

# **THE STATE OF PLAY: A REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE**

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A conference on "The State of Play: Perspectives on Children's Oral Culture" took place at the University of Sheffield, England, organised by the National Centre for English Cultural Tradition in collaboration with the Folklore Society. It was a truly international gathering with speakers from Australia, Israel, North America, and several countries, as well as from all corners of the British Isles.

We were privileged to have Dr. Iona Opie as guest of honour and our opening speaker. She described how she and her husband, Peter, had become interested in children's oral tradition and how they approached their work. In typically modest vein, she stressed that neither of them had any academic training, the onset of the Second World War precluding the possibility of attending university at the time. Their total commitment to their chosen field, however, had undoubtedly been an inspiration to many in the audience.

There were also five keynote addresses during the conference. June Factor spoke on "Three Myths about Children's Folklore," Gwenda Davey discussed continuity and change in Australian children's traditional play, and Simon Lichman illustrated the way in which the Traditional Creativity Through the Schools project used the study of children's folklore and family traditions to help bring together the Arab and Jewish communities in Israel. Allison James, approaching children's play as a social anthropologist, discussed children's oral communication strategies in the negotiation of identity, while John Widdowson highlighted the importance of the informal language used in the playground for the acquisition of the formal linguistic skills taught in the classroom.

In addition, there was a plethora of stimulating papers on such topics as the effects of the physical environment on imaginative play and games, the influence of the media on playground games, children's story telling, historical aspects of the study of play, and children's music.

The conference seems to have stimulated communication among researchers around the world concerned with children's oral culture. It is hoped that a selection of the conference papers will be published in the near future. To obtain future information on this, please contact the organisers at the address below, or join the e-mail distribution list by contacting Julia Bishop (j.c.bishop@sheffield.ac.uk).

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