

9 All the material collected by Dorothy Howard while in Australia, including photographs and play memorabilia, is held in the Australian Children's Folklore Collection at Museum Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. For a discussion of her fieldwork see Factor (1988). For a more general survey of her contribution to children's folklore studies, see Grider (1994). Dorothy Howard published a series of articles in American scholarly journals about her findings in Australia which are listed in the Bibliography.

10 In the Australian context see for example the individual and collaborative work of Ian Turner (1978), Wendy Lowenstein (1974), June Factor (1986, 1988, 2000, 2001), Peter Lindsay and Denise Palmer (1981), Sue Dockett (1999), John Evans (1993), Bronwyn Davies (1982) and previous research by Heather Russell (1986, 1994, 1997).

11 The doyenne of children's folklorists, Iona Opie, represents the view of many other researchers in her account of her 13 years visiting the same school playground, *The People in the Playground*: 'Every feature of the playground is used: the corners and walls of the buildings; the fences (as "home", or for tying one end of a skipping rope); the ledge outside the largest temporary classroom (for walking along, or as a vantage point, or for a game of King of the Castle); the flat drain covers and slotted drain covers (as sanctuaries or as marbles boards); the small cavities at the foot of "the marbles fence", where the asphalt meets the grit surface of the lane; the dust-bowl at the edge of the grass, used for flinging toy cars.' (Opie, 1993:11) See also Marc Armitage's (2001) description of an English school playground.

12 Lindsay & Palmer (1981: 121) also noted that 'The games are not to be found in all [Brisbane school] playgrounds because in some schools they are banned and in others they are definitely not encouraged.'

13 This view derives some support from Jerome Kagan's observation that 'The human brain, like the brain of a rat, is biased initially to attend to generality rather than particularity.' (Kagan, 2000:2)

14 'Mucking around' is an all-purpose term encompassing casual conversation, joking, teasing, showing off, etc.

15 The ubiquity of play, especially in primates, is now the subject of new research by a number of biologists and other scientists, who are speculating that 'play has evolved to build bigger brains... play activates many different parts of the brain... [and] also seems to activate higher cognitive responses... play creates a brain that has greater behavioural flexibility and improved potential for learning in later life' (Furlow, 2001:29-31)



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Where have all the players gone?

Olga S. Jarrett

Think of how you played as a child and what you learned from your play experiences. When I was a child, I had rich play experiences. Like many children today, we did not live in a safe neighborhood. I did not have the freedom to roam the streets, but we used our tiny backyard to the max. At home with my brother or with my friends, we played detectives, designing our own 'who-done-its', played school and made up tests, and played supermarket, shopping for products from our pantry with pretend money. Other memorable experiences included dress-ups, making up complex scenarios with dolls and dollhouses, being an explorer among the hollyhocks in our small backyard, making up puppet shows, playing board games, and designing a museum of natural history in a bedroom cabinet. When we got tired of having our baseball go over the fence, we sometimes got taken to a park to play. On vacation, we made sand castles at the beach and moss gardens and stick log cabins in the mountains. My half-day kindergarten did not teach me to read. Instead, we played at the sand table, learned singing games and did art projects. In school we had recess twice a day and an hour to walk home for lunch. We had art and music every week; and we had time to play after school since we did not have homework until 4th grade. I see many connections between how I played as a child and my adult work and hobbies, and I strongly suspect that play and informal learning experiences affected my approaches to learning (creativity, problem solving ability, and persistence) more than my formal school experiences.

What is happening to play? Children in America seem to be having fewer and fewer opportunities for positive play experiences. I see four trends that are eating into children's opportunities for play and fun in general:

- *Abolition of recess.* Many of the schools in at least 10 states have abolished recess, causing children to spend many six hour days without exercise or down time. Even kindergarten is affected. A recent survey of Georgia schools suggests that 25% of the kindergarten children do not get daily recess. They are indoors all day. Children without recess miss an opportunity to chase each other, make up their own games, decide what is fair and who is 'it' and hone their physical skills and imagination on playground equipment. The pressure to increase test scores has caused many school systems to opt for 'uninterrupted instructional time'. Nationwide (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Linver & Hofferth, 2002) and in my home state of Georgia (Jarrett, 2003), the children most likely to be deprived of recess are African American or Hispanic children living below the poverty line. Since children who usually have recess consider it punishment when recess is withdrawn, one could consider that whole segments of the population are being punished daily. What are the outcomes of a no recess policy? Dale, Corbin and Dale (2000) found that children who are inactive at school are even more in active after school. My own research suggests there might be more classroom management problems. (Jarrett, Maxwell, Dickerson, Hoge, Davies and Yetley, 1998) What about increases in obesity, lack of concentration, problems with learning social skills, lack of creativity, and increases in inappropriate play in the classroom?
- *Academic pressure at younger and younger ages.* Over the past 10 years, I have seen significant changes in Kindergarten and pre-Kindergarten (pre-K) curricula. Kindergarten is more like first grade was 10 years ago, and pre-K (4 year-olds) is looking more like



Kindergarten was in 1994. Kindergarten once was a 'children's garden' where five-year-olds played in block areas, housekeeping centers, with puzzles and games, and with sand and water. There was circle time with books and story telling, music and movement, and outdoor play. As I have supervised student teachers in kindergarten classes over the past ten years, I have seen major changes. The block and housekeeping areas have been removed, and children receive formal reading instruction for most of the day. Children who can't read at the end of kindergarten are considered behind. A pilot survey which my doctoral students conducted with veteran kindergarten teachers last summer showed that teachers are concerned that today's five-year-olds seem less creative and less able to entertain themselves than five-year-olds were a decade ago.

What about pre-K programs? Early academics is becoming a growing focus of these programs as well. New trends include testing in Head Start and the abolition of naps in pre-K to allow for more academic time. (Carr, 2004) According to policy-makers, focus on academics in pre-K is needed to prepare children for kindergarten, where a focus on academics is needed to prepare children for first grade. But what happens where children are allowed to play during the early years? In Finland, children learn through play until they enter formal schooling at age seven. (Ojanen, n.d.) They start out a bit behind, but they soon catch up. In international research designed to compare test results from different countries (Program for international Student Assessment), Finland is the highest scoring country in literacy and near the top in mathematics and science. Finnish teenagers score high on engagement and interest in reading. They read because they enjoy it. (Valijarvi, Linnakyla, Kupari, Reinikainen, Arffman, 2000) In contrast, a second-grader I know who learned to read early and was rewarded for reading many books as part of the Accelerated Reader program, refused to read at all during the summer. Reading for him was work rather than fun. Does academic pressure at younger and younger ages deprive children of prerequisite play skills that help build understandings and positive approaches to learning?

- *More structured and/or more passive leisure time.* Children whose parents have the time and money to involve them in lessons, organizations and sports often lead very structured lives, as they spend after school hours, Saturdays and summers in one program after another. They don't have much time for free play. On the other hand, latch-key children generally don't have much opportunity to play either. They are expected to stay at home and not have friends over to play. These children are more apt to spend their leisure time watching TV or using the computer alone than in playing school, playing board games, exploring outdoors in the fields and woods or in playing outdoor games. Are over-structured children suffering from stress? Are 'couch potatoes' more likely to be obese? Do they expect to be entertained? Do children with little outdoor experience care less about the environment? Eminent scientists have reflected on their early freedom to investigate as important preparation for scientific careers. Where do budding scientists learn how to investigate if school and after-school experiences do not allow it?
- *Funding cutbacks and No Child Left Behind.* The pressure of standardized testing mandated by the **No Child Left Behind** legislation has taken a lot of the fun out of teaching and learning. Many schools are teaching only what will be covered on the test. In some cases, this has meant cuts in physical education, art, music, science and social studies. The subjects that are not tested are often not taught at all. And the subjects that are tested tend



to focus on topics and concepts that can be tested by multiple choice tests. The National Science Education Standards (National Research Council, 1996) focus on science process skills, but scientific behaviour is not readily tested with multiple choice tests. Will a generation of students be turned off science?

Many schools have scripted programs that give teachers no leeway to draw on the children's interests or make learning fun. One teacher in my master class has to teach five scripted programs each day, allowing him not more than 15 minutes a day to individualize the curriculum. Pep rallies for standardized tests have replaced pep rallies for sports. Interestingly, a school in Canada that devoted one third of the day to playful activities such as art, music, and physical activities saw an improvement in attitude, fitness and test scores in spite of less time spent on academics. (Martens, 1982)

I am concerned about the pressure for more time on task and earlier academics. I wonder about the long term effects of less time for outdoor play and less time for activity-based learning. An unfortunate experiment is going on that could show what happens when young children do not have the opportunity to play. Are we ready to study it?

This article was first published in the *TASP Newsletter*, vol.28, no.2, Fall 2004. Reprinted with permission. Olga Jarrett teaches at Georgia State University and was the President of The Association for the Study of Play in 2004 .

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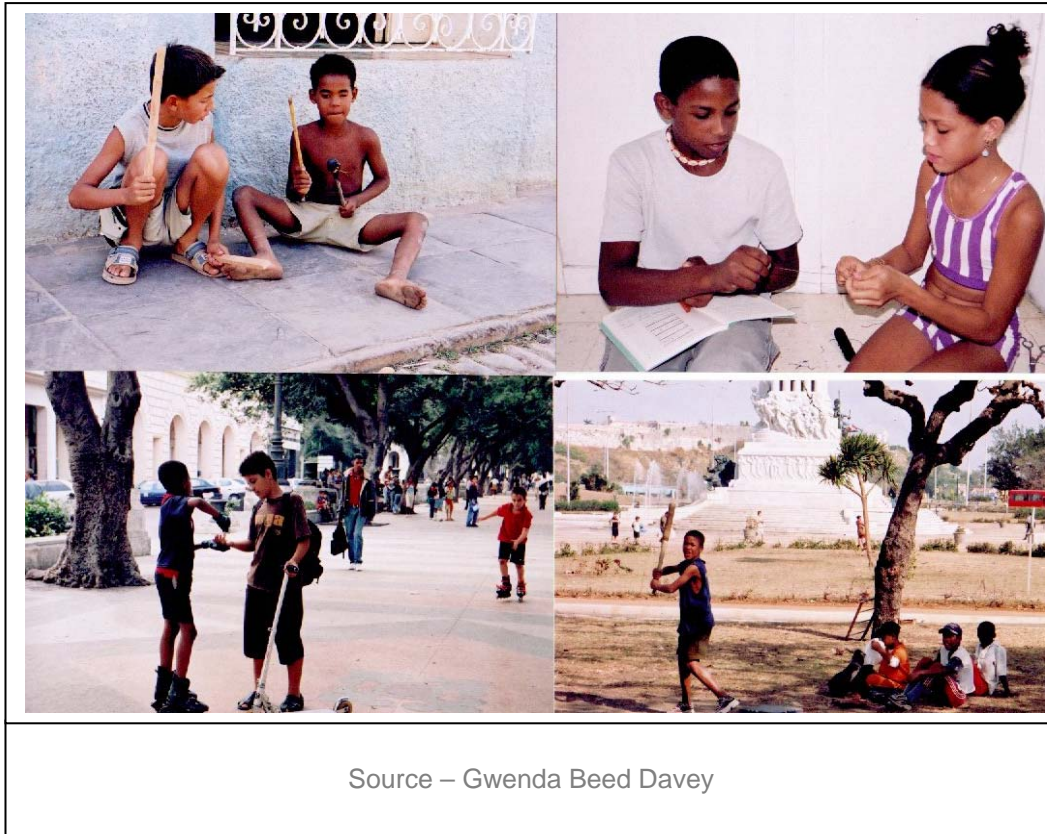
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Play in Cuba

Gwenda Beed Davey

In January 2005 I attended the Ninth International Symposium on Social Communication, held in Cuba's second city, Santiago de Cuba. Post-conference traveling took me from one end of this beautiful island to the other, and provided a number of opportunities to photograph some examples of children's play. The photos were taken by my Canadian cousin and travelling companion, Patricia Moss.



Trinidad is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a town whose buildings are almost unchanged since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the casa particular (private bed and breakfast house) where we stayed, the daughter of the house has enlisted her cousin and next-door neighbour to help her make a friendship bracelet (while he does his homework!). Out in the street, the younger boy is receiving instruction from his older friend in some of the correct rhythms for Cuban music. Given the importance of traditional music in Cuban life, it seems necessary to begin learning at a young age.

In the capital city, Havana, children play baseball, an enormously popular game here, in a convenient park, and others take to wheels in a plaza in central Havana. In a generally low-income economy, clearly some children's families are able to provide these expensive toys. Perhaps they are some of the lucky families working in the lucrative tourist industry. I was told that last year 600,000 Canadian tourists visited Cuba – it's only a three and a half hour flight from Toronto to Havana.

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Child's Play: Dorothy Howard and the Folklore of Australian Children

Morag Fraser

Walk in to the Melbourne Museum this week and you'll be confronted by a storybook line up of huge, improbable creatures. There's a rhino, a zebra, a bison and a mountain goat, all taxidermed to attention. But in between stands a boar, facing the other way round, his bottom stuck out at all comers. The children near me who stood and stared at the animals were as enchanted and astonished as I was. Stripes? Rumpled stone leather for skin? Tobacco horns? Can such things really exist? And, like me, they skittered round the back to look the boar in the face. Then they laughed, and laughed. Someone on the Museum's curatorial or promotions staff understands the importance of play and how gleefully children (and perennial child-adults) respond to play. One good game begets another. Any good teacher knows how to exploit that.

Upstairs in the Australia Gallery of the Museum last week another game was in progress. It swirled around the launch of a book about a remarkable 20th century East Texan educator called Dorothy Howard. The book, published by the Museum, is called *Child's Play* and collects the observations of this remarkable woman who came to Australia in the 1950s to explore the games our children played.

The book's editors, June Factor and Kate Darian-Smith, last week had a front-row audience of primary school children and a back row audience of adults. Dorothy Howard would have approved. Instead of talking about children, the adults had to talk with them. Engage. Play. Learn.

Dorothy Howard seems to have been one of those rare people who can retain a childlike openness to experience while still managing to grow up. In the United States, as a young teacher doing it hard in the classroom, she made a virtue out of necessity by turning her yard duty into a laboratory. She became fascinated by the ritual complexity and inventiveness of children's play and used her understanding of it to change her own teaching. The fascination burgeoned into a lifetime of research.



Children at the Launch
Source – Museum Victoria

Howard was an explorer – one suspects she couldn't help herself. In 1950, Australia, for a Texan, was along way away – the country of the great silence, she was told. It had no folklore of its own, they said. Australia's children played only the games of their colonial inheritance. And besides, there was nothing serious about child play anyway. Do Freud instead.

But Dorothy Howard was the kind of woman who would always have been first to run around the back and look the boar in the face. She got herself a Fulbright research grant, came here and



spent ten months travelling all around Australia as ‘a practiced playground snoop’. Her observations, collected in *Child’s Play*, detail exactly what she found but also what kind of woman, and teacher, she was. Australian children, unsurprisingly, were not the dutiful parrots they were supposed to be. Their games, rhymes, riddles, jokes, autographs albums, oaths and initiation rites were that paradoxical and intriguing combination – traditional ritual and dynamic invention.

In Dorothy Howard’s findings is a pedagogical principle so often articulated but as often ignored. If you start with children, trust to their innate wit, to the capacity for patterning and connecting and refashioning the world around them that is evidenced in their play, then you will be better able to teach them. And, as bonus, you too will learn.

A few weeks back Kevin Donnelly, writing in these pages (2 May 2005), lamented the ‘lowest common denominator’ literature being served up, particularly to boys, in our current curriculum. The likes of ‘The Day My Bum Went Psycho’ won’t lift their aspirations, he argued.

I don’t wish to trade book lists with my fellow columnist. And I’ll cheer any kid who reads The Iliad and will chant it happily alongside him. But I did wonder what Dorothy Howard would have thought of Kevin Donnelly’s prescriptions. There was something back-to-front about them. Children love the play of ‘The Day My Bum Went Psycho’. Just as they would love the irreverent inventiveness of the playground rhymes documented in Dorothy Howard’s research. Like this one:

*A man sat down by the sewer
And by that sewer he died.
When the case was brought to the coroner’s court
They called it suicide.*

From the energy generated by that play – word play, thought play – student and teacher can catch sparks and go on to explore other worlds. It is entirely possible to inspire children with all the best that has been thought and said while at the same time acknowledging the culture in which they live and encouraging what they themselves can do. That is, if we give them the space and licence in which to do it.

This article was originally published in the education supplement of *The Age* newspaper (Melbourne) 23rd of May 2005. Morag Fraser is an adjunct professor in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe University.



Source – Museum Victoria





**CHILD'S PLAY: DOROTHY HOWARD AND THE
FOLKLORE OF AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN**

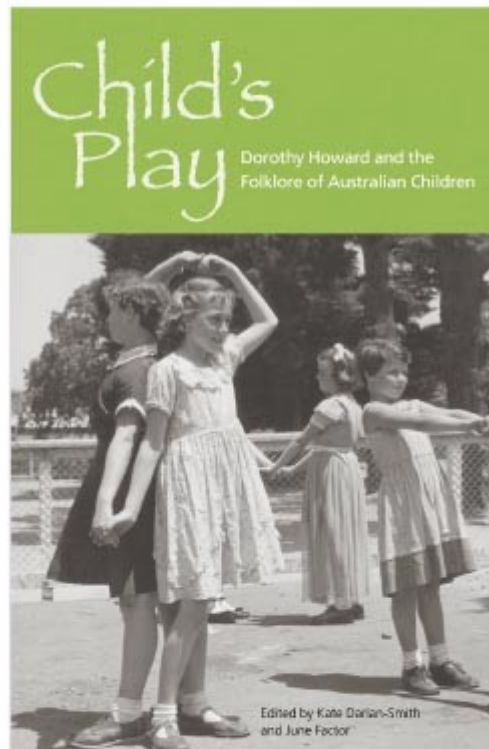
Edited by June Factor and Kate Darian-Smith

About the book

American academic Dorothy Howard visited Australia in the 1950s on a Fulbright Scholarship: her mission was to observe and document the play and folklore of Australian children. Fifty years later, Howard's original essays have been re-published, along with contextual essays by international scholars in the fields of history and folklore. Howard's meticulously documented accounts of hopscotch, knucklebones, marbles and string games reveal the Australian schoolyard as it was in the 1950s. Her insights into the world of the child are as relevant now as then. Essays by well-known authors June Factor, Kate Darian-Smith and Brian Sutton-Smith pay tribute to Howard's fascination with and advocacy of child's play.

Format: Limp, gatefold cover
240pp, 216 x 140mm
Illus: black and white photographs
and line drawings
RRP: \$24.95
ISBN: 0 9577471 7 9
Publication date: May 2005

From the book: 'I suggest that while we are studying children on the playground, they are studying us in the classroom, at home and in public gatherings; and expressing their findings — not in esoteric, academic jargon but in subtle but direct satire. I suggest we can learn about ourselves by listening to them ...' Dorothy Howard



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