

highly imaginative and creative ways. We should not, however, allow children's remarkable capacity to adapt to alienating environments to lull us into a sense of complacency. Streets are becoming more hazardous and not just from motorised traffic. Almost on a daily basis we are confronted with news of crimes against children and of accidents in

and around the home, street and school. The bigger the city the more complex and challenging the problem. There is a growing need for parks like Corams Fields; parks which are not just token green islands in a concrete landscape, but places where children can have a real say in shaping the play environment.



Playground just for children (London, 1996). Photo by John Evans

Access and diversity are the key elements, according to Robin Moore, whose book *Childhood's Domain* provides an interesting insight into how and where children play. 'Playground stereotypes need to be expanded into a vision of children interacting among themselves, with family and community, in every place lived in and used'. The notion of 'keeping kids off the street' is, according to Moore, not only unrealistic, but undesirable. In city living, streets are an integral part of the landscape. They are meeting places and places where children can play close to home. He argues that 'designated playgrounds can add important play opportunities

and attract activity, but they cannot substitute for the immediacy of the street'.

The difficulty of providing and/or retaining designated play spaces is that they require a commitment to the importance of play. They are resource intensive. There can be little doubt that the space occupied by Corams Fields in inner London would be eagerly sought after by wealthy conglomerates with a keen eye for well-positioned real estate. Conserving these 'special' places is a priority only for those who understand the meaning of play in children's lives which is why this particular playground captured my

attention. I don't know what led to the development of this park but, in this day and age, you have to admire a policy which places the children first and adults second. There is a lot of rhetoric surrounding this approach but not very often does one see some tangible evidence of it happening. 'No adults unless accompanied by children' is certainly a change from the signs we more typically see around our cities which proclaim in bold letters that 'children cannot enter unless in the company of adults'. For once it was nice to see the bold letters giving priority to the rights of children.

Reference:

R. Moore *Childhood's Domain: play and place in child development*, London; Dover, NH: Croom Helm 1986

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CHILDREN'S PLAY TRADITIONS ON YACATA ISLAND, FIJI

Jenny Williams

Yacata village is the only village on Yacata Island, and consists of just over two hundred people. The village school caters for children aged from six years (grade 1) to thirteen years (grade 8). The children then go to another island to continue schooling. In 1992 there were fifty-eight children at the school, divided into grades 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6, 7 and 8). Formality and discipline were noticeable during my visit, which somewhat inhibited my observations.

Upon my arrival, the principal called the school together for a formal meeting and introduction. The children then dispersed and I was escorted to the room for grades 1 and 2. They sang for me a number of songs in English: *Sing me a Rainbow*, *Old Macdonald*, *In the Rain*, and *Ten Fat Sausages*. The teacher told me they sing many English songs and rhymes as a way of teaching the children English. They also sang for me a traditional Fijian song about cows, and a Fijian song about a butterfly.

I asked the teacher if I could observe the children playing outside...The children were playing a game of 'tag' or 'chasey'. I asked how they decided who was 'it' or the one to do the chasing. A girl stated that in each year level they have two leaders

(usually the oldest or the biggest) who delegate duties or roles to the other children. The teacher didn't know of any counting-out rhymes as they were not necessary as the leaders chose...

I was able to observe other children, younger than school age, roaming around the outside of the school grounds with the smaller ones following the bigger ones. They involved themselves in climbing trees and drawing in the dirt with sticks or large stones...

The boys played a traditional spear-throwing game, which is used as a sport against other islands. It is similar to a javelin in Australia. The spear is made of wood, is approximately one and a half metres in length, with a tip carved from wood approximately 6 cm in diameter at the base, carved to a point at the top. A hole is carved on the inside to slide on to the wooden pole. At one stage a boy took the top off and used it as a whistle, blowing down the hole while resting the base against his bottom lip. The throw is marked by its length.

I also observed a number of boys involving themselves in throwing and catching a rugby ball, standing approximately 6 metres away from each

other...I was shown a Fijian game called *Zuru* which seemed to me a game of strategy and is popular amongst the children. It appeared to create great enjoyment. The girls also showed me their game of *Jacks*, for which they used small stones or nuts off a tree, approximately 3 cm in diameter.

A number of children were skipping and I was able to listen to their skipping rhymes. I found the European influence interesting, as the children didn't have any Fijian skipping rhymes; they were all in English. I questioned this, and was told by the oldest girl that there were none in Fijian...

Fijian children have a toy which they make from a piece of cloth and a tuna tin lid. They make two holes in the centre of the lid, then thread an old scrap of cloth or string, or anything they can find, through the holes and join it together. The cloth needs to be long and thin. The cloth and lid are then twirled around tightly by moving both hands simultaneously in small circles. You then pull the cloth tightly, move your hands in and out the cloth, and the tin spins in and out. I had a turn and didn't find it an easy task at all, and had the children

laughing at my expense! The children of course were experts...

ZURU

Activity: Six squares are marked out along the grass or ground. There are two teams of three. It is the objective of one team to cover between them all six squares by running or getting into them, then all ending in the same square, holding hands and calling *zuru!* It is the objective of the other team to prevent their opposition gaining entry into squares. To do this they need to tag them before they cross over the line. Once tagged, the person must return to his/her previous square. Once the team has won by calling *zuru*, the teams swap over.

(Note: *zuru* has no Fijian meaning.)

Extracts from a research essay written by Jenny Williams while a final year undergraduate student at the Institute of Early Childhood Development (now Department of Early Childhood Studies, University of Melbourne). Jenny Williams made a brief visit to Yacata Island school in 1992.



Zuru. Photo by J Williams