunities for longitudinal analysis. Others were invited because they were relatively new schools designed from the ground up and had interesting spatial design and sharing arrangements with other schools in the neighbourhood. Others used ‘positive play programs’ as a way of helping students to

understand structure and discipline in the classroom. A number of non-government schools participated, including some that could be broadly defined as ‘alternative’ schools. Some single sex schools were chosen. Unfortunately, no Catholic, Jewish or Arabic schools agreed to participate.

The spread of nineteen schools visited reflects a broad range of playground contexts and experiences; from wealthy non-government schools to government schools in extremely socio-economically disadvantaged areas; from schools in the tropics in summer to those in Tasmania in winter; from those with a playground dominated by natural bushland to those with little more than an asphalt quadrangle; from those where children are allowed to climb trees and use tools to build cubby houses to those where the flying fox on the playground equipment is chained up and no more than five children can play together as a group. In all contexts, children played games of their own choosing, and despite the differences, there were remarkable similarities across contexts as well.

Once a school accepted the invitation to participate, a complicated administrative process began. Project officers prepared information packs, including consent forms and reply paid envelopes for school administrative staff to distribute to parents prior to the school visit taking place. Parents needed to give informed consent for their children to participate in the research. (In Western Australia, children are also required to give consent). No child could be photographed, videoed or sound recorded without their parent’s permission. Furthermore, because the material collected was to be placed in repositories for the eventual use of future researchers beyond the life of *Childhood, Tradition and Change*, parents needed to be given the opportunity to complete paperwork that allowed them to place access conditions on the material relating to their children. A small number of parents returned the consent forms via the postal system but most of them handed the forms back to fieldworkers when they arrived at the school.

The implications of this informed consent and access process were significant for the project. It meant that parents were required to wade through six pages of quite complex documents before approving their children’s participation. Some parents simply couldn’t be bothered. Others didn’t have the language or literacy skills to fully comprehend the documents. At one school, the majority of students came from homes where English was not the first language spoken. Extra time and resources, in the form of additional site visits and translation of paperwork into eight additional languages, was required to pull those schools into the project, but it was money and time well spent. Principals, teachers and students at these schools were interested and engaged with the research and their support was crucial to the project’s success.

As a result of the need for informed consent for participants in the project, ethnographic recording 'in the wild' was not an option. Fieldworkers needed to know exactly who they were photographing, videoing or sound recording. They could not simply point the camera, record and follow up names and details later. The fieldwork method, therefore, was devised in order to ensure compliance with the conditions of approval set down by the regulatory authorities. In broad terms, this meant that fieldworkers needed to survey the scene, record what they saw, make judgments on what should be recorded, check that formal consent had been given for the participation of children in the data collection and then set up interviews and play demonstrations. All in the space of a week!

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF A FIELDWORKER

Fieldwork for the project was conducted between December 2008 and November 2010. Fieldworkers were sent to schools, in pairs (generally one male and one female), to observe children for a week. In some cases, where the fieldworkers lived near the school, they would appear at an assembly in the weeks leading up to the visit to introduce the project to the school community. There were a few schools where they stayed for longer (nine-ten days) because the schools were either very big, or had multiple campuses. One site, a single room country school, was visited for three days.

Regardless of the length of stay, the schedule for a school visit was consistent. The first half of the visit, fieldworkers would walk the grounds before and after school, at recess and at lunch time, recording written observations about the types of play children were involved with, the ages and gender of the children involved, the weather conditions and other information they deemed important. They would make special note of play that they thought should be recorded either on video or as sound recordings, and would take the names of the children involved in the play. When the grounds were empty, they would take photographs to document the appearance of the school, its playground and its distinguishing features.

When the children were back in the classroom, the fieldworkers would check the names against the list of children who were given consent to be filmed, and then devise a schedule of interviews and recording sessions to be carried out in the second half of the visit, during class time. Children with permission were taken out of class and photographed, videoed and sound recorded. Video would generally show the children playing, sound recordings would generally involve interviews with children telling the fieldworkers about their play, divulging information about how a game is played, who is allowed to play it, how they learned about it, whether there are variations on the theme and so forth.

In some schools, fieldworkers were able to establish very good relationships with staff and principals, who also agreed to be interviewed. These interviews are an important resource for the researchers, providing insights into the changing educational contexts that shape the way children play and learn at school, along with the individual staff members' personal history and teaching philosophies. Other teachers encouraged their students to document their favourite games and send these written reports to the project after the fieldworkers had left the school.

At many schools, parents were also keen to contribute information. Some had been to the school that their own children now attended. Others were interviewed at school reunions and school anniversary celebrations. Others had no enduring connection with the school, but were engaged with the project and promoted it amongst the parent body, encouraging them to sign the consent forms and thus increase the 'talent pool' of children with consent that the fieldworkers had to draw upon.



Figure 1: Fieldworker collecting data at a school

Once the data was collected, fieldworkers then wrote up their notes, labelled their photographs and sent sound and video recordings for processing. Notes included pages of their random observations taken while observing activity in the first few days, as well as detailed descriptions of individual games, including information about when it was played, how many players could play, age and gender of players, weather conditions, number of variations on a theme. They were also asked to classify the game in accordance with category headings supplied by the research team, for instance, whether the game was a 'Ball Game' or a 'Chasing Game' or 'Language Play' and so forth. Fieldworkers also drew detailed maps of the school playgrounds, and where the play occurred.

INFLUENCES ON DATA COLLECTION

There were many variables that affected both the ability to record children's play and shaped the data collected by fieldworkers. For instance, in extremely hot or inclement weather children played inside, rather than outside. In some schools the physical environment of the playground either encouraged or discouraged particular forms of play. Significant variables that had an impact on the data collected over the one week period of the fieldwork research included:

- Climate
- Time of year
- Number of students at the school
- Cultural diversity of the school community
- Playground space and design
- Space arrangements (including number of campuses and sharing arrangement of playgrounds with other schools)
- Facilities available for student play
- School philosophies on play
- School rules
- Principal and teacher enthusiasm for both play and the project research
- Parental awareness and involvement in relation to both play and the project research
- Age of the students
- Gender of the students

DATA STORAGE AND REPORTING BACK TO THE SCHOOLS

Copies of the sound recordings have been sent to the National Library of Australia and Oral History Folklore Collection for inclusion their permanent collection. Museum Victoria has received copies of the video recordings for inclusion in their Australian Children's Folklore Collection, as well as the sound recordings. Both collecting institutions have also received copies of all textual descriptions and photographs.

Textual descriptions and photographs have been entered into an on-line relational database, along with fieldworker reports that include basic information about and impressions of the schools they have visited.

All participating schools and state and territory education departments received an individualized report on their school, as well as more general feedback on the findings of the project. A project website has been constructed, which will include ongoing updates: <http://australian-centre.unimelb.edu.au/CTC/index.html>

TYPES OF GAMES PLAYED

Throughout the project fieldworkers recorded and described nearly 400 games, which have been organised into thirty-eight categories or 'functional descriptors' of play on the project database. Within each of these categories there were many variants recorded. For instance, the fieldwork data revealed that while Chasey was a universal game in schools, there were many variations on the 'rules' that children ascribed to this game.

The major categories of play recorded in the fieldwork were:

- Ball Game
- Board Game
- Bullying
- Card and Board Game
- Chasing Game
- Choosing Game
- Circle Game
- Clapping Game
- Climbing Game
- Collecting Games
- Computer Play
- Construction Game
- Counting Game
- Dance Game
- Dramatic Play
- Elimination Game
- Forbidden Game
- Games With Technology
- Guessing Game
- Hand and Finger Play
- Hiding Game
- Imaginary Play
- Jumping Game
- Language Play
- Miscellaneous Physical Play
- Miscellaneous Play
- Music Play
- Out of School Hours Activity
- Physical Play
- Play with Equipment/Props
- Play with plants/garden materials
- Play With Toys
- Punishment
- Quiet Play
- Running Game
- Shooting Game
- Skipping Game
- Teacher Aided Game

Many games that were observed did not fit neatly into a major category or functional descriptor of play. For instance, Apple on a Stick is both a Clapping Game and a form of Language Play. The fieldworkers recorded descriptions of play onto data sheets as seen in Figure 2. These were then analysed and ascribed to one or more categories or functional descriptors in the project data base.

ARC PLAYLORE PROJECT 2007 - 2010		DESCRIPTION SHEET			RESEARCHER: Judy McKinty			
DAY/DATE: Monday, 26/11/07		Weather: Sunny, warm			SCHOOL:			
Time	No. of Players	Gender	Age	Type of Activity	Name of Activity	Props/Objects Used	Location	Duration
Lunch play 1:45 - 2:20pm	2	F	9-10	Clapping	APPLE ON A STICK		PA3	

DESCRIPTION: **VIDEO:** Yes **PHOTO:** Yes

Apple on a stick, makes me sick,
 Makes my heart beat two forty-six
 Not because you're dirty, not because you're clean,
 Just because you kissed a boy behind the magazine.
 Girls, boys, they have a lot of fun,
 Here comes Johnny with a pickle up his bum.
 He can wiggle he can wobble he can even do the splits,
 But I bet you ten bucks he can't do this,
 Close your eyes and count to ten,
 If you muck it up you're a big fat hen.
 (Do clapping pattern with eyes closed) One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.
 (Eyes open) You didn't muck it up so that's the end.
 OR
 You mucked it up so you're a big fat hen.

PLAYERS/INFORMANTS:

COMMENTS: This game has a complicated clapping pattern involving clapping backs of partner's hands with own hands together, clicking the fingers, changing handgrips and slapping the hips. There are no ordinary clapping movements in it.

Figure 2: Description sheet used by fieldworkers

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Analysis of the extensive range of data is now underway. The following observations are preliminary and general, and form the basis for further research questions to be considered by the investigative team.

THE NEED TO RUN AND PLAY CHASEY CROSSES ALL SCHOOL CONTEXTS

Forty varieties of chasing games were observed and described. Some version of Chasey (or Tips, or Tiggy) was played at every school, even the school visited in the Northern Territory during the tropical summer. The official rules about who can play and in what numbers are strict at some schools. Other rules, as established by the children, are complicated and require equipment. Girls and boys both play it with the same degree of enthusiasm. If we are to believe the testimony of one child, who had been banned from playing Chasey for a week as a disciplinary measure, Australian children need Chasey for survival. 'Being banned from Chasey,' he said, was like being banned from food, or TV.'



Figure 3: Chasey

SPORT AS PLAY

Australian Rules Football (Kick to Kick or Marker's Up), Touch Rugby and Basketball (Shooting Hoops) were popular activities at all schools, with preference for a particular game determined by state. Some football codes are more popular in certain Australian states. For example, forms of Rugby are more likely to be played in New South Wales and Queensland, reflecting their popularity in the broader population. If the playground offered a space large enough, or a hoop to throw a ball through, there was bound to be someone playing some variant on one of those games. Very rarely would girls of any age be involved in these types of games, unless it was an activity that was organised by a teacher. Only at two schools was the 'girls' game' of netball played in the same, spontaneous fashion. This is not to say that girls did not enjoy playing ball games. Older girls would get involved in games of Four Square, Handball, Downball, Keepings Off and Bat Tennis. To do so, however, normally required that they play the games with boys.



Figure 4: Soccer

LANGUAGE PLAY FEATURED IN MUCH PHYSICAL PLAY AND GAMES OF SKILL

Seventy-three types of language play were described. These descriptions included language play associated with physical games, for example skipping, elastics and clapping games. Rhymes like Miss Mary Mack and My Boyfriend Gave me an Apple appeared to be well known, regardless of where the fieldworkers visited. Girls in the Northern Territory, Tasmania, Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales all knew My Boyfriend Gave me an Apple. Counting out games like Dip Dip, there's a

Party on the Hill, played to determine who was it for Chasey or Hidey, were similarly well known across the country.



Figure 5: Clapping game

Language play was also associated with games that tested the memory. Concentration, for instance, requires players to chant a standard rhyme and clapping sequence and then provide new information when the rhyme prompts and it is their turn. A variant on the game, using a similar rhyme and clapping sequence, was played at three different schools, always by girls.

Interestingly, there was some variety with regards to the tolerance of ‘rude words’ in language play. At a school in Tasmania, for instance, most children say ‘It bit dog poo, you are not it.’ The word ‘shit’, that seems an acceptable part of a counting out rhyme in other schools visited, appears taboo, or not acceptable here. Upon asking, several children responded vehemently that they **never** said the ‘other’ word. Alternatively, at a Victorian non-government school, girls discussed with disdain a recent publication of traditional rhymes for children that, in their opinion, sanitised the originals.

PLAYING WITH EQUIPMENT/PROPS/TOYS

Most schools discourage children from bringing toys from home, mainly for security reasons, but also because in some schools, the presence of such objects has led to incidents of bullying and theft. For example, Australian Football League (AFL) collecting cards were no longer permitted at a school in Tasmania because of unpleasantness in the previous year. Nevertheless, there are still some items that make it past the gate.

Dolls, stuffed toys, and swap cards/collectibles are all popular items and provide inspiration for much imaginary play. In particular *Pokémon* cards, *Kung Fu Panda* figurines, *Tech Deck* mini skateboards and life-like baby dolls were all popular at schools around the country. Ownership and control of the items appeared to confer status in some contexts. In one card game played in a Tasmanian school, the girl who held the cards also held power over the whole game.



Figure 6: Card collecting

Children will also use props and equipment in the playground to test themselves physically. Children playing King of the Tower, for instance, would balance on a bar in the adventure playground and wrestle each other (see Fig. 7). The player who didn't fall was proclaimed king.



Figure 7: King of the Tower

Children also played with traditional play equipment such as skipping ropes and elastics. Some form of skipping game was recorded in eleven schools, including the all boys' school. Elements of competition are clearly to be found in many skipping games.

Children will use steps, painted designs, hopscotch patterns and four square courts to play 'regulation' games that they are designed for, but they also use them to make up games of their own. For instance, Days of the Week (see Fig. 9 below) is played on a set of seven wide and shallow steps. Each step is a day of the week, from the top: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The grass at the bottom is Holiday. One girl is 'It' and stands down on the grass at the foot of the steps. All the others stand along the top step. The girl who is 'It' can name two 'poisonous days', and no-one is allowed to stand on those particular steps. Anyone who does is out. 'It' calls out a day of the week, and everyone has to move down or up to that particular step, but they must jump over any 'poisonous days'.

Players can help each other if the jump is too long for someone. They reach out their hand and pull them up or down over the 'poisonous day' step, steadying them when they land. If 'It' calls out 'Holiday!', everyone runs onto the grass. They have to reach the rubbish bin beside the oval, about halfway down. 'It' tries to tag someone, who becomes the new 'It'. If she doesn't catch anyone, she is 'It' again in the next game.

Figure 8: Skipping

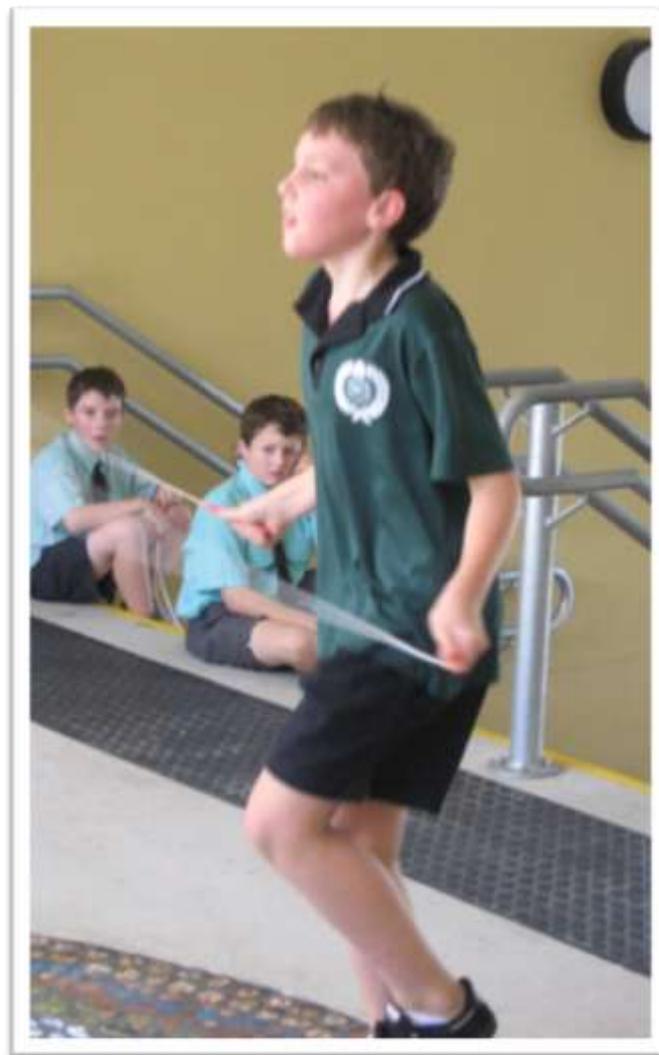




Figure 9: Days of the Week

At some schools, teachers will deliberately leave buckets of toys and play equipment, such as hula hoops bean bags, skipping ropes and elastics out in the playground, or in the classroom, for children to use as they wish.



Figure 10: Hoops

FIELDWORKERS DESCRIBED SEVENTY-FIVE FORMS OF IMAGINARY PLAY

Many games of imaginary play involved props or toys brought from home (dolls, stuffed toys etc.), or were based on characters that had broad appeal in popular culture such as characters from the films *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones*.

Some of the games had quite complicated 'plot lines' and used school infrastructure (as opposed to play equipment). At one school five grade three boys played a game based upon the *Indiana Jones* series of movies about a hero who goes looking for ancient treasures and has adventures along the way. They all had character names and their task was to find the 'Crystal Skull'. They moved across the school oval, according to the action of the game. The boys used the stormwater drains running under the oval in their game. The drains have open metal grills, and in the game these were 'portals' – 'Portal 1', 'Portal 2' and 'Portal 3' - their 'secret way to communicate'. The boys were kneeling on the covers of the drains and leaning over to yell their messages to the others (see Fig. 11 below). The person on the middle drain had the job of relaying the message along to the people at the other end. Other, older children witnessed the game and were impressed by its players' inventiveness.



Figure 11: Imaginary game based around *Indiana Jones*

Children would also find interesting items in the playground and improvise. Fossilised Egg, for instance, was played by six-year-old boys who found a piece of broken rock which they imagined to be an ancient egg. This 'fossilised egg' was confiscated by a teacher, however play continued as several smaller rocks were found in the hollow bricks. Fairy gardens were made out of sticks, leaves, twigs and

feathers at schools where there was a significant natural environment included in areas that children could play in.

MUSIC PLAY AND DANCE GAMES

Children played games based on singing and dancing activities because the school made music and space available for them to do this. Others staged their own rock concerts or practiced for formal events that were scheduled later in the week. Popular reality television competition shows like *So You Think You Can Dance?* and *Australian Idol* would sometimes prompt these sorts of activities. Boys were equally involved in these sorts of activities with girls. They would practice hip hop moves, and where schools offered dress up boxes, would create costumes for rock concerts. They would happily demonstrate their expertise and moves. For instance, one team of fieldworkers visited a school in 2009 not long after the death of Michael Jackson. One boy in particular was very keen to have his Michael Jackson dance moves recorded.

QUIET GAMES

Some children need space and time to sit, talk and ‘Chillax’ as they describe it. This was observed at all schools. However, the children’s preference for quiet games may be particularly acute in extreme weather conditions. For example, children at a school in Australia’s northern tropics were visited in late October to early November which allowed the fieldworks to observe the affect of growing heat and the buildup of tropical humidity on play.

While active games such as soccer and cricket were played at the school, there were a number of children who took advantage of the ‘quieter’ options available to them. By the time the heat built up their preference was for quieter forms of play. But even in schools where extreme climate was not a determinant needed the option for quiet pursuits at times. At several schools children were found in pairs or alone just reading or drawing. Hanging around and talking is also an important way of relaxing for children at all schools.



Figure 12: Playing quietly with beads

SHOOTING GAMES

Most schools disapprove of gun games and at one school visited shooting games are forbidden. Children still played them. Interestingly, the children at a non-government school with a reputation as 'alternative', where 'no shooting games' is one of a handful of strict, enforceable rules, were the group most open to discussion about the form of their shooting games. Bang requires a minimum of three players. They will chase each other using either an object or their hands to mimic a gun. They will then stalk each other, aim and fire, making appropriate shooting noises when they do. If someone is obviously shot, they have to crouch down for twenty seconds before they resume play. Some children suggest that, in order to get around the 'no gun rule', they will play with 'light sabres' as per the weapons used in the movie *Star Wars*.

FORBIDDEN GAMES

Twenty-four forbidden games were recorded. Children were fully aware that some games were forbidden. Informants told fieldworkers about Blender, for instance, in confidence and with some embarrassment. The game was played on a metal stair banister. One player would entice another unwitting student to sit on the middle bar of the banister. He and his partner would then each grab one leg and run down the stairs. The victim would then be hurt by direct connection with the bottom upright of the bar banister.

What is forbidden at one school may be legal at others. At one Victorian government school, there appeared to be a general anxiety about children testing their physical limits. Standing on top of the monkey bars, for instance, was against the rules. The same game, however, at another government school was permitted. And at a Victorian non-government school, children were not only 'daredevils' on playground equipment, they were encouraged to climb trees. When asked how she felt about this, one parent explained that the school's belief in the need for children to face physical challenges was one of the reasons she travelled 10 kilometres to get there every morning.

There is also evidence of confusion between children and teachers as to the status of the 'forbidden' games. For instance, at one school, children thought that doing handstands was against the rules, but they were not sure (see Fig. 13). At another, the status of Chasey is complicated because discipline problems at the school required the principal to ban it in some forms for a while.



Figure 13: Children at one school performed handstands but weren't sure whether or not they were a forbidden activity

Fieldworkers who observed schools in both the government and non-government sectors gained the impression that students in the non-government sector were perhaps subject to fewer statements of rules restricting the movement of children and play. Teachers were more likely to intervene on a case by case basis if there were issues, rather than create blanket rules 'just in case'. It was notable that in the government schools that there is much attention given to Occupational Health and Safety requirements and the impact of this on play activities and spaces. Further investigation into how schools manage this issue will be undertaken by the research team.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POPULAR CULTURE IN PLAY

Children use what they see in the outside 'mediascape' to inform their play in the playground. Television programs such as *Australian Idol*, *So You Think You Can Dance?* and *Man Versus Wild* provided the inspiration for some structured activities (e.g., concerts) and imaginary play. Dramatic play games, using characters from movies such as *Star Wars*, were popular. Games played with or based upon the *Pokémon* (see Figs. 14 and 15 below) and *Yu-Gi-Oh* gaming cards (derived from the popular television and computer games) were widespread. Children may be required to leave their technology and outside toys at the school gate, but their inspiration informs much of what happens in the schoolyard.

ARC PLAYLORE PROJECT 2007 – 2010: OBSERVATION SHEET					
SHEET NUMBER: 12		RESEARCHER: Olya Willie		SCHOOL:	
DAY/DATE: Tuesday 4 May 2010		WEATHER CONDITIONS: sunny and cool 18 C			
NAME OF ACTIVITY	Pokemon		TYPE OF ACTIVITY	physical - climbing	
GENDER	boys	AGE/GRADE	6-7	NUMBER OF PLAYERS	3
TIME OF DAY	lunch	DURATION	15 mins	PROPS USED?	climbing wall which is part of the playground equipment
SPECIAL COMMENTS				WHERE PLAYED (INC MAP REFERENCE)	area 7
INFORMANTS (IN PENCIL)					
CONSENT TO RECORD? (IN PENCIL)					
DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITY: This game involved ascending a climbing wall, which had footholds built into it and on reaching the top straddling it. The boys pretended that they had captured a certain character in the <u>Pokemon</u> cards.					

Figure 14: Fieldworker's observation sheet detailing the *Pokémon*-based game depicted in Fig. 15



Figure 15: *Pokémon*-based game

Names in the news, as well as popular media, can grab attention and be incorporated into a play. At a school visited in early 2008, a boy was observed playing in the sandpit area outside his classroom. He was sitting in one of the sandpits, and had lined up a number of shovels in the sandpit next to him. He had collected a pile of rocks and was throwing the stones at the digging end of the shovels. When asked what he was doing, he replied that he was ‘chucking stones at George Bush’s house’.

TECHNOLOGY AND COMPUTERS

As mentioned above, the content of new media forms, such as computer games and DVDs, inspires imaginary play in schoolyards. In some schools it does more than this, as it provides the context for new language in traditional games. At one school, the way to ask for a break in the game is to hold up the index and middle fingers straight and together, and shout 'Pause!', as if to mimic the pause button on the DVD player. If something needed to be repeated, someone would yell out 'Rewind!' Two girls wanting to share a quiet conversation by themselves would create 'the chat room', a term used for spaces in cyberspace where people can have private 'conversations'. Children at a small non-government school played dress ups and performed, but were able to watch themselves doing so in real time with the help of a webcam and computer. Others at this school played treasure hunt games, leaving clues for each other on networked computers in different classrooms. At another school, mobile phones, although generally banned from schools, were observed being used by the students for communication in the playground.



Figure 16: Computer play

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND PLAY

Australia is a culturally diverse nation with a population that speaks almost 400 languages and identifies more than 270 ancestries (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Yearbook Australia, 2009-10). Since World War II Australia has been profoundly shaped by successive waves of migration: from the post-war migration of Europeans, to the arrival of South-East Asian refugees from the late 1970s, to the more recent influx of migrants from parts of Africa and Afghanistan. By 2006, almost a quarter of

all Australians were born overseas, and just over a quarter of Australian-born people had at least one parent born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Yearbook Australia 2008). Migration has shaped the cultural diversity and social life of the broader Australia community, and by extension, has impacted on practices of play in Australian schools. In particular, the ethnic and cultural composition of school populations in the twenty-first century is vastly different from what Dorothy Howard would have found when she visited Australian schools throughout the 1950s.

In school communities with a proportion of migrant children we can see that play becomes an important means by which newly arrived children become socialised and familiarised with their new environment. They also provide new variants of play. 'Traditional' games, such as Scissors, Paper, Rock get a new twist in one game, where children use the same hand signals but call out 'Sim, Sam, Sah'. Girls of Sudanese heritage attending different schools in different states play a similar sort of game with rocks and pebbles they find lying around the yard (see Fig. 17). Boys who have recently arrived in Australia often demonstrate their sporting prowess by playing sports with global appeal, such as Soccer and Basketball (or Shooting Hoops).

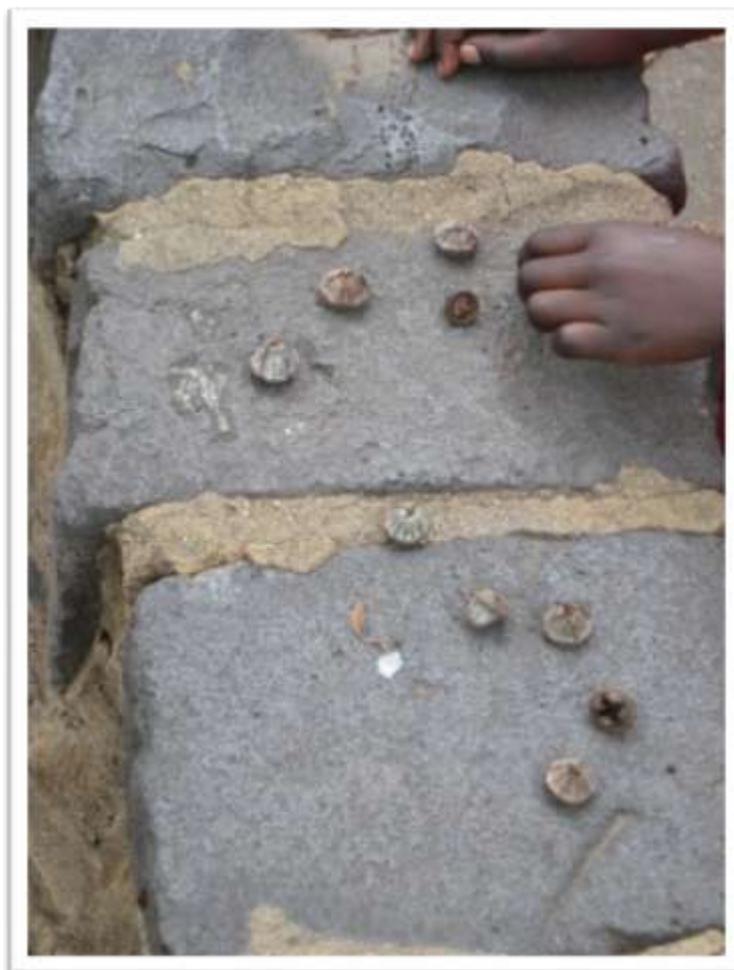


Figure 17: Sudanese game using rocks and pebbles

The project visited one inner urban school with a very high percentage of new arrivals from a variety of different countries, and another school in a non-metropolitan town where significant non-Anglo-Celtic populations had settled. Most other schools had varying degrees of ethnic and cultural diversity, with the non-government schools, especially the 'alternative' non-government schools, perhaps being the most culturally homogeneous. Some of the government schools located in affluent neighbourhoods exhibited little ethnic diversity as well.

Some of the schools visited were located in areas where there was a statistically significant Indigenous population, although this does not appear to have had any discernable impact upon the games played at these schools. There was an Indigenous student support program at one small rural school in New South Wales and an Aboriginal Resource Officer at the Northern Territory school.

Recognition of Indigenous cultures was a key feature in some schools, mirroring the changes the reconciliation movement has brought to relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australian society more generally. Two schools (one non-government and one government, both located in inner metropolitan centres) incorporated Aboriginal motifs, such as the Rainbow Serpent, into their playground design. Indigenous politics was present in one non-government school, as 'Sorry' graffiti appeared in cubbies built by children along the fence line (see Fig. 18). This graffiti explicitly engages with broader political debates over reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.



Figure 18: 'Sorry' graffiti at one school

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the low number of Indigenous children at one school in a regional centre was an attraction for many non-Indigenous parents, the majority of whom did not live in the school's official zone. If the anecdotes are to be believed, non-Indigenous parents are voting with their feet for an unofficial form of segregated schooling.

AGE AND GENDER

No formal gender segregation was observed in the playground in Australian government and non-government coeducational schools. However age based segregation does exist. Normally separate playgrounds are designated for children in grades Prep – 2 and Grades 3 and over. Many schools will permit the younger children to wander into the 'big school' in search for their designated 'buddies' – typically older children or siblings who have been allocated to 'mentor' younger children. Older children are not normally permitted into the junior playground, although again, exceptions are sometimes made for buddies and siblings. Student numbers and the playground facilities available were additional determinants to how playground space was used. There were no restrictions at a small rural school with two teachers and a student population of thirty, whereas another, larger school in a regional centre has split its 'infants' and 'primary' children across two campuses. Interestingly, at a school that went up to Year 9, students in Years 8 & 9 are not allowed to be in groups larger than 3 people, and the fieldworks saw a teacher on playground duty requesting students in this bracket to split into smaller groups.



Figure 19: Young girls and boys playing together

Throughout their time at the schools, fieldworkers observed the impact of gender on children's play across both all-girls and coeducational contexts. In all schools many schools girls preferred to wear shorts, including under dresses, so as to be more able to participate in physical play. A spokesperson from the all-girls school that was visited believed that girls at the school did involve themselves in physical activities that they might not have had the confidence to attempt at a co-educational school. Challenging tricks on the playground equipment, for instance, that involved hanging upside on bars, were one such activity. How this impression holds up under real analysis remains to be seen. Girls at coeducational schools were observed engaging in quite physical play, but whether there are trends determined by age, climate and uniform is not known. There is evidence that boys still have the capacity to dominate in a coeducational situation. One school leaves marbles out for the children to play with. A female Year 3 student observed: 'The boys hog the marbles, but the girls play if they can get them'.

A teacher at the all-boys school noted with interest that when girls are involved with holiday programs, skipping and clapping rhymes become evident, contrasting with 'boys' only' programs where these aspects of play are not observed.

WEATHER AND SEASONAL DIFFERENCES

Extremes of weather were included in the sample of schools visited by fieldworkers. One team was in the Northern Territory in early November, a period sometimes referred to as 'Mango Madness'. The impact of seasonal climate changes had a very marked effect on play at this school, much more so than any other school observed during the national research study. At the time of the fieldwork the temperature was around 35 degrees C, and the combined effect of the beating sun and the rain limited the time that could be spent outside. The school day is structured in relation to the climate; classes begin relatively early at 8.05 a.m. and finish at 2.30 p.m. During the week of fieldwork, staff commented that fewer children were on the oval than in the drier months, and that more children were spending lunchtime in the library. For instance, marbles can't be played on the wet ground, but these 'take over the school' in the drier weather in Term 2 (April – June). It was interesting to observe how children modified their play activities (sometimes under the direction of teachers) in response to extreme climatic conditions.

Not surprisingly, inclement weather in winter often led to more inside play, as children were required to move into the classroom to get out of the rain. Some schools catered for inclement, cold weather by allowing children to play with the class computers and even their mobile phones. If the weather was cold but clear, many 'traditional' physical games, such as Chasesy, Skipping, Queenie and Elastics were in full swing in the playground.



Figure 20: Elastics

The school with a population of 883 students was much more regulated. The school is a complex site to describe in terms of play spaces, as playgrounds are spread over the whole area, some large, some small. Each separate playing space is designated for particular Year levels, and the combination changes according to the space. There are designated playing spaces for Prep, Years Prep & 1, Year 2, and Year 3, Years 1 – 3, Year 4, Years 4 & 5, and Years 4 – 7. There are also five Adventure Playgrounds, each designated for specific Year levels. There is plenty of open, grassed space between and around the classroom buildings, including two large ovals. The ovals are designated for Years 1 – 3 and 4 – 7, and the age groups are strictly controlled.



Figure 22: Large school campus

One metropolitan non-government school claimed that it deliberately kept its school population small, thus enabling a range of activities that could not reasonably be expected at larger schools. Children are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves, including responsibility for their own risk-taking in activities such as climbing and cubby building. Given the small school population, teachers are able to keep a watchful eye, without hovering. Children at this school also decided to rescind former decisions to separate play areas by age-group, with students now choosing to share all play spaces. A considerable amount of play involving different age-groups was observed during the fieldwork period.



Figure 23: Building a cubby



Figure 24: Climbing

LANDSCAPES OF PLAY

There was a great deal of variety in the landscape children had available to them. Some children on the urban fringe, or in the country, had playgrounds where native bush was not merely ornamental, it was a place for play. Children could climb trees and use the nooks, crannies and natural materials to make fairy gardens and dells. They constructed cafés and shops, using the leaves and twigs to make pretend food. They were allowed to dig channels and make rivers, and smash rocks. Inevitably, the opportunities for making their own objects from the materials in the environment were greater for children going to these schools.



Figure 25: School fence

Other schools, often by virtue of their metropolitan location, had less natural bushland to play with, but effort and imagination had gone into creating playgrounds of interest, sometimes through the use of public art, like the Rainbow Serpent at one school (see Fig. 26). At another school, in a low socio-economic area where a large majority of children live in high rise apartment blocks, a policy of garden play was introduced, including the creation of a vegetable garden. The principal stated that ‘the kids have been thrilled with the gardens [as] they don’t have them at home’. More gardens are planned for the future.



Figure 26: Rainbow Serpent

At one school there is deliberately only one set of play equipment. The principal sees this as desirable, as it is believed to encourage children to use their imagination in developing free play activities.

At another school, the playground was not only a place for children to play and interact; it was a self-conscious statement about the cultural change being affected at that school since 2004. The principal recognised the need for the school community to develop pride in their physical environment as an important mechanism in resetting the values and goals of the school. In the playground, features such as the gazebo, gardens, and the fencing around the school were part of this development. There is a raised rose garden beside the grassed area, with stone steps and a terrace leading to a flagpole where the Australian flag is flown (see Fig. 27). The Aboriginal flag is flown on another flagpole in the centre of the main playing area. Before the new landscaping was begun, the principal invited a group of visiting Buddhist monks to come to the school and perform a ceremony of peace and harmony at the site. The monks subsequently visited the school several times to work with the children.



Figure 27: Playground with Aboriginal flag

Other schools provided expansive landscapes for the children to play in but were nervous about allowing children too much freedom within the space, for reasons of safety. One school with an impressive adventure playground, grassed oval area, extensive asphalt areas and tree groves had the following list of ‘thou shalt nots’, a list with which not all teachers were in full agreement:

- picking up sticks
- doing handstands and cartwheels
- playing in the grove of trees
- climbing trees
- standing on the top of monkey bars
- doing ‘waterfall’ and ‘flips’ and hanging upside down off monkey bars
- bringing ‘flying toys’ to school
- playing chasing games and ball games in the ‘passive area’
- no drawing hopscotch patterns on the asphalt with chalk

The landscape of play was an important variable in children’s play practices, although it should not be assumed that bigger, more diverse playgrounds always led to more real options. Arguably, the range of options available to children, regardless of the landscape, was dependent on the schools rules and philosophies of play.



Figure 28: Locked up flying fox

SCHOOL RULES AND PHILOSOPHIES OF PLAY

Most schools visited offer variations on the following theme when it comes to defining rules: 'We try not to have too many rules for the children to follow'. If there was a single, consistent rule that children had to remember across all schools, it was 'no hat, no play' due to sun exposure (although in the southern states this rule is only applied in Terms 1 and 4.) A similar attitude applies across most of the government schools visited, although the rules are more clearly articulated, and less left up to the 'common sense' of the children. Rules that were common across most schools that impacted upon play included: no playing with sticks, no tackling in ball games, no climbing, no digging in the native gardens, and no playing of vigorous games in passive play areas. One school had a variation on the no-sticks rule that allowed students to play with sticks no bigger than a child's hand. Another school, concerned about safety in ball games instituted a 'hands free' policy that banned children from making physical contact – although the children were nevertheless observed subverting this rule to play Chasey and tackle in football games.

Fieldworkers were interested to note that at the majority of non-government schools, there was a relaxed attitude to play with very few rules that impact upon play activity. At one school, the philosophy behind this is explicitly stated: 'We understand the importance of experiential learning. Children are encouraged to explore and experiment, to find their own meaning and to develop an independent voice ... The school does not rely on externally imposed discipline.'

Principals at most government schools articulated similar philosophies. They are very aware of the sanitisation of play and the encroachment of Occupational Health and Safety inspired limitations to play, although some fieldworkers observed that it is likely to be parental attitudes that lead to what could be described as the unfortunate 'bubble wrapping' of children at some schools. To paraphrase one principal, schools aim to build resilience in students, rather than be over-protective, though they have to be supremely attentive to safety issues. The principal at one Western Australian school stressed the importance of play-based education and socialisation. He stated that the only specific rules relating to play at his school were bans on running on the verandahs, and he hoped that they would never have to introduce specific 'forbiddings' such as playing with sticks. At another school, with a high population of children who were recent immigrants from many countries, play was seen as a positive means of social integration.

This relatively relaxed approach to play and play activities can be contrasted with a far more structured approach at one school where, ten years ago, violence and bullying defined the experience of school for the whole community. There are reports that prior to the arrival of the current principal, many children had stopped

playing in the playground altogether, and stood with their backs to the wall as this made them feel safer. This school now operates a system of 'positive play', a principle that was developed to manage the school's previously hostile playground environment (see Figs. 29 and 28 below). A series of spots painted on the playground form part of a progression of behavior consequences which range from warnings to time out (sitting on the spot), attendance at a Focus Room during lunchtime through to suspension or exclusion. It is important to view the current play at this school within the context of this recent school history because it is an indication of how the ethos of the school has been positively transformed.

Though the playground became a safe place for students, the years of violence and inertia had severely disrupted children's play patterns. In particular, there had been a break in the continuity of children's play traditions and many did not know how to play any of the games usually found in schoolyards. Some of the teachers taught games they remembered from their schooldays and the Physical Education teacher taught children how to make rules and take turns and how to play games such as Red Rover and Dodge Ball, and painted 4 square courts in the playground. The school has a policy of some teacher-led physical activity every morning. This includes playing of games.



Figure 29: Positive yard play poster



Figure 30: Positive yard play rewards

The emphasis in the playground is on safety and conflict management. Games deemed physically dangerous or having potential to cause conflict are banned (such as Brandy). Banned activities also included running on the asphalt which affected children's ability to play games that involve chasing and catching. As a result a distinct lack of running in the playground was observed. As mentioned earlier, it is important to understand the current restrictions on play within the context of the history of discord and violence. That children actively and willingly participate in a variety of games across the entire yard is an indication of the success of the current principal in transforming the culture.

Most of the schools visited have rules and philosophies that sit somewhere in the middle of the examples described above, balancing safety concerns with the needs of students to engage in active play.

CHILDHOOD OBESITY AND ADULT INTERVENTIONS IN PLAY

As seen in the example above, there is adult intervention into children's 'free' playtime at school. Adult 'footprints' are all over the playground in other school contexts. Concerns about the perception that childhood obesity in Australian is increasing explicitly influence what goes on in the playground at several schools.

There is a strong emphasis on physical activity in the curriculum of one South Australian school and class time is set aside for structured outdoors activities under the direction of teachers. A scheme is in place whereby children in the older grades teach games to younger children during class time. Some of these structured activities find their way into the informal play of students. There is also an emphasis on student input. The children choose the patterns/games that have been painted

on the asphalt, and these include hopscotch and a snake that has numbers on its body. The Information Technology room is open for use over the lunch break, although students are encouraged to go outside and be involved in play activities. In recent times, Australian Rules Football has become more popular due, it appears, to parental influence, which has led to the establishment of four permanent goal posts in the oval area. There is strong support at the school for dancing, competitive jump-rope/skipping (with teams chosen in Year 6), and pedal prix competition (pedal car races). All these activities are designed to help children find an activity that will interest them enough to get them moving.

Some schools actively encourage particular play activities. Hoops and chalk are made available in the Junior play area of one school at lunch and afternoon recess. The parents fund the provision of pavement chalk, and it is used extensively by students in the schoolyard; students were observed drawing hopscotch patterns. A crate containing skipping ropes is provided in the lower courtyard.

Other schools employ external providers to get their children moving. One school has a program of golf activities. Another uses a play-based physical education program designed to foster cooperative learning. In this program a variety of games are played, including balance, tag and partner games to encourage working together in a team situation.

Fieldworkers commented on the particular influence of adults evident in play activities at one school. The music programme had given the children a song repertoire that lived on outside the classroom in the playground. The girls who were playing Elastics had been taught the game by the mother who had given her daughter the elastic for a birthday present. One boy sang us humorous songs his aunt had taught him.

SCHOOLS AS COMMUNITY PROPERTY

Several schools operate as much more than learning centres from 9am to 3pm. Almost all of them operate some form of Out of Hours Care service. As well as providing the standard curriculum from Prep to Year 7, another school covers several learning centres on the same campus, including: a Child Parent Centre for 4-year-olds, with early entry available for children with special needs, and 3-year-olds from Aboriginal background and children from non-English-speaking backgrounds; a Centre for Hearing Impaired children (CHI); and, a District Special Class with a Special Education teacher.

At this school the children in the CHI and Special Education classes join mainstream classes for Fitness, PE and other subjects. Playgroups for parents and their children

aged from birth to school age are held twice weekly in the multi-purpose room, and there is also a Dental Clinic on site. There is also a Breakfast Club providing breakfast each morning for children who require it.

Some newer schools, purpose built in newly developed sub-divisions have complicated shared facilities arrangements. One school visited by fieldworkers shares its site with two other schools (both non-government). Although each school has separate classrooms they have shared administration, library and playground areas. In order to manage this there are staggered lunch and recess breaks.

At one school, observations were undertaken of children at an After-School Program. Here it was noted that play was perhaps more relaxed than in the formal school environment, and that there was greater interaction across age levels and between genders.

CONCLUSION

The preliminary findings of the *Childhood, Tradition and Change* project reveal much about children's schoolyard play in Australia, not least the inventiveness of children and their capacity to engage with each other and their environment in all forms of play. Further analysis of the data collected by fieldworkers at the nineteen schools will reveal in further detail *how* children in Australia play in schools in the early twenty-first century, and the diversity and similarity of their play practices from school to school, and state to state. The research findings will also focus on the ways that children's play has altered and remained constant since the mid twentieth century, drawing upon the earlier studies of scholars, such as Dorothy Howard, and Peter Lindsay and Denise Palmer, and Heather Russell.

Certainly much has changed in children's play over half a century. For a start, there have been considerable alterations to school grounds, both in terms of landscaping and the facilities such as play equipment provided, as well as to school regulations determining who played where and when. Many schoolyards in the 1950s and 1960s were often segregated into boys' and girls' areas, a practice not observed today, and the types and availability of playground equipment and ground care has often changed dramatically. One very recent change in Australian playgrounds is the replacement of grassed areas with astro-turf as a result of many years of drought.

Other differences in contemporary children's play reflect broader changes to Australian society and culture. In particular, the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity of Australian society has impacted on children's play, and a range of games from other countries and cultures has been absorbed into the playlore of Australian schools. New technologies too have brought considerable changes to play from Howard's time. This is especially the case with the rise of computer play, which has often been adapted to fit in with more traditional games and imaginative activities, showing how children can adapt their games to incorporate a range of objects and environments.

Other aspects of children's play that were observed in the *Childhood, Tradition and Change* project showed a remarkable continuity with the playgrounds of previous decades. Games such as Hopscotch, Elastics and Marbles are still to be seen, though these are not played as regularly as they were twenty or more years ago. Other games, such as Chasey and ball games, remain popular although some activities may be restricted by the safety concerns of a school. Clapping, chanting and rhyming games are still enjoyed by children all over Australia, though the words and references to popular culture are updated by every new generation of Australian children.

In conclusion, the ***Childhood, Tradition and Change*** project has amassed a significant data set documenting Australian children’s play, which will prove a vital resource for researchers into the future. The project reveals the richness of children’s games and language, and the diversity and similarity of play across the nation attests to the vibrancy of children’s cultures.

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