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# Children's Folklore Review

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## CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE REVIEW

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# Children's Folklore Review

Special Issue

The Texas Children's Folklore Project

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## SPECIAL ISSUE

### THE TEXAS CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE PROJECT (TCFP)

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## From the Editor

This special issue of *Children's Folklore Review* is dedicated to the work of the Texas Children's Folklore Project (TCFP), which took place in Austin, Texas in the 1970s. The contributors to this special issue are Richard Bauman, leader of the TCFP, and John McDowell and Beverly Stoeltje, who worked with the TCFP as graduate student researchers. Children's folklorists—all folklorists—are aware of the immensely successful careers of these scholars, and Part I of this issue consists of new contributions from each.

The insights in the new pieces are many. Bauman's article, "The Texas Children's Folklore Project: A Retrospective," provides, for example, historical context on wrongheaded deprivationist theories held by many scientists and teachers in the seventies. Where deprivationists saw a lack in the communicative and expressive practices of working class and minority children, folklorists working with the TCFP found playful, artistic, and cognitive virtuosity. McDowell's fresh reflections in "On the Streets with Austin's Chicano Kids" reinforce just how important it is for children's folklorists to get our feet on the ground—on the playgrounds, in backyards, and in the neighborhoods—so we can directly observe children's expressive performances in natural, unmediated socioecological contexts. Moreover, the highly creative multilingual speech play that McDowell documented on Austin's streets highlights the fertile grounds for expressive culture that multicultural communities provide. Stoeltje's thoughtful new piece, entitled "Play and the Performance of Children's Folklore: Opportunities for Learning," also focuses on her fieldwork. She discusses doing a kind of insider fieldwork with a group of youths that included her own children. In private and semi-private spaces, Stoeltje had front-row access to the group's folkloric performances in which the kids rejoice in cultural taboos, playing the clown, and making sense of nonsense. Having done my own fieldwork with groups of youths that included my children over the past decade, I am fascinated and inspired by the timeless pertinence of Stoeltje's intimate analyses.

I highly encourage readers to listen to the selections from McDowell's and Stoeltje's original field recordings that are linked in their essays in Part I. For those audio files, I thank Alan Burdette and Allison McClanahan, who while working with the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University, completed the crucial task of digitizing the original audiotape recordings. Their help was invaluable.

Part II of this issue consists of previously written and previously published articles, including Bauman's "Ethnography of Children's Folklore" (1982) and McDowell's "Riddling and Enculturation: A Glance at the Cerebral Child" (1976). The issue

concludes with Stoeltje's complete instructional book, *Children's Handclaps: Informal Learning in Play* (1978). I am very pleased to say that, until now, none of the contributions to this special issue have been published in an easily accessed, high-quality digital format.

Of the many challenging ideas located in the older pieces, I have my own idiosyncratic reasons for noting that the problem of *adultocentrism*, first introduced by Bauman in "Ethnography of Children's Folklore," the question of how children's play forms are connected to human development of higher-order, role-based relational reasoning, as discussed by McDowell in "Riddling and Enculturation," and the youthful forms of body acquisition that accompany children's performances of complex handclap routines, as demonstrated in Stoeltje's instructional book, are issues that remain just as relevant today to the lives of children and to the work of children's folklorists as they were a half-century prior. No doubt, readers will make their own discoveries as they (re)read these works.

Two further acknowledgements: The authors and I thank Jay Mechling for encouraging *Children's Folklore Review* to pursue a special issue on the TCFP. Additionally, Beverly Stoeltje would like to acknowledge the major role her daughters, Gretchen Stoeltje and Rachael Stoeltje, played in her research. They were engaged, even enthusiastic, about the project, the boundary between spontaneous and requested performance being quite fluid. Their names were changed in the Counting-Out performance write-up to Gina and Suzy.

For my part, reading (and rereading) this gathering of new and old TCFP publications, I am immediately impressed by TCFP's bountiful outputs. Look over the bibliography of TCFP publications (Part III, page 147 in this issue). The list includes twenty-one articles and working papers; two dissertations; and four books—including John McDowell's *Children's Riddling* (1979), a book that won the Chicago Folklore Prize, and Margaret Brady's "*Some Kind of Power*": *Navajo Children's Skinwalker Narratives* (1984), a book that I believe demonstrates some of our discipline's most clever and penetrating methodologies for gathering folk narratives from youths.

All in all, the TCFP must be considered one of the most successful research programs into the nature of children's folklore ever conducted in the United States.

K. Brandon Barker  
Indiana University  
Bloomington

## Part I

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# New Reflections on The Texas Children's Folklore Project



# The Texas Children's Folklore Project

## A Retrospective

Richard Bauman  
*Indiana University, Emeritus*

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*In this introductory essay, I present an overview of the historical and institutional context, the motivating ideology, the methodological framework, and the research foci of the Texas Children's Folklore Project, conducted from 1973-1976 by a team of faculty and graduate students from the University of Texas under the auspices of the Southwest Educational Laboratory.*

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From 1973-1976, I directed a research project on children's folklore under the auspices of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) in Austin, Texas. The project yielded a number of publications that suggest the principal frames of reference that guided our work<sup>1</sup> but not necessarily the motivating factors that led me to undertake it in the first place or the elements of time, place, and organization that gave it shape and direction. This essay, then, is intended to fill some of those gaps, though at a remove of more than 50 years and in the absence of concrete records that would allow for more detail and precision. Those files, alas, fell by the wayside in the course of several moves and office clear-outs, but memory, conversations with surviving participants, and the published record bring back at least the basic contours of the enterprise.

### **The politics of education in Texas in the early 1970s**

Texas, like other southern states with a long history of segregation, was conspicuously resistant to the kinds of efforts at integration mandated by *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the foot-dragging of top-level administrative officials, there were a few

staunch staff members at the Texas Education Agency (TEA) who made efforts, beginning in the late 1960s, to respond constructively to the need for redressive and compensatory measures to overcome the deeply detrimental effects of a century of segregated schooling.

One such effort, organized by Mary Galvan of TEA in partnership with Rudolph Troike, a linguist in the University of Texas English department, was the East Texas Dialect Project, launched in 1967 with funding from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), signed into law in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson. Among its wide-ranging provisions, the law provided federal grants to state educational agencies to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education. The substantive focus of the project in East Texas was "To study the language patterns which exist in Texas, particularly the phonology and syntax which have most bearing on learning" (Galvan and Troike 1972[1969]:298). A critical turning point in the project's development was the discovery by fieldworkers of "extralinguistic" factors (i.e., factors beyond the initial focal elements of phonology and syntax) that seemed to have significant implications for understanding language use on the part of African American children. Specifically—perhaps unexpectedly—the fieldworkers began to amass a corpus of children's folklore forms—"rope-skipping rhymes, game songs, and narrative accounts" as well as "verbal contests"—the dynamics of which could not be grasped satisfactorily in formal linguistic terms. As recounted by the principal investigators, "About this point, the project was fortunate in acquiring the consultative services of another University of Texas staff member, a folklorist with a specialty in Negro culture, whose role was to explain many cultural patterns of behavior to staff members. His contribution became larger as time passed and is at present [i.e., in 1969] equally important as the linguists'" (Galvan and Troike 1972:299). That folklorist was Roger Abrahams, Troike's colleague in UT's English department. African American children's

folklore was a significant component of Roger's dissertation research in South Philadelphia (Abrahams 1962) and at the time he joined the East Texas Dialect Project team he was at work on *Jump-rope Rhymes: A Dictionary* (1969). Roger's contribution, and that of Américo Paredes who joined up in the next phase of the project as it expanded into Mexican American South Texas, cemented the place of folklorists in subsequent compensatory efforts on the part of TEA. All this is to say that just as the UT Folklore Program was getting fully under way with the establishment of the Center for Intercultural Studies in Folklore and Oral History ("the Folklore Center") in the Spring of 1968 (see Bauman 2020), children's folklore was becoming a significant component of the intellectual environment for UT folklorists.

In the aftermath of the East Texas Dialect Project, TEA established a consulting committee, including Roger and Américo, to assist in the development of intercultural education programs but the politics of culture in Texas and the continued foot-dragging on the part of top-level leadership at TEA precluded any real progress. Pressures increased significantly, though, in 1971 with the handing down of Civil Action 5281, a federal court order issued in response to a lawsuit challenging continued efforts to circumvent integration (The School Desegregation in Texas Policy Research Project 1982). Sweeping in its scope, encompassing the entire state, the order contained multiple provisions addressing demographic and administrative problems and policies, but one section addressed "Curriculum and Compensatory Education" and placed TEA in charge of monitoring and enforcement. This responsibility provided an impetus to elevating the consulting committee, now under the rubric of the "Confluence of Texan Cultures," with a charge that included "the provision of programs to compensate students for the ill effects of previously segregated schools" and "the development of a statewide design to educate the disadvantaged."<sup>2</sup> Membership on the committee, as it turned out, was not without its frustrations as efforts to slow-walk the process within

TEA and to circumvent its implementation out in the state at large persisted, but for the time being, into the mid-1970s, children's folklore remained of at least professed interest to the agency as a resource that would serve the interest of compensatory program development and acknowledge the cultural heritage of "the disadvantaged."

It is important to recall that this period in the late '60s and early '70s was the heyday of deprivationist ideologies on the part of educationists and psychologist—even liberal ones—concerning the verbal and cognitive abilities of working class and minority kids and their low performance in the nation's public schools. In the pithy critical summary offered by Joan Baratz,

The educators were the first to contribute a statement about the language difficulties of these children, a statement that amounted to the fact that these children were virtually verbally destitute—i.e., they couldn't talk and if they did, their speech was deviant and filled with "errors." The next group to get into the fray—the psychologists—reconfirmed initially that the children didn't talk, and then added the sophisticated wrinkle that if they did talk, their speech was such that it was a deterrent to cognitive growth. [Baratz 1969:87]

To folklorists even superficially familiar with the kinds of verbal, cognitive, and interactional skills—even virtuosity—that these very children were able to display out in the schoolyard, the neighborhood, and the home, these deprivationist portraits simply did not ring true. The interventionist efforts that those of us at UT and our colleagues elsewhere sought to bring to bear were based on our understanding that what kids knew and could do with regard to language and the associated skills demonstrated in their play activities would provide a critical corrective to notions of verbal and cognitive disability and a basis for enriching educational programs that would compensate for and redress the damaging effects of segregated schooling.

At the same time that Roger and Américo were engaged in these state-focused efforts, I became involved in similarly motivated project sponsored by the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA), the national professional organization of speech pathologists and audiologists in the U.S. Collegial connections with faculty and graduate students in Speech and Hearing at UT drew me into a consultative role with ASHA as it too attempted to come to terms with linguistic and cultural diversity and overcome a deeply entrenched bias toward monoglot standard English and the ideologies that sustained it. My efforts, in a 1970 workshop and subsequent article (Bauman 1970), were directed at suggesting the productiveness of a relativist, ethnographic perspective on language as a critical corrective to the ethnocentric biases that prevailed among the vast majority of speech pathologists and speech therapists engaged with school-aged children. In particular, I advocated for the value of children's folklore as a vantage point on what minority children knew and could do with language.

### **The Texas Children's Folklore Project**

The foregoing overview is prologue, but it suggests why I should have been receptive when Bob Randall came to see me as director of the UT Folklore Center, sometime in the fall of 1972. Bob was the head of the Early Childhood Program at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), one of a network of research and development centers and regional educational laboratories authorized in 1965 under Title VI of the ESEA, the same agency that funded the East Texas Dialect Project, and subsequently transferred to the newly created National Institute of Education (NIE) in 1972. The Early Childhood Program was charged with research and program development for children in kindergarten through third grade, roughly, 5-9 years old. Bob's own interests centered on informal learning, that is, learning that takes place

primarily outside or in the margins of formal educational institutions and without formal instruction. Children's folklore was on Texas educators' radar by this time and Bob wanted to explore with me the possibility that SEDL might sponsor a research project in the area with the potential to serve a basis for educational programs that built on the verbal, cognitive, and interactional energies and strengths of cultural forms that were child-initiated and directed and pleasurable to the participants. Moreover, given that the children's folklore forms were rooted in their own communities, they might provide a mechanism for the kids to work out their own adaptations to multiculturalism in newly integrated schools. The outcome of our conversation was that I agreed to direct the project that Bob envisioned under the auspices of SEDL. For me, the venture was multiply appealing: it was an opportunity to put my money where my mouth was, doing primary research that was at the same time oriented to important applied ends and it was a way to support UT graduate students and get them involved in fieldwork that was socially engaged, motivated at least in part by real world social problems.

During the spring of 1973, SEDL administrators and I worked out the arrangements and launched the project. I would teach a graduate course on children's folklore that would serve as a venue for recruiting and training potential fieldworkers as well as exploring foci for research that would suit their interests and those of the overall project and include kids from the three predominant ethnic groups in Texas: African American, Anglo American, and Mexican American. During the academic year of 1973-74, I would take a leave of absence from UT to work full time on the project. Our responsibility was primary research, defined in scholarly terms. SEDL would handle all the bureaucratic work, mediate between us and NIE, provide leads to Austin-area schools that would allow us to work with their kids, and do the work of adapting our findings to school-oriented programs when the time came. Altogether, seven UT

graduate students worked on the project: Meg Brady, Rosalind Eckhardt, John McDowell, Andrea Meditch, Danielle Roemer, Beverly Stoeltje, and Dorothy Stroman. Meg and Beverly were experienced teachers, returned to UT as doctoral students in folklore and Beverly had kids of her own, which enhanced her participation in the project. As the project developed, sollicitational routines (riddles, knock-knock jokes, catches), ring games, line plays, and handclaps emerged as the principal substantive foci of our research.

### **Project guidelines and research foci**

The guidelines for project research were shaped by the conceptual and methodological principles of the ethnography of speaking, then entering what amounted to the second major phase of its development. Following on the programmatic phase of the 1960s, a cadre of young researchers had carried the approach into the field as a framework for their own primary research and by the early 1970s they were ready to report on the results of their efforts. At the time of my involvement in the TCFP, I was engaged, with Joel Sherzer, in the organization, conduct, and aftermath of the Conference on the Ethnography of Speaking, held at UT in April of 1972 to bring these researchers together and followed by the publication of *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* (Bauman and Sherzer 1974) and a review essay of the field (Bauman and Sherzer 1975). At the same time, in a related effort, I was engaged in formulating a concept of performance as a display of virtuosic skill and efficacy, presented initially in the *American Anthropologist* in 1975 and in expanded form in the book version of *Verbal Art as Performance* (Bauman 1975, 1977).

There are abundant bodies of literature on the ethnography of speaking and performance so there is no need to recapitulate their founding principles and subsequent development here. A few key points may be useful, however. First, the

notion of performance was central to the TCFP in two fundamental senses, both rooted in the ethnography of speaking: (a) performance as *practice*, that is, the social use of communicative forms in the conduct of social life, with a focus on acts, events, participant roles and structures, emergent outcomes; (b) performance in the more marked sense of *virtuosic display*, especially important as a critical corrective to deprivationist models. Second, our focus was developmental, attentive to the acquisition of competence in the use of the folklore forms in the children's repertoires. How did children acquire and manifest the knowledge and ability to use these forms in socially appropriate and intelligible ways? This concern required that we record and analyze what amounted to incompetent as well as fully competent attempts to engage in riddling or perform handclaps as novice performers tried them out on the way to being able to accomplish and evaluate fully competent performances and ultimately to attain reflexive awareness of how the various forms are made, used, evaluated, and even, perhaps, parodied or subverted in inversive counterplay. The standard of social appropriateness that guided our work was child-centered: if participants judged and responded to a performance as skillful, enjoyable, and engaging, it was socially appropriate, even if, by strict adult or school-centric terms it was obscene, scatological, or otherwise transgressive. Third, again consistent with the charter of the ethnography of speaking, our assumption was that engagement in children's folklore was cross-culturally variable and to be discovered ethnographically. Thus, as noted earlier, we built into our research protocol fieldwork with children from all three of the major ethnic groups in Texas, Anglo American, African American, Mexican American. Finally, in addition to variation by age and ethnicity, we were attentive to gender variation in repertoire, participation, and development.

### *Outcomes*

It's difficult to know whether or to what extent the research findings produced by the TCFP made their way into early elementary education. By the terms of our arrangement with SEDL, we submitted our materials and reports to them and they were to take over from there in developing educational programs based on what we provided. I do recall a mockup of a booklet of riddles drawn from our corpus, but I'm unsure whether it ever found a publisher or made its way into schools. The lab did support the production of two brief books, one consisting of essays by Meg and Rosalind on African American girls' participation in a variety of play forms, at times in interaction with their Anglo and Mexican American classmates (Brady and Eckhardt 1975), and one by Beverly on handclaps (Stoeltje 1978). Both works combined scholarly documentation and analysis with teacher-oriented explication and feedback to the authors indicates that some teachers, at least, found the works interesting and useful. Just how they were used, who knows? I need hardly say that the lab people paid no attention to the transgressive materials that we collected. Some were even a tad suspicious of data that suggested that children manipulated forms like counting-out rhymes or engaged in inversive clowning against the grain of orderly performances considering that those materials somehow compromised the mainstream ideology of childhood innocence.

For the graduate-student researchers who worked on the project, there were a number of clear payoffs, even beyond the financial support they received for their work. Several went on to do further research on children's folklore. Danielle and John produced Ph.D. dissertations based on the research they carried out under the auspices of the project (McDowell 1975; Roemer 1977). Meg extended her engagement with children's folklore in her subsequent dissertation research and book on Navajo children's Skinwalker stories (Brady 1984). Danielle, John, Meg, and Beverly all went on to teach courses devoted to children's folklore or including a significant component of

children's folklore in more general courses, such as American folklore. And for all participants, I believe, the project offered a focused initiation into the world of socially engaged scholarship. I know that for all those participants who went on to teach, bringing that engaged stance into the classroom had a multiplier effect. Over the decades since the early '70s, the work of the TCFP colored the educational experience of a lot of college students. We can hope that it made a difference in their understanding of the strengths and challenges of cultural and linguistic diversity and what they might offer to a humane multicultural society. In the end, I believe, no one who has considered closely the semantic intricacy of a children's riddling session can doubt their cognitive abilities; no one who has analyzed the poetic and kinesic intricacy of a handclap session can doubt their capacity for verbal virtuosity; no one who has observed the structural acuity of a schoolyard clown in his inversive parody of a line play, can question his capacity for reflexive awareness; and no one who has witnessed the social finesse of a girl leading a ring play can deny her rhetorical skill and effectiveness in managing complex interaction.

*Richard Bauman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Folklore and Anthropology at Indiana University, Bloomington. The principal foci of his research include narrative, oral poetics, performance, genre, and language ideologies. Among his publications are Verbal Art as Performance (1977), Let Your Words Be Few (1983), Story, Performance, and Event (1986), Voices of Modernity (with Charles L. Briggs, 2003; Sapir Prize 2006), A World of Others' Words (2004), and A Most Valuable Medium (2023). Bauman has been a Guggenheim Fellow, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, recipient of the Lifetime Scholarly Achievement Award of the American Folklore Society, and the Franz Boas Award for Exemplary Service to Anthropology of the American Anthropological Association.*

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<sup>1</sup> See the TCFP bibliography (page 147) in this issue.

<sup>2</sup> L. Harlan Ford to Américo Paredes, 9/17/71. Américo Paredes Papers, Nettie Lee Benson Library, University of Texas, Austin.

# On the Street with Austin's Chicano Kids

John Holmes McDowell  
*Indiana University, Emeritus*

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*These pages offer a retrospective on my time with the Texas Children's Folklore Project, which set me in motion to document the verbal play of Chicano children in Austin, Texas. After a short overview of the field collection assembled there, I address its core elements in relation to techniques that enabled me to get the work done, a small set of events that stand out in my memory as exemplary, and a surmise of analytical themes emerging from my encounter with those lively youngsters and their repertoires. My essay is supplemented by a selection of rhymes and songs performed by the children, in the form of audio files and corresponding transcriptions and (as needed) translations.*

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My awareness of the big picture of the Texas Children's Folklore Project (TCFP) was quite limited. I knew that it was coordinated by Richard Bauman, my mentor and contact for the project, that it had a regional hub in the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), and that there was federal funding from the Department of Education. I was aware that the project proposed gathering samples of children's folklore, primarily in the form of verbal art performances in their natural, peer-group settings, with representation from the three main ethnic groups in Austin, the Anglos, Mexican Americans, and African Americans.<sup>1</sup> And I had the idea that these field-gathered resources would be the source of educational materials for teachers and for use in their classrooms. But mostly, I knew that my job was to collect folklore from Chicano kids; that's what I did, and that's what I will briefly reflect back on here.

How did I get involved in the project? I had come up to Austin from Corpus Christi where I was a VISTA volunteer, working with a Community Action Program to eradicate poverty, or, at least, assist local Chicano populations in their quest for the equal rights owed them as citizens of the nation. I attended in Austin a conference on bilingual education, a topic of interest to the Chicano activists I was associating with at

the time, and there I met Professor Américo Paredes, who encouraged me to enter graduate school at the University of Texas where he was teaching. I did that, entering the MA program in Latin American Studies in 1971, and, the MA completed, moving in 1972 over to the doctoral program in the Folklore Center, with its foothold in both the Anthropology and English departments, under the supervision of Professor Richard Bauman.<sup>2</sup>

In the spring of 1974 I was recruited by Professor Bauman to work in the Texas Children's Folklore Project, specifically, since I was fluent in Spanish, to collect folklore among Mexican American children. This was salaried work, much appreciated at the time – I had spent the previous summer painting the exterior of the house I was renting in exchange for the summer's rent money. Moreover, I carried with me a fondness for the people and the culture, based on my two-years as a VISTA volunteer, living and working in Chicano communities, first with migrant families in the area around Hillsboro, Oregon, then in settled communities in the counties around Corpus Christi, Texas. Hence, I found the prospect of gathering verbal lore from Chicano kids to be an attractive one. So, I signed on and started visiting the neighborhoods in Austin with Chicano residents during the spring semester of 1974, continuing these visits over the summer months and into the fall of that year.<sup>3</sup>

In these pages, I offer a retrospective on my time with the TCFP. After first presenting a short overview of the field collection I assembled, I turn my attention to its core elements via a reprise on the techniques I developed to get the work done, an account of a small set of events that stand out in my memory as exemplary, and a surmise of analytical themes emerging from my encounter with this material. Before I commence with this agenda, it's worth noting that, after preparing as required a report for the SEDL replete with my field data, I then wrote my doctoral dissertation thesis on this material, highlighting what I viewed as the children's significant social and

cognitive development accomplished through participation in this medium of playful communication. This thesis, completed in 1975, is titled *The Speech Play and Verbal Art of Chicano Children: An Ethnographic and Sociolinguistic Study*.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the field materials gathered during those months in Austin's neighborhoods and barrios has fueled a string of publications over the years, from my first book, *Children's Riddling* (IU Press, 1979), winner of the Chicago Folklore Prize, to a segment in my 2018 book chapter, "Transitionality: The Border as Barrier and Bridge," included in *Border Folk Balladeers: Critical Studies on Américo Paredes*, edited by Roberto Cantú and published by Cambridge Press.<sup>5</sup> In all, publications making use of these field materials include, in addition to this first monograph and the 2018 chapter, eight substantial articles and chapters and several smaller pieces (see separate list of publications). During my stint as a fieldworker with the TFCP I created a veritable treasure trove of ethnographic field materials that has sustained my abiding interest in the remarkable things that children achieve through their playful peer-group interaction.

### **Contents of the Collection**

My field collection of Chicano children's folklore in Austin, Texas, consists of a set of nine audio cassette tapes containing over 14 hours of recorded material documenting the verbal art and speech play of Chicano children in Austin, Texas, recorded in 1974 on the streets and playgrounds of the Clarksville neighborhood and East Austin, featuring riddles, stories, taunts, and rhymes and songs of children between the ages 4-11 performing in peer groups ranging from two-to-six children and occasionally in solo recitations. There is, as well, one recording of a home conjunto performance at a birthday party, and there are also a few low-quality photos.<sup>6</sup> (See the appendix to this essay for sample performances from these recordings.)

While I do not have access to the written report that I produced for the TCFP, I do have in hand my 1975 dissertation thesis, which uses that report as a starting point: I reproduced in the thesis the majority of the field data meeting basic standards of coherency, that is, that could be rendered as items of folkloric performance. In addition to scene-setting chapters and chapters on acquisition and enculturation, the thesis has chapters on what I call interrogative ludic routines, that is, playful question-answer sequences built on the speech act of interrogation, and on narratives, taunts, and rhymes and songs. A total of 124 interrogative routines are included in the thesis, organized into three categories: descriptive routines (riddle-like questions that contain no block element), riddles proper (these do center on a block element that impedes easy solving), and routines of victimization (these appear to be riddles but instead facilitate miniature acts of aggression). The thesis features transcriptions of fifty narratives, organized into several categories; almost half of these belong to the category “spooky stories.” The chapter on taunts presents thirty-four taunts from the Palm School encounter – more on that to follow. A whopping 183 texts of songs and rhymes are presented in the thesis, organized into several categories including items associated with games such as handclaps and jumping rope, and items tied to the pursuit of social control.

Drawing on folkloristic precedents in the study of children's lore, and attending to issues of interest to the student of children's folklore, I establish the architecture of these four genres with their multiple categories to make sense out of the enormous stock of material captured on the nine cassette tapes recorded with Austin's Chicano children. These are the expressive forms that attracted the imagination and energy of the children, and although they sometimes occurred mixed together in the recording sessions, it was useful to separate them out into genre inventories for purposes of analysis and interpretation. As can be seen, I found the children to be loquacious, ready

and even anxious to display their ability and agility in these verbal forms, to rehearse and adapt to the requirements of the present moment the ample resources granted them by tradition.

### **Field Techniques**

So how did this encounter between the errant folklorist and the resident Chicano children transpire? What were the situational factors that made possible the assemblage of such a rich harvest of folklore? As this was my first extended fieldwork experience, I had no backlog of previous practice to draw upon. In my graduate studies I had read commentaries on collecting folklore, but there was no set of orthodox procedures to follow. Instead, as I reconstruct the process, I entered this field setting with a few basic orientations in mind, and with the expectation that I would improvise as needed to assure the free flow of folklore from the children to me and my SONY tape recorder. My orientation to the project rested on my conviction that children are capable of creating artistic renderings of experience worthy of our respect and even admiration. Moreover, I sensed that the verbal repertoires of these Chicano children would be especially intriguing, in light of their bilingual and bicultural heritage. I viewed children's folklore as an oral literature indigenous to childhood, and hence thought that it should be disentangled to the extent possible from the discourses used in communicating with adults.

This set of orienting expectations led to a fieldwork technique that revolved around documenting children's folklore in peer-group settings whenever possible. My goal was to establish arenas where children would share performance routines with and for each other, where my presence and my tape recorder would fade from sight as the verbal exchanges among peers became animated. The truth is that I did manage to create such arenas, and in these the flow of folkloric performance was a splendid thing

to behold. But it was not always possible to do this, and there were other kinds of collecting arenas that took shape: lively groups with children competing for my attention and for the opportunity to hear their voices replayed on the recorder; and solo sessions where I collected repertoires from especially active performers of children's folklore. In one instance, the Palm School encounter, I became the unhappy focal point of the children's attention, as we shall see in the next section of this paper.

### Exemplary Events

Walking the streets in Clarksville and East Austin was always an interesting experience.<sup>7</sup> During the summer months of 1974, and on school days in the fall afternoons, I would invariably find groups of friends gathered in front yards or by curbside, and they were generally agreeable to come sit for a chat with me.<sup>8</sup> I will highlight here a few exemplary moments, selected from many others, to reveal something of the flavor of my fieldwork activity with Chicano children and their families.

#### *Episode 1: Playing the naming game*

The Chicano children I encountered in East Austin, particularly, were conscious of their participation in two distinct languages and cultures. The following exchange, recorded in June of 1974 in East Austin with a group of five children aged 7-11, shows the interest and even delight they bring to this bicultural endowment:

Raúl: Can you say our names in Spanish?

Me: What are your names?

Paula: Paula.

Me: That's Spanish already.

Silvia: Paula (emphasizing the Spanish pronunciation)

Rudi: Say Rudi.

Me: Rudi, ah Rodolfo.

Adam: Adam.

Me : Adán.

Rosemary: Say Rosemary in Spanish.

Me: Rosamaría.

Adam: Say Mary Jane.

Me: María Juana.

(laughter)

Adam: What's your name in Spanish?

Me: Juan.

Adam: Juanillo.

Silvia: Juanillo Río.

In my most recent publication drawing on the Austin project, I characterize this exchange as follows (McDowell 2018, 96):

In this flurry of queries about naming, the children focus on me as a friendly outsider, even as they display their own fascination with the two parallel naming systems in their experience. In addition, the crafty Adam (Adán) lures me into a verbal trap, cleverly nudging me into speaking a close approximation to a taboo term, marijuana, and Adam and Silvia demonstrate, in the final sequence, the productivity of the Spanish component of the system, which allows them to frame up innovative riffs off of the Spanish version of my given name: Juanillo, Juanillo Río.

### *Episode 2: "We don't know any rhymes."*

I have a vivid memory of walking down a street in East Austin one afternoon, and spotting three or four children out in front of a house. I had just begun talking to them when two mothers appeared, and, hearing what I was up to, invited me into the

backyard to continue the conversation with their children while we had a sip of lemonade. But, when I asked the children if they knew any rhymes or riddles, they responded, under the close gaze of their mothers, that they didn't. Amiably, I took my leave, but the children followed me to the front of the house. There we reconvened and I secured an excellent session of storytelling, and yes, riddles and rhymes. The moral here is that children's lore is native to childhood and, often, an intimate component of it – hence, at times, something they might be reluctant to perform in front of their parents.

***Episode 3: "Yeah, that's the part I don't get either."***

A six-year-old child had just performed for me the newspaper riddle – “What's black and white and red (read) all over?” When I asked her why the newspaper was “red,” she replied, “Yeah, that's the part I don't get either.” Working with children over an age-range 4-11 years, I could trace lines of cognitive (and social) development rather clearly. One conceptual hurdle in performing and understanding what I call riddles proper is the ability to comprehend the reversals that feed the block element, whether they be metaphorical, where one object stands in for another, or acoustic, where two words sound alike but have different meanings (as in red/read). I found that it was roughly around the time of their seventh birthday that kids become competent in these tricks of the riddle trade. It turns out that this timing coincides with Jean Piaget's developmental scheme, and with observations on children's play by child development specialists working in laboratory settings (Piaget 1972; McGhee 1976; Shultz 1974; Whitt and Prentice 1977).

***Episode 4: Symposium on locomotion.***

This transpired as a group of children explored, over the course of a half-hour, the conceptual domain of locomotion -- how things move about in the world. During this riddling session, they produced eleven riddle-like routines directed to the ways that

animals, machines, and people get about, with legs and wheels, and the number thereof, serving as the distinguishing features. In *Children's Riddling*, I characterize this session as a symposium and argue that "as the theme of locomotion is explored and developed, one routine begetting another, one senses that underlying this contemplative kind of performance there lurks a rather fully developed folk taxonomy" (1979, 137). The symposium on locomotion begins with this routine: "What has eight wheels and rolls?" The answer provided is, "roller skates." But the session also includes this riddle: "What has four legs and can't walk?" The answer here, of course, is "a chair." Hence, I see this symposium moving in two different directions, toward confirming a shared set of perceptions about the world, and toward challenging "the familiar orders of language and culture" (1979, 143). The upshot, for me, is to recognize the cerebral child, who is "concerned in his or her verbal art with complex matters of rationality, logic, sociability, and aesthetics" (1979, 144). Like Claude Lévi-Strauss's cerebral savage, the cerebral child needs to be rescued from our complacent disdain and celebrated as an ethnographer and creator of culture.

### ***Episode 5: Palm School encounter.***

Palm School was, and still is, an elementary school in East Austin, and I ventured there one weekend afternoon in November in search of children. The aggressive attitude of the children I encountered that day stands out as unique across the whole gamut of my research ventures for the Texas project. As noted, I include in my dissertation (1975) a chapter on taunts, and feature excerpts from the encounter with four children, ages 6-10, on the Palm School playground. Presenting this episode as an instance of the children testing the investigator and the situation, I describe the action as follows: "Verbal taunts were accompanied by physical aggression...as the investigator became a recipient of mock blows to the back, head, and shoulder. At one point three or

four children climbed on my back and were not easily dislodged. This physical aggression was carefully restrained, never reaching the level of actually inflicting serious pain. Also worthy of mention is the momentary theft of the investigator's notepad and glasses case, which were returned upon request."

In the pages of that thesis chapter, I analyze the form and content of the verbal taunting, noting, for form, that a range of speech acts are exploited, including mock riddles, pointed narratives, and derisive and disparaging rhymes; and for content, that metaphorical thinking prevails, disparaging the investigator as a non-human creature, as a deviant human being, and as a part of the human anatomy. At the time of the Palm School encounter, I reasoned that the schoolyard on a weekend afternoon is an ambiguous space, where the children are released from the constraints of home and family. Such a settling could give rise to behavior lodged at the uncertain zone between play and not-play. Looking back at the event, I understand it as well to have been a spirited defense of disputed territory, embodying larger societal factors, whereby the children are fending off against the intrusion of an agent of the often-oppressive outside world.

### *Episode 6: Popeye the sailor man.*

I saw in the children's verbal repertoire an engagement with contemporary popular culture that spanned their cultural horizons. For example, in one session, the performance of the English-language parody of the Popeye ditty brought to the fore a Spanish-language equivalent:

#### English version:

I'm Popeye the sailor man,  
I live in a garbage can,

I eat all the worms  
and spit out the germs,  
I'm Popeye the sailor man.

Spanish version:

Popeye nació en Torreón	(Popeye was born in Torreón
encima de un sillón,	on top of a toilet seat,
mató a su tía	he killed off his aunt
con una tortilla,	with a tortilla,
Popeye nació en Torreón.	Popeye was born in Torreón.)

It appears that the cartoon protagonist had a presence also in Mexican popular media, and that children tuning into this manifestation of it were just as irreverent as their peers in the United States. His name, however, comes out quite differently in the two languages – in Spanish, it has three syllables, with each “e” ringing forth like the vowel sound in the English word “say.” How fortunate the child, I thought at this event, who can have fun with Popeye in two languages!

### Emerging Themes

#### *The underlying political agenda*

At the time the Texas project took shape, there was a sense among academics in the social sciences and humanities that we could participate in a redemptive movement, helping to redeem socially marginalized populations from commonplace stereotypes that deprived them of their agency and even their humanity. For example, the word in some circles was that “Chicanos are functionally illiterate in two languages.” Their bilingualism was viewed, in these circles, as a negative thing, holding them back in the educational system and in the larger society. Inspired by William Labov’s work in

recognizing the verbal excellence of urban Black youth culture (1972), I saw my work with the Texas project as an opportunity to feature the achievements of Chicano children and the advantages of growing up in a bicultural, bilingual community.

And the children did not disappoint. As I detail in a later article, "Sociolinguistic Contours in the Verbal Art of Chicano Children" (1982), the children I documented in Austin exhibited verbal competence and creativity in English, Spanish, and in a creole mode of speaking that combines the two languages. It seemed to me that this Spanish-English creole was, for some of the children, their favored speech variety, and it percolated into much of their verbal art performance. For example, I recorded this linguistic reshaping of a well-known interrogative routine (I've placed the Spanish in Italics and added English translation for the Spanish words; see McDowell 1979, 177):

1<sup>st</sup> child: Why did the chicken cross the road? *¿Por qué?* (Why?)

2<sup>nd</sup> child: *Porque* (because) it's too far to walk.

3<sup>rd</sup> child: *Porque está* too far *pa' andá(r)*. (Because it's too far to walk.)

One senses here the children savoring the possibilities inherent in their speech competence, rolling different options off their tongues, mixing Spanish and English, as they seek the most pleasing formulation, perhaps aware at some level that the fit between riddle question and answer wasn't quite where it needed to be.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, they could draw on rich verbal art heritages lodged in two world civilizations: Anglo American traditions rooted in the British Isles and processed through the North American experience; and Spanish American traditions with roots in Spain, processed through the Latin American experience, primarily that of Mexico, the culture of origin for most of their families. I formulated this competence in my 1982 article as one featuring both parallel and mixed constructions, that is, verbal products that keep the two languages and traditions separate, and those that mix them.

Discussing this competence in my 2018 article, where I work with the concept of transitionality as endemic to border populations, I conclude that the verbal performance of Chicano children reveals that “transitionality entails its dislocations, but when circumstances are favorable, it can occasion a doubling of riches” (2018, 98).

### *Assessing the functions of children's play.*

Crossing the triviality barrier (Sutton-Smith 1970) that encourages indifference to the things children do, I sought to show that the verbal routines I collected are not only diversions or entertainments, which they are, but that they also serve important purposes in the life of the child, enabling children to participate successfully in group activities and to express themselves artistically in traditional cultural forms and arenas. Entering the world of children's peer play, and seeking to describe it as it actually transpires, I came away impressed with the social skills in evidence as the children collaborated on their multi-turn performances, and with their inventiveness as they brought forward, reprocessed, and repurposed familiar items in their cultural repertoires. Such was the fluidity of mental operations in this play arena that, when Brian Sutton-Smith asked me to write on the transmission of children's folklore, I used materials from the Texas project to write instead about the *activation* of children's folklore, finding the concept of transmission to be too mechanical to fit the data (McDowell 1995).

In sum, I came to construe children's play as a crucial arena of socialization and enculturation. Addressing the praxis of the verbal routines I gathered in Austin, I wrote in the thesis (1975, 394) that the children learn “that they can tease, rebuke, plea, command, inquire, solicit, and insult through any one of these verbal genres, and that often the message will be all the more convincing when formulated in one of these verbal capsules.” And, construing children ultimately as both ethnographers and

tricksters, achieving mastery over cultural resources but also the ability to detect points of overlap, inconsistency, and neglect, I wrote, in the thesis, as follows: "Without the availability of this informal, generally pleasurable format for interaction, it is difficult indeed to imagine that children could acquire and master the range of cognitive, linguistic, and practical materials and methods which will eventually carry them into adolescent and adult roles" (1975, 395-96).

### **Concluding thoughts**

Casting my glance back over the years, I feel fortunate to have participated in the Texas project. There was the immediate satisfaction of coming into contact with children and their families in Clarksville and East Austin, and my growing fascination with the impressive verbal repertoire I was documenting. Additionally, there were short-term benefits of considerable importance to me – not the least being that I could generate from my field materials the dissertation thesis that would complete my doctoral work at the University of Texas. Moreover, the laboratory actually financed the typing of my thesis!

Looking further down the path, it was valuable to gain this on-the-ground experience doing fieldwork in a community; I had previously done only minor bits of fieldwork in the course of preparing seminar papers.<sup>10</sup> The extended stint in the Chicano neighborhoods of Austin, Texas, gave me the opportunity to amass a significant body of field data and to ponder its possible meanings and uses. And, as is evident in this retrospective account, the materials I collected in Austin have served me well over the years as I have continued to be instructed and intrigued by the conspicuous verbal expertise of the young Mexican Americans I came to know on the streets with Austin's Chicano kids.

## Appendix: Audio File Compilation

Story: [“Este chamaquito estaba chewing gum”](#) (click for access to audio)

This performance took place in East Austin on May 11, 1974, among a lively group of siblings and friends. My notes indicate a session with “some riddles, then stories about talking monkeys (*changos*) in English and Spanish; next, inter-racial jokes favoring the Mexicano; then they sing songs from the current Spanish hit-parade.”

The storyteller is Raymond, age 5, who insists on telling a story his older brother claims to have already told – the performance is remarkable for its code-switching, to the point of displaying a Spanish-English creole. Here is my transcription, and translation, of Raymond’s performance:

Este chamaquito, este chamaquito estaba chewing gum,  
(This little boy, this little boy was chewing gum)

estaba comiendo gum y la estaba chewing  
(he was chewing gum, and he was chewing it)

y después se le cayó y ya la iba a levantar y dijo la mamita:  
(and then it fell and he was going to pick it up and his mother said)

"No, no lo agarre porque el diablo ya la lambió," y después dijo,  
(“No, don't grab it because the devil already licked it” and then she said)

"Ten, anda a buscar otra," so he chewing it  
(“Take this, go and look for another” so he chewing it)

and this, el vio una big old rock que la mamita, la quería hacer jump la rock y se  
cayó y dijo,  
(and this, he saw a big old rock that his mother, she wanted to jump over the  
rock and she fell and said)

"Ontá mi nene?" y dijo, "No, porque el diablo ya te lambió."  
(“Where's my little boy?” and he said, “No, because the devil already licked you”)

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**Rhyme:** [“Corrí corri”](#) (click for access to audio)

This rhyme was performed by a lively group, with Ricky, age 10, Angie, age 8, and Linda, age 9, in the middle of the action. The scene is East Austin, the date July 17, 1974.

“Corrí corri,” is comical and also slightly risqué, and it evokes a good deal of laughter as the children rapidly chant it. Here are the words – the Spanish original, my English translation:

Corrí corri me tropecé  
 (I ran and ran, and then I tripped)  
 caí en las lanas de José  
 (I fell into the undies of José)  
 se las metí, se las saqué  
 (I put them on, I took them off)  
 tenía pelitos y me asusté  
 (they had little hairs and I got scared)

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**Song:** [“Elena la Ballena”](#) (“Elena the Whale,” click for access to audio)

This performance (and the next one) took place on May 1, 1974, in the Clarksville neighborhood of Austin. Three youngsters, José, age 9, Joanne, age 9, and Tina, age 7, are the main players. Leonice Santamaría is assisting. My notes have this synopsis: “Mix of Spanish and English. Lots of riddles, rhymes, songs, and games.”

“Elena la Ballena” is sung entirely in Spanish; here are the words, with my translation:

Elena Elena	(Elena Elena)
Elena la ballena	(Elena the whale)
vivía vivía	(she lived, she lived)

vivía en el mar (she lived in the sea)

En el agua azul (In the blue water)

le gustaba jugar (she liked to play)

en el agua azul (in the blue water)

le gustaba bañar (she liked to bathe)

Ay mami (Oh mother)

que hondo está el agua (how deep is the water)

que hondo está el mar (how deep is the sea)

---

**Rhyme:** ["My Sailor"](#) (click for access to audio)

This rhyme, performed in the May 1, 1974, session in the Clarksville (see above, #3), neighborhood with José, Joanne, and Tina, is widely known, and is performed by these children to accompany their handclapping.

Here are the words, in their original English:

My sailor went to sea sea - sea sea  
to see what he could see see - see see,  
but all that he could see see see - see see,  
was the bottom of the ocean sea sea - sea sea

My sailor went to cha cha-cha cha  
to see what he could cha cha- cha cha,  
but all that he could cha cha- cha cha,  
was the bottom of the ocean cha cha- cha cha.

My sailor went to Chi-na  
to see what he could Chi-na,  
but all that he could Chi-na,

was the bottom of the ocean Chi-na.

My sailor went to ooh-wa-chi-ga  
to see what he could ooh-wa-chi-ga,  
but all that he could ooh-wa-chi-ga,  
was the bottom of the ocean ooh-wa-chi-ga.

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<sup>1</sup> I use Mexican American and Chicano interchangeably here, notwithstanding their connection to two different speech registers: Mexican American the more formal, official option; Chicano the more informal, colloquial one. See Limón 1979 for a discussion of these ethnonyms.

<sup>2</sup> See Bauman 2020 for a full account of the twists and turns in the road leading to the formation of this program.

<sup>3</sup> My partner at the time, Leonice Santamaría, took an interest in this project; she accompanied me on visits with children in the Clarksville neighborhood, and assisted with translation questions as these arose.

<sup>4</sup> It was Professor Bauman who helped me formulate this excellent title for a thesis. My thesis committee was a strong one: Bauman as chair, plus Roger Abrahams, then chair of the English department; Marcia Herndon, ethnomusicologist in the Anthropology department; Américo Paredes, who was in English at the time; and Brian Stross, in Anthropology.

<sup>5</sup> This collection of essays derives from the 2016 conference themed "Américo Paredes: Border Narratives and the Folklore of Greater Mexico," sponsored by UCLA and California State University, Los Angeles; my essay is based on my keynote address at that conference.

<sup>6</sup> Copies of the tapes are stored in the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University (see <https://iucat.iu.edu/catalog/5735752>), and transcriptions of these recordings are stored among my papers at the Indiana University Archives: see John H. McDowell papers, Accession 2021/067, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington, IN.

<sup>7</sup> Especially memorable is the afternoon I wandered in on a birthday celebration where a conjunto was making music – I was invited to join in the festivities, and provided with beer to boot!

<sup>8</sup> I realize this protocol would not fly today, when IRB's are closely watching research projects involving children. Indeed, there is perhaps less easiness now than formerly about strangers interacting with children, and I doubt one would find many children at ease in front of their houses, with the rise of supervised activity and the interference of computer-mediated entertainment.

<sup>9</sup> The riddle question would have to ask something like, "Why did the chicken fly across the road?" in order to sustain the proffered solution.

<sup>10</sup> I note that three of these seminar fieldwork projects resulted in publications: McDowell 1972; McDowell 1974; and McDowell 1985. I thank professors Brian Stross, Joel Sherzer, and Richard Bauman for providing much-appreciated guidance and inspiration.

# Play and the Performance of Children's Folklore Opportunities for Learning

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*Focusing on a wide range of folklore genres (handclaps, songs, jokes, counting out rhymes, circle games) and taboo topics, this study situates the data within a theoretical literature on play, performance, ritual, learning, and symbolic anthropology. Children between the ages of 4 and 10 (female and male) performed the various genres in the early 1970's in Austin, Texas. The research was conducted in conjunction with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in Austin, Texas, and the Texas Children's Folklore Project directed by Richard Bauman at the University of Texas, Austin.*

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Launched in the early 1970's at the University of Texas (Austin) the Texas Children's Folklore project not only generated new research but aimed to attract the attention of educators. As a graduate student in the Folklore Program I enthusiastically joined the research team with the encouragement of Dick Bauman and Roger Abrahams who were engaged in the field as Dick outlines in his essay.

In addition to "Bauman and Abrahams," as they were widely known (or "Dick and Roger" to students), were other faculty whose interests had a potential bearing on children's folklore and welcomed our attention. Among those on the Folklore Faculty was Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (from whom I took my first folklore course) who published an edited volume on speech play with one chapter devoted to the speech play of children.

Doug Foley (Education and Anthropology) regularly taught courses on the anthropology of education and welcomed Folklore students. Joel Sherzer—Dick's close colleague in linguistic anthropology - was closely allied with the graduate program in Folklore. His interest in speech play featured prominently in his research and in his classes. Brian Stross (Anthropology) maintained an interest in children's speech play and encouraged folklore students engaged with any genre of children's folklore.

When Barbara Babcock arrived, she introduced structural symbolic anthropology

into the folklore curriculum, including the ideas of Gregory Bateson, Mary Douglas, Victor Turner, Jim Fernandez, and French structuralism in the work of Claude Levi-Strauss, Paul Ricoeur, Guy Debord. Of particular relevance to me in this literature was the theme of Play as it related to ritual, festival and carnival.

This milieu was saturated with heady theoretical perspectives, ones that supported an interest in children's folklore. Combined with this rich academic environment was the SEDL (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory) research project (as Dick Bauman has explained in his essay). It provided a fertile empirical domain within which to explore children's performances and assimilate the research to a wide range of theory.

At this same moment in time folklorists in the American Folklore Society were engaged in debates concerning whether folklore scholarship should or could be applied to settings outside of academe. As the purpose of our research was to provide results relevant for educators, our research generated interest among folklorists across the country. In Austin we felt that our research had value both within academe and in the field of education.

My research incorporated a wide range of folklore genres in a variety of settings recognizable as *play*. Scholars in separate disciplines were focusing on the relationship between play and ritual in these years, identifying the space for play with the liminal period in ritual in which creativity and expressivity flourished.<sup>1</sup> Erik Erikson linked these concepts in his definition of play as *playful ritualization* (1972:143), and Jean Piaget emphasized that learning is based on a process of discovery, construction, and re-invention (1972: 26-27), a definition equally appropriate for children's folklore. Further, in his now classic article on play, Gregory Bateson introduced the idea of frame, a concept especially useful in the study of children's folklore and widely applicable to performance studies. Further, he succinctly argued that in play a child is learning "a

conceptual structuring of the universe” in which there are “sorts and categories of behavior” (1971, 266).

### **Children’s Handclaps: Poetic Features and Semantic Concepts**

Children’s handclaps involve the performers in a multiplicity of skills involving a wide range of learning. This topic was selected as one that deserved a separate book designed for teachers and others who worked with children. That became my project for SEDL, an instructional book that would direct teachers to the importance of handclaps as informal learning.

Let me mention my qualifications for this task in addition to the fact that I was a graduate student engaged in children’s folklore research. In the 1960’s I taught junior high school on the Monterey Peninsula of California, providing me with first-hand knowledge of teaching in public schools. Piano lessons (for almost twenty years) provided me with the ability to transcribe the handclap tunes. Of even more relevance, my research was greatly facilitated by having two informants in residence, my daughters Gretchen and Rachael, who were a constant source of rich data and always ready to collaborate in my research. They were ages four and seven years and then five and eight years, ages when handclaps and other folklore forms were popular play activities. They and their friends filled numerous cassettes with their performances.

The instructional book is titled *Children’s Handclaps: Informal Learning in Play*. It includes twelve texts of handclaps (with cultural variations), suggestions for teachers, instructions for participation, drawings of hand positions, the musical scores for the tunes, and multiple photos illustrating nineteen children of different ages, ethnicity, and gender plus one teacher, all engaged in “doing handclaps.” A statement on handclaps as artistic communication and cultural variation, and its relevance for learning, concludes the book.

Handclaps involve hand/eye coordination and coordination with another person. They also integrate a musical tune, rhythm, rhyme, repetition, word substitution, and nonsense, all of which constitute speech play. While the tune and rhythm and certain words will remain the same throughout a specific song, other words will change as the song moves from one verse to another, moving the action along. Poetic features coordinate concepts, plot, rhyme, tunes, and movement in forms of speech play by means of integrating the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic; in other words, the principle of combination/contiguity and the principle of selection/substitution coordinate to create the poetic form. "When Sally Was a Baby" repeats a sentence (the combination of words into a sentence), but Sally's identity is a substitution in the sentence as she grows up, finally becoming a skeleton, illustrating the life cycle with words and movements.

### Verse

*When Sally was a baby, a baby, a baby  
When Sally was a baby, she went like this  
Ummmm, this-a-way, ummmm, that-a-way.  
Ummmm this-a-way, one, two, three.*

*When Sally was a schoolgirl, she went like this:  
Two plus two is four, four plus four is eight,  
eight plus eights is sixteen,  
sixteen plus sixteen is thirty-two*

*When Sally was a teen-ager, she went like this...*

*When Sally was a wife.....*

*When Sally was a mother.....*

*When Sally was a grandmother.....*

*When Sally's husband died.....*

*When Sally was a skeleton.....*

### Motion

*thumb sucking motion*

*OR: She went like this:  
ooo, aah, cha, cha, cha*

*talks on phone or slaps knees*

*kissing and hugging motion*

*rocking baby motion*

*bent over with aching back*

*hands over face*

*shake arms loosely*

In the following handclap, "Tiny Tim," the nonsense sentences serve to emphasize rhyme and rhythm as well as sequence and repetition.

*Miss Lucy had a baby, she named him Tiny Tim.  
She put him in the bathtub to see if he could swim.*

*He drank up all the water, he ate up all the soap.  
He tried to swallow the bathtub, but it wouldn't go down his throat.*

*Miss Lucy called the doctor, Miss Lucy called the nurse.  
Miss Lucy called the lady with the alligator purse.*

*In walked the doctor, in walked the nurse.  
In walked the lady with the alligator pure.*

*Out walked the doctor, out walked the nurse.  
Out walked the lady with the alligator purse.*

Not all handclaps have a linear, sequential message, or a “plot,” but each handclap selects from the repertoire of ideas and concepts available to children and combines them with poetic features, including nonsense words or phrases, so that the song and the clapping express the rhythm. The performers are increasing their motor skills through hand/eye coordination and their musical ability by carrying a tune. Not to be overlooked, in the clapping a child is learning cooperation and coordination with another child. Bateson’s definition of play (above) is especially cogent for handclaps - that they are not learning separate concepts but skills, knowledge, and semantic categories, the conceptual structuring of the universe.

Though my major responsibility for the project was the production of the Handclap book, I also visited a Navajo elementary school in Crown Point, New Mexico. It was a school that had been shifted from BIA administration to the tribe itself. I know that my review was very positive as the school was running smoothly, and children were very comfortable being interviewed by me in English. The strongest image I came away with was the children’s artwork, posted on the walls of classrooms. One drawing

depicted in the child's own words a "Squaw Dance where people are having a good time. The women are trying to cook some foods, also Sharlinda's family were there to help." Above the scene with the women cooking and Sharlinda's family were cars flying through the sky in the traditional Navajo pattern, an arc. Instead of horses flying across the sky, the young artist, Melvin Chee, had incorporated modernity in the form of cars, the more common mode of transportation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Publicity and Continuity

Our team was not tasked with publicity and distribution, and we did not receive data from SEDL. However, through folklore channels we were aware that news of the book went out and requests for copies arrived. In one example, a four-page excerpt from the Handclap book appeared in the Winter of 1979 newsletter of the Children's Folklore Section. Further notices announced it in the American Folklore Newsletter and in the student newsletter of Indiana University. At KLRN-TV, Austin, a teacher's guide was produced entitled, CABOODLE, which used some of the *Children's Handclaps* material. In their newsletter The Center for Southern Folklore wrote an article that included material from the Handclap book, and the editors replied to Stoeltje, "We feel what you have to say about handclaps fills a much-needed link in presenting a well-rounded picture of children's folklore to our audience...". Also, Lillian Krelove of Legacy Books sold copies of the book, and numerous folklorists requested copies through those of us at the University. On our recommendation, letters and copies of the book were sent as well to specific scholars, and announcements went out to colleagues in fields related to Education.

A second body of research from the Children's Folklore project published by SEDL focused on ring games performed by African American girls: *Black Girls at Play: Folkloric Perspectives on Child Development*. This publication featured two articles

describing and analyzing traditional ring games that Black girls played on school playgrounds. Margaret Brady's article, "This Little Lady's Gonna Boogaloo," emphasized the importance of peer group support, demonstrated in performance (through coaching) or in the case of hurt feelings or preventing someone from falling off the merry-go-round. Noting Jean Piaget's attention to this element she references his comment that social collaboration is an essential factor in intellectual development (1964, 4). Rosalind Eckhardt, the author of "From Handclap to Line Play," documented handclaps in circles of children - as many as ten. Her essay included 24 photos of girls (and boys) playing ring games and line games in which one girl performs in the center or through two lines of other players. Eckhardt elucidates the proxemic structure of these games and notes the increasing complexity of the games in children ages eight and nine. Both the *Children's Handclaps* instructional book and the *Black Girls at Play* publications are held in libraries throughout the country.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most important means of communicating information related to the Texas Children's Folklore Project rested on the shoulders of the participants in the project. One example was the symposium on Informal Learning of Children chaired by Brian Sutton-Smith in 1976 at the annual meeting of the A.E.R.A. (American Educational Research Association) in San Francisco. Included in the presentations were ones by Richard Bauman and Bob Randall of SEDL. Significantly, as the team members gathered data, we also gave papers at the annual meetings of the American Folklore Society and began publishing articles based on the research.

Dissemination of the research has been ongoing, however, through teaching. For those several of us who went on to become professors at various universities, teaching presented an opportunity to present the research in folklore classes. While teaching in the English Department at the University of Texas, I included children's folklore in my classes, and again at Indiana University where I taught large folklore classes and was

assisted by graduate students in the Folklore and Ethnomusicology Department. Not only could the undergraduate students relate to children's folklore, but the graduate student assistants incorporated it in their classes when they began teaching at other universities. One of our team, Margaret Brady, who published her dissertation on Navajo children's skin walker stories, taught throughout her career at the University of Utah where she included children's folklore in her classes. (See John McDowell's article in this issue for his publication and teaching.)

### **An Ethnographer's Observations**

Johann Huizinga considered that "...one of the most important characteristics of play was its spatial separation from ordinary life" (1970, 19-20). As research confirmed, children perform a wide range of folklore genres in settings that are unstructured, removed from routine activities. Sites where children perform comfortably include school playgrounds, neighborhood yards and homes, car trips, mealtimes and more. The "separation" need not be measured in distance but rather the children must feel that no adult nor adult rules are governing the play space or will intervene in the play-- though an adult may be present or in proximal space.

For example, my research included lunch time in a school cafeteria; though teachers were present in the room, they were not sitting with or monitoring the children. Like playgrounds, lunch time was separated from the authority and routines of the classroom; it brought friends together in a child only space which they transformed into a performance opportunity.

In addition to school lunch as a research site, I collected performances of children's folklore on school playgrounds, in after school play groups, in the car, at mealtime, in my own home and wherever children were at play. Consequently, my

research captured a wide variety of children's folklore performances, filling 16 cassette tapes.

While some scholars and educators have recognized the importance of social collaboration and/or group solidarity for learning (Piaget argued that "social collaboration...leads to a critical frame of mind where children must communicate with each other" [1964, 4]), it depends on familiarity or an environment in which familiarity can develop. Folklore performance flourishes when groups of children interact frequently over time. Interaction creates familiarity with performance forms and trust among the participants, ultimately building confidence among the group members. Consequently, children will organize themselves in performance more quickly and sustain their play longer when they frequently play together in contrast to children who are not familiar with each other.

Placing the focus on specific performances reveals significant individual behavior as well as that of groups, small and large. Leadership roles, clown behavior, competitive and/or cooperative relationships, skills and talents such as knowledge of jokes, songs, and handclaps or the ability to perform exceptionally well, or, alternatively, the lack of ability to perform or the source of disruption – all of these can be observed as children perform handclaps, ring games, and more. An especially important interaction involving specific individuals is that between more experienced performers (either because of age or experience) and newcomers or younger ones. The experienced member of a group will often assist a novice or contribute a new item to perform; however, taking advantage of their expertise, some experienced individuals will manipulate the folklore form to their advantage.

Though rarely mentioned in collections, the identity of the field worker – how it can be exploited to good advantage or be an obstacle to overcome – bears consideration

in conducting research. Whether an individual has language facility, familiarity with children and schools, knowledge of folklore forms, access to children, and other relevant features such as cultural identity and gender, can influence the success of the research.

The examples below from my research illustrate the effects of familiarity, the wide range of folklore the children possessed, and the significance of documenting specific performances. I have noted the relevance of poetic features, the manipulation of the semantic categories that constitute the effort at a conceptual structuring of the universe, the variety of roles children can assume, and the social interactions that are encapsulated in a performance of children's folklore. These examples include a counting out rhyme, a circle game, a short verse, and songs and jokes.

### **Manipulation and Resistance: Eenie Meenie, Minnie, Moe or "Counting Me"**

In the following counting out rhyme, "[Eenie, Meenie, Minnie, Moe,](#)" (click for access to audio) five girls, ages 4 to 10 years, are in my living room participating in the counting out rhyme. Four of the five girls live on the same block and play together frequently; the fifth and oldest girl plays with the group when she is visiting her grandmother but attends a different school.

My tape recorder and I were familiar to these children because I frequently recorded their play, and one of them especially enjoyed hearing herself on the tape. On the day I recorded the "Counting Me" incident I was sitting at the kitchen table, and the children were close by in the next room, and the tape recorder was running. Suzy is the 4 year old, and Karen is the 10 year old.

I hear the finish of the counting out rhyme and suddenly several voices at once were screaming:

"You are it!"

"Suzy did it."

"Gina did it."

"Quit it, Suzy, Quit it!!!!"

"Come on...let's go tell, Gina."

The girls come rushing into the kitchen, accompanied by Suzy.

Gina: "Mommy, Suzy's been spittin' all over the table and everything."

Mommy to Suzy: "Why were you doing that?"

Suzy replies: "Cause, they were counting me, and I didn't like it."

Mommy to Suzy: "They were counting you? What does that mean?"

Suzy: "they..." (pause)

Karen to Mommy: "We were going Eenie, Meenie, Minie, Moe, and we knew it was her, and everybody knows, and...it even landed on her, so we said it was her. Now, she keeps on fussing."

Mommy to Karen: "Come, show me how you do it."

Suzy screams: "I'm not it. I'm not it!"

Karen to Mommy: "Eenie, Meenie, Minie, Moe, Catch a fella by the toe, If he hollers, let him go. Eenie, Meenie, Minie, Moe. My mother told me to pick this very one - so you are it. See - it landed on her some way."

Mommy to Karen: "How did it turn out for her to be it?"

Karen to Mommy: "See, Gina, when it landed on her she started pointing at Suzy. Suzy started kicking then and got people's pants all dirty, and then Lucy wiped it back on her, and then she got the chair and tried to get Lucy – and that wouldn't work."

Karen to Mommy: "Look, she's it... EENIE, MEENIE, MINIE, MOE - see, it always lands on her."

Mommy to Karen: "Does it have anything to do with who you want it to land on?"

Karen answers: "NOoooo, Yesss. Well, see, this is really the way it goes—see, I told Lucy she might lose a \$5.00 bill, you know, so I told Gina, 'Gina, take this \$5 bill and keep it' (pause). I told Lucy, 'Lemme see that \$5 bill,' and she goes (pause), and everybody starts runnin' on Suzy."

Mommy to Karen: "This is how you decided it was Suzy?"

Karen answers: "I didn't – she did."

Mommy to Karen: "You said, 'Eenie, Meenie, Mini, Moe' to decide who took the \$5 bill?"

Karen: "Yeah, and it always landed on her, see."

Suzy: "I wasn't IT!!!"

In this case Karen, who was three years older than several of the girls and five years older than Suzy, was managing the counting out rhyme and planted the \$5 bill that was the object of this rhyme on Gina. (She gave it to her and told her to keep it). (She obtained the \$5 bill from Lucy). She manipulated EMMM so that it landed on Gina, but Gina understood that she was to be judged the one with the \$5 bill so she pointed to her younger sister (Suzy), and Karen agreed to the move and claimed that it landed on Suzy, the 4 year old who was not sure what this was all about, but was quite certain that she had been identified as "it" - the one guilty of something. Being much younger, she opted to act out in resistance and began kicking and spitting on the others, disrupting the game and bringing it to an end.

Peace was restored once Karen explained her strategy to me. (The manipulation of counting out rhymes seems to be a common occurrence among children.)

### **Punchinella: A Rich Opportunity**

A circle game popular with African American girls, *Punchinella*, names the individual in the center of the circle who demonstrates a movement that all in the circle must repeat while singing the verses of the song. The movement is coordinated with hand clapping and the words and tune of the song. When all the verses are completed, the child in the center chooses one from the circle to become *Punchinella*, and the song is repeated with a new movement. Though the game is frequently performed, in each instance variations are enacted. The game and specific performances are also described in Brady and in Eckhardt (Brady 1975 and Eckhardt 1975).

[The performance I observed](#) (click for access to audio) took place on the playground of an integrated elementary school in Austin. African American girls created a circle and began the game. At a certain point in the game, a white girl walked up to one of the black girls in the circle and requested to join; permission was granted and a handclasp was broken to permit her to enter the circle, and the game continued smoothly.

Another variation in this particular game was the action of two boys who played a distinct role. Previous to *Punchinella* one of the boys was engaged in chasing one of the girls (who had initiated the chase game). Once she organized *Punchinella* he continued to focus on her, pushing her, running across the circle and other disruptive moves. At times one player would yell to him to get out of the way, and another player yelled to others not to hit him in the back. He played the role of the clown, refusing to join in the game, violating the rules, but as he was juxtaposed against the structure of the game, he was generating energy, and sustaining the “chase relationship” with the leader of the

group. Another boy participated in the game, performing the movements to perfection and urging others to shape up the circle and get the game moving by uttering the phrase, "Get by your Honey." The variations/violations and the instructions created by the two male figures provided a clown figure to create anti-structure and an artist who represented structure, the effort to move the game along smoothly. The two seemed to be friends and tolerated each other comfortably. The girls seemed to enjoy the two boys, and the game continued for many rounds, suggesting that the energy the boys provided prolonged the game by introducing these innovations.

Performing the circle game is itself an example of social collaboration, but it also provides the opportunity for individuals to perform before a responsive audience; equally important, each one of the players experiences a turn in the center of the circle. In this example the two boys draw attention not only to themselves but to the girls' ability to tolerate the disruptions caused by the clown and the instructions issued by the artist.

### Poetics and Performance Matters

My daughters and I moved to student housing where they had new playmates. Pablo and Julio, who were from Nicaragua, were the ages of my children and we car-pooled every morning to school, and sometimes they played in the afternoon. One evening they joined my girls and me for dinner when the [following performance took place](#) (click to access audio). Gina is finishing her dinner and begins a verse, keeping time with her feet:

Beans Beans..."  
The more ya eat, the more ya toot:  
The more ya toot, the better ya feel;  
So eat your beans at **ev**-ry meal.

However, Pablo is not satisfied with her performance and issues a correction. The emphasis in the last line should not be on *every*, but on *meal*.

“That’s NOT at *every* meal, but at every *meal*.”

As Pablo points out, the poetic function in this brief verse requires that emphasis be placed on *meal* to emphasize the rhyme with *feel*. Gina then repeats the verse with the correction.

The children then have ice cream and discuss school activities. At that point I ask Gina where she learned the verse, and Pablo volunteers that he taught it to her, having learned it from a friend of his who goes to a different school. Being the source of the verse endows him with authority to correct the emphasis. Throughout dessert Gina continues to play with the verse, speeding and slowing the rhythm, exaggerating the speech with a Texas accent and speaking the lines of the verse separately – all in an effort to try out various poetic features.

### **Taboo as Rearranging the Categories**

Children from k-6th grade are characteristically curious about and learning from multiple sources about sex, bodies, authority, violence, animals, insects, and other topics, some of which may be considered taboo for children. Aware of topics that are taboo, some children delight in performing genres of folklore that articulate those topics as they elicit squeals and laughter from the other children and encourage further attempts to bring bodily topics into their verbal play. These efforts constitute semantic categories which the children are exploring.

As I reflect on my fieldwork in relation to the SEDL charter for the project, what comes vividly to mind is the material that fell outside their ideological comfort zone – those categories considered taboo. A small group of children, female and male, who were friends in and out of school provided a very rich body of taboo material for me,

most of which is characteristic of children 6-10 years of age. My two children were members of this group and occasionally spent time with Phillip and Chris outside of the group interactions - when one of us parents would take them to a movie, for example.

This material was fascinating to consider as it related to my intellectual interests in ritual, festival, and symbolic anthropology (as mentioned above). A major figure in this field, Mary Douglas, addressed these semantic categories as they occur in the marginal/liminal period of ritual, "the segregation of the body from society." She wrote with targeted insight that "...inhabitants there are licensed to participate in asocial behavior. Dirt, obscenity and lawlessness obtain..." (1966, 117). Moreover, "The orifices of the body are then the vulnerable points of the body, and what issues from them is marginal -spittle, blood, milk, urine, feces or tears... In this theory, the body mirrors the social situation, therefore the power of particular bodily margins is determined by the situation being mirrored." (1966, 145)

Like the inhabitants of the marginal described by Mary Douglas, members of this children's group frequently performed jokes and songs concerned with sex, bodies and body parts, death, school authorities and repulsive items such as gopher guts. Because the core group of children socialized often, they were familiar with each other and with the jokes and songs. Their ages ranged between 5 and 9 years.

Individual behavior was prominent in the group as Phillip (eight years) focused on the taboo and grotesque, assuming the role of a clown. He dominated the play but his performance stimulated others to perform as well. As he liked to hear himself on the tape recorder, he was eager to perform in the hopes of hearing the playback. His brother, Chris (nine years), did not appreciate his performances and responded with verbal skill. Most of their songs have been documented in collections of children's folklore.<sup>3</sup>

## Verse & Jokes

At lunch in the school cafeteria Phillip volunteers when he sees my tape recorder, telling me that the following is really a song:

I'm a twenty-foot geeenie,  
With a thousand-foot weenie,  
And I showed it to the lady next door.  
She thought it was a snake  
So, she hit it with a rake.  
Now my weenie's only 5 foot 4.

The after-school play group included several of the same children who sat together at lunch in the school cafeteria. A popular joke in the after-school group deals with the body and the discovery of sexuality:

Sally and Tommy were playing together, and Tommy says, "Sally can I play with your belly button?" and Sally says "sure." So he starts playing with her belly button. Sally says, "Tommeeee, that's not my belly button." And he says, "that's not my finger either."

Another joke introduces a violation of the teacher/student relationship; the teacher initiates the action with an unwilling (at first) child.

"Ok," the teacher says, and "ok, it's time to go home; everybody go home except," I don't know his name.

After everyone left, the teacher said, "John, take off my shoes," and he says, "I don't want to," and she said, "*John*," and he said "ok."

And she said, "John, take off my dress," and he said, "I don't want to," and she said, "*John*," and he said "ok." (giggles)

And finally he undressed her all, and she laid down on the table, and she said, "John, get on top of me" (giggles) and he said, "I don't want to," and she said, "*John*," and he said, "ok," and he gets on her, and then the janitor walks in, and in a few minutes says "John, get off that teacher," and he says, "I don't want to."

## Songs & Inversion of Instructions

Glory, glory hallelujah, teacher hit me with the ruler;  
I hit her in the weene with a rotten tangerine, and she ain't my teacher no more.

More verses followed.

In the following example five children of the same group as above are recorded and observed as we go to a pizzeria for dinner and then to an ice cream shop for dessert. As we are driving to the ice cream shop, I remind the children of good behavior because on a previous trip Phillip broke his dish and spilled the ice cream.

Phillip responds: "We'll remember – I'll go over the rules. Throw ice cream at each other. Break up spoons. Don't eat the ice cream. If you do not like it, throw it at somebody. And those glass cups, remember break them on your way out. Those are the ground rules. Do them all."

Phillip's brother Chris replies, "Phillip, you want to know something? If pooh came out of your rear end every time you said a word, your pants would be too heavy for you to wear, and it would be impossible to clean up."

These comments lead to a discussion of diarrhea with all children talking at once, and Gina states that Phillip's diarrhea comes out of his hair. We arrive at the ice cream shop, and everyone enjoys their ice cream with no accidents. Once in the car, the children sing one of their favorite songs:

Have you ever seen a hearse go by, with people in it about to die.  
They wrap you up in a bloody sheet and drop you down about sixty feet.  
The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out, the worms play  
penuchle on your snout.  
They eat your eyes, they eat your nose, they eat the jelly between  
your toes. Then all the lizards crawl through your gizzards.

When finished they move on to another favorite song: "Greasy, Grimy Gopher Guts."

Throughout the performance of these examples and many more, Phillip assumed the role of clown, reversing rules and relationships, crossing conceptual wires of the real and imaginative, and inverting concepts and categories. Others in the group participated when they had a taboo form to contribute. The group enthusiastically sang the songs carefully constructed with poetic features which nevertheless expressed grotesque images.

Like the inhabitants of the marginal described by Mary Douglas the children are marginal to mainstream adult society and when at play are “licensed” to articulate the obscene, agonistic, inversive, scatological – all beyond the pale of mainstream educational principles and pedagogy. These performances occurred during play time and can be accurately described by Babcock who argued that the “play dimension – the re-arranging of semantic categories...” (914) was not simply chaos, but *...whether it be the game of a child, the art of a clown or the play of the novelist –[it] is an ensemble of rules for the manipulation and transformation of the various semiotic systems which constitute a given culture.*” (Babcock, 921).

### **Children’s Folklore: Play and Performance**

As the above examples demonstrate, play and the performance of children’s folklore create a wide range of informal learning. Not limited to adding skills and knowledge, informal learning also creates opportunities for subtracting and refining, classifying and rearranging, creating reflection on and refinement of semiotic systems – the fundamental material of culture.

Concerned with informal learning, the Children’s Folklore project motivated a great deal more research concerned with children’s performance than the products published by SEDL. Had the potential of the project been fulfilled, more publications would have been produced out of the research, and person to person contacts with

teachers and school administrators could have been pursued to explore further developments and application of the research material.

While the concept of informal learning would seem to be attractive to educators, expanding the topic into a larger document addressing concepts such as *Play, Language, Social Collaboration, Creativity, Substitution*, would have been valuable for teachers. Another approach would have involved breaking down the material into smaller units, suggesting how it could be used as an illustration, integrated into a day in which numbers or language or some other formal learning were on the agenda.

Finally, an essay on Children's Performance of Folklore would have been a valuable contribution, emphasizing that an individual has the opportunity to try out roles, to perform before a friendly audience, to express self-assertion or resistance, to demonstrate artistry and to practice social skills when performing in play. These opportunities assist children to develop self-esteem, discover talents, build friendships, social awareness, group solidarity, and finally, to conclude what to keep and what to discard.

The Children's Folklore project was well situated to send a message, and perhaps did succeed in doing so, confirming that the performance of children's folklore showed in impressive ways what children were interested in and what they were capable of, intellectually, interactionally, aesthetically, morally.

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Folklore, the Research Review (Ghana) and chapters in multiple volumes. Her current research is focused on the Ashanti people of Ghana, with special attention to Queen Mothers and chieftaincy disputes.

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Beverly Stoeltje would like to acknowledge the major role her daughters, Gretchen Stoeltje and Rachael Stoeltje, played in her research. They were engaged, even enthusiastic, about the project, the boundary between spontaneous and requested performance being quite fluid. Their names were changed in the Counting-Out performance write-up to Gina and Suzy.

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<sup>1</sup> See Victor Turner (1974).

<sup>2</sup> A further note: NYU published a book in 2020 entitled *The Games Black Girls Play* by ethnomusicologist Kyra Gaunt. It employs a different perspective from the Brady and Eckhardt essays, but references "Black Girls at Play," suggesting that the author might have been inspired by their publication.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Roger Abrahams (1969).

## Part II

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# Revisiting Three Previously Published TCFP Works



# Ethnography of Children's Folklore

Richard Bauman  
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*First presented in 1978 at the Colloquium on Ethnography and Education, which was hosted by Research for Better Schools, Inc. and the University of Pennsylvania, Bauman's "Ethnography of Children's Folklore" was also printed in Children In and Out of School: Ethnography and Education in 1982. Thank you to the Center for Applied Linguistics for permission to reprint in this Special Issue of Children's Folklore Review.*

*Via an examination of children's folklore—including riddles, jokes, catches, and solicitational routines—Bauman's article makes strong claims for the importance of ethnographic study of children's folklore as a source of insight into the rich artistic, expressive competencies too frequently ignored by educators.*

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I am especially pleased to have the opportunity to address the subject of children's folklore within the context of ethnography and education. For nearly twelve years now, I have been hawking children's folklore to educators in one form or another, more often than not in conferences or workshops organized in terms of conceptions of children's expressive behavior and/or of research generally in varying degrees out of phase with my own. But not this time. Ethnography is exactly what I believe in and try to do, and I am convinced that a self-conscious consideration of what is distinctive about ethnography and children's folklore can highlight some important matters that otherwise tend to remain obscured.

Let me begin by specifying what I mean by children's folklore, namely, the traditional formalized play activities of children, including forms of speech play and verbal art, that are engaged in and maintained by the children themselves, within the peer group. Familiar genres of children's folklore include riddles, games, jokes, taunts, retorts, hand-claps, counting-out rhymes, catches, ring plays, and jump-rope rhymes, and several dozen others that most of you can probably remember as well as I can.

Children's folklore is distinguished on the one hand from nursery lore, such as nursery rhymes, finger plays, knee-bouncing rhymes, tickling rhymes, and other routines that have their locus in the interaction between very young children and adults. It is likewise distinguished from, though it may share items and genres and have other continuities with, adult folklore.

### **Ethnographic Studies of Play and Children's Folklore**

Anthropological students of childhood will be familiar with a whole range of what are generally identified in the literature as ethnographic studies of children's play, either full-length ethnographies, or more often parts of ethnographies conceived in broader terms. Characteristic of these studies, the feature that earns them the designation *ethnographic*, is the consideration of children's play within the context of and functionally integrated with larger social and cultural systems. Most often, as pointed out by Helen Schwartzman in her review of the literature on anthropological studies of children's play (1976), these studies view children's play as an enculturation vehicle. The children are seen as proto-adults, learning things and acquiring competencies through play that will equip them for later, more mature stages of life beyond childhood. The view is a teleological one, taking children as incomplete, as yet unfinished bearers of adult culture, helped along toward adulthood by their play activities. Schwartzman (1976:298) quotes a nice example of the genre from Colin Turnbull's (1961) description of the play of Mbuti Pygmy children:

Like children everywhere, Pygmy children love to imitate their adult idols...at an early age boys and girls are 'playing house' or 'playing hunting.'... And one day they find that the games they have been playing are not games any longer, but the real thing for they have become adults.

This perspective, characteristic also of many psychological treatments of children's play, tends to be attractive to educators, because education tends

overwhelmingly to be conceived—by educators and laymen alike in our society—as preparing children for, and moving them along toward, adulthood. At its best, the approach can be useful, for one of the universal facts about children is that they do indeed become adults, and moreover, because they do in fact operate to a significant extent in the world of adults.

Unfortunately, however, research on children's folklore with an eye toward enculturation and toward the potential application of childlore to education tends to be seriously skewed by the widespread underlying attitude toward play that it has to be useful in a moral sense, that it should contribute toward 'proper' and 'productive' adult ways of behaving. Thus, I have found in my own work with educators that my research was impelled toward the investigation of language skills in children's speech play and verbal art that are clearly implicated in reading proficiency, or of reasoning skills that contribute to mathematical or scientific proficiency. The tendency is to reduce the playful, whimsical, artful aspects of children's folklore to the merely instrumental, and to shun entirely the aggressive, obscene, scatological, anti-authoritarian, and inversive elements (e.g., *Glory, glory, hallelujah! Teacher hit me with a ruler ...*) that any student of children's folklore knows well to be a central part of the expressive culture of childhood.

It would certainly be ill-advised to argue against the appropriateness of excluding these latter elements from the classroom, and I don't propose to do so. But what role should they play in research on children's folklore? Should they be excluded from educationally sponsored research as well?

I'll return to this issue shortly, but first I want to establish a broader point, relevant to it, but stated so as to be more directly relevant to the matter of ethnography. What I want to do is point up a basic paradox implicit in the kind of ethnographic studies of children's play as enculturation that I was discussing a moment ago. One of

the most fundamental commitments of ethnography, really a basic ideological principle, is to the necessity of accounting for the realities of a culture in its own terms, free of the bias inherent in the imposition of frames of reference, or functional imperatives, or a priori moral judgments from without. Anthropologists have a name for the violation of this principle, namely, ethnocentrism, and they view it as a cardinal sin.

But let us consider an anthropological study of children's folklore as it functions in the enculturation process in a particular culture that is carried out by the best relativist standards, and is innocent of any taint of ethnocentrism vis-a-vis that culture at large. Remember here, though, that children's folklore is uniquely the expression of children in the peer group, and the peer group, although situated within the society as a whole, undeniably has its own social structure, and, I would argue, its own distinctive culture. Perhaps subculture would be a better term, but in either case, a way of life and a way of perceiving, comprehending, and operating in a world that is not the same as that of adult members of the society.

What we are faced with, then, in viewing children's folklore by adult standards and imperatives, is something very much akin to ethnocentrism, perhaps *adultocentrism*, if you will permit. This may be an inescapable consequence of the fact that children are indeed in transit to adulthood, as I mentioned earlier, and of the quite legitimate interest and concern that adults--whether anthropologists, educators, or laymen—have in the process and its outcome. I want to use this occasion to argue, though, for the need to provide a counterbalance to this adultocentrism by turning our ethnographic lens on the peer group and its lore in its own terms, precisely in the manner that we undertake our ethnographic investigations of other cultural systems. Moreover, I would argue as well that this ethnographic focus on the peer group of children should logically precede the study of children's folklore as a mechanism of enculturation for adulthood, and still further that investigation of this kind has its own special usefulness for educators.

To describe the kind of study I am advocating for children's folklore, I will need to say something about what ethnography has come to mean in folklore research generally. For most of the history of folklore as a scholarly discipline the basic unit of analysis has been the folkloric text, the item of folklore, sometimes in relation to other versions of that item in historical or distributional perspective, sometimes in relation to other texts to which it bears a generic relationship, sometimes in relation to other aspects of society or culture, or even individual biography or personality, but overwhelmingly with a sense of folklore as isolatable stuff, like a pot or an axe or an arrowhead, with its essence somehow identifiable in its formal structure and content alone. More recently, however, there has been an increasing interest in folklore as situated communication, for the place and uses of folklore in the conduct of social life and the competence that underlies this use. (By competence, I mean the knowledge and ability to operate appropriately in a socially constituted and culturally defined world [Hymes 1971a]). This study of the patterns and functions of folklore as situated communication, rendered meaningful in terms of endogenously determined contexts of use, is what I mean by the ethnographic approach to folklore (see also Paredes and Bauman 1972; Bauman 1975, 1977a, 1977c).

An illustrative example might be useful here, to underscore the distinctive ethnographic perspective I am suggesting. A particularly effective example, directly relevant to children's folklore, concerns counting-out rhymes, those forms, like eeny-meeny-minie-mo or one potato, two potato, that children commonly use to allocate game roles or establish other kinds of priority orderings. Counting-out rhymes were an early focus of anthropological interest in children's folklore on the part of nineteenth century scholars, who saw in them a survival of ancient forms of divination (see, e.g., Bolton 1888). More recent scholars, including Roger Caillois (1961:36) and Brian Sutton-Smith (1959:89-90), concerned with the organizing principles of various game activities

and the correlation between these organizing principles and aspects of adult social relations, have classified counting-out as a game of chance, based on the formal structure of the activity without regard to its actual use.

Kenneth Goldstein (1971) , however, undertook to investigate ethnographically how children actually conduct the activity of counting-out, and made an interesting discovery, namely, that children employ a variety of quite conscious strategies, including extension of the rhyme by additional formulae, selection of alternative rhymes, skipping regular counts, changing positions, and the like, to manipulate the apparently random mechanism of counting-out to ensure specific desired outcomes. That is, for Goldstein's population, counting-out is actually a game of strategy, masked over by a seeming reliance on chance. His findings demonstrate counting-out to be a more complex activity than had formerly been recognized, in which the public fiction of chance and impersonality is maintained at the same time that a series of strategies are available to the counter and the counted for manipulating the outcome, and the counter especially has a considerable amount of latitude and power in controlling the activity. Goldstein's analysis thus reveals a more complex range of competencies to be mobilized in the conduct of counting-out than just the mastery of the rhyme and the associated kinesic and proxemic aspects of the activity would suggest.

The various educators to whom I have presented this case have often been made uneasy by it, as somehow suggesting that innocent children are in fact duplicitous and manipulative, and that ethnography, by implication, is the business of exposing the seamy underside of childhood. Still, it seems to me that ethnography can do far worse than to stand as an enterprise that pursues an understanding of how people really go about the conduct of their social lives; with reference to children's folklore, this means investigating their folklore as a cultural system in its own terms, attending to the ways and contexts in which it is used by them in the conduct of peer group social life,

neglecting nothing that is meaningful to them—decorous or indecorous, sense or nonsense—without asking first if it is meaningful or appropriate to adults sensibilities. Insofar as a rational and responsive educational system must take fundamentally into account what a child at any given stage of development already knows and can do, nothing having to do with the competence of children is irrelevant to education, whatever relation it may bear to adult competence, and whether or not it ultimately makes its way into the classroom.

Now, much the same kind of argument could aptly be made for the study of children's peer group culture in all its aspects, not just children's folklore. Why single out children's folklore for special attention? I believe that the investigation of children's folklore is especially productive because folklore represents communication in its special modes, modes that are traditional, foregrounded, highly marked, valued, and enjoyed. Folklore forms are display forms, public means for the presentation and representation of oneself, one's culture, and one's social structure to others in ways that underscore both their meaningfulness to the group and one's own competence as a member of it. The forms of children's folklore, as I conceive them, are the special traditionally shared means for displaying one's competence to others, subject to evaluation for the skill and effectiveness mobilized in performance, the most artful way of speaking and behaving in the children's peer group repertoire. As such, children's folklore is an index to what is important to children in the peer group, and to their communicative competence within it.

### **Naturalistic Observation and Children's Folklore**

All that I have said thus far addresses the nature of ethnography as a perspective, centering on the goal of developing descriptive theories of what one needs to know and how one needs to behave to operate in a socially constituted and culturally defined world, from the point of view of endogenously organized meaning—meaning

apprehended and interpreted through the eyes of members of the social group itself. There remains yet the matter of ethnography as method, usually identified as naturalistic, open-ended, and qualitative, by contrast with the more experimental, operational, and quantitative methods of behavioral research. There is already an extensive and growing literature debating the merits and shortcomings of these respective research orientations, much of it produced by people better qualified than I am to discuss these issues. Accordingly, I do not propose to deal at length with the general issue of methodology in the ethnography of children's folklore, confining my remarks instead to some of the special problems attendant on this research.

I do believe that the ethnographic perspective dictates at the very least a naturalistic frame of reference, whatever specific methodologies are invoked for the gathering and interpretation of data. By a naturalistic frame of reference. I mean at least an implicit concern for naturally occurring, contextually situated behavior, unmanipulated and unconstrained by externally imposed methodological imperatives. This is not to say that everything the ethnographer wants to know is evident in externally observable, naturally occurring behavior, or even that truly natural behavior is always accessible to the observer; if nothing else, the anthropological version of the Heisenberg principle calls into question whether any behavior, as observed by the researcher, is ever truly "natural." Nevertheless, a naturalistic frame of reference can and should be used as a guide and a standard for the evaluation of methodological validity in ethnographic research.

I raise these issues because naturalistic observation and participation is often a special problem in the study of children's folklore—the free peer group activity of children is by its very nature a privileged realm in which adults are alien intruders, especially so insofar as much of the children's folklore repertoire violated what children understand to be adult standards of decorum. The ethnography of children's folklore

thus raises to special importance the need to establish rapport with informants, to convince them of the genuineness of interest in the full range of their folklore repertoire, in order to overcome their reluctance to open their expressive world to adult scrutiny.,

Moreover, it is a fundamental characteristic of many, if not most, forms of children's folklore that they are spontaneous in occurrence and fleeting in duration, such that one never knows for certain whether or when a group of children will engage in them. Thus, direct elicitation, pump-priming, or the establishment of an induced natural context (Goldstein 1967), all requiring prior familiarity with the repertoire, may be necessary before the observer might have the opportunity to step back and allow the dynamics of peer group interaction to take their course.

On the other hand, rapport once established, adult interest can also be a stimulus to performance, by providing an occasion for it, since children do enjoy engaging in the performance and exchange of their folklore. Sometimes, the licensed ignorance of the adult outsider can itself provide a useful stimulus, as in cases where all the children in the group know and are tired of a particular routine, and the presence of someone who purports not to know it provides a fresh occasion to trot it out once more. The essential point is, whatever methodological ingenuity is called for, it should be informed by the goals of the ethnographic perspective and hew as closely as possible to the naturalistic frame of reference.

### **Examinations of Solicitational Routines**

Let me turn now to a series of concrete and related examples drawn from an extended research project in children's folklore that I undertook with some of my students in 1973 through 1976 in conjunction with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Our research was centered especially on children's verbal folklore in the conviction that the ethnographic study of these forms would reveal useful information about the communicative competence of children within the context

of their own self-motivated and enjoyable peer group activity, information that might not be so readily accessible from the study of children's communicative behavior in more formal settings, or in interaction with adults. Moreover, because of the crucial centrality of language skills to contemporary American education, we felt that the strongest case for the potential contribution of children's folklore to education could be made in this sphere.

The project focused on the folklore repertoire of 5- through 8-year-old Anglo, black, and Chicano children in Austin, Texas. At the very beginning of our fieldwork it became apparent that perhaps the most popular folklore forms, at least among the Anglo and Chicano children in that age range, were riddles and related forms like knock-knocks and catches, to which I applied the collective label *solicitational routines*. These are expressive routines (Hymes 1971b:58), which are distinguished by their incorporation within the formal structure of a dyadic social exchange consisting of at least one solicitation (a speech act, the function of which is to elicit a verbal or kinesic response) plus the response (Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman, and Smith 1966: Sinclair and Coulthard 1975). At first glance, from the outside, solicitational routines appear as small, rather inconsequential forms, considered trivial and corny if not downright foolish by most adults. On closer examination through the ethnographic lens, however, solicitational routines reveal themselves to be fascinating in their complexity, implicating a wide range of linguistic and sociolinguistic virtuosity. Perhaps if I can leap the triviality barrier, to use Sutton-Smith's apt phrase, by showing something of the complexity of these small folklore forms, the productiveness of studying children's folklore intensively in all its richness will be more readily accepted.

I stressed earlier that the ethnographic study of folklore contrasts strongly with those investigative perspectives on folklore that draw conclusions based on the abstract, normative structure of verbal genres, without attending to their actual social use. Such

normative conceptions of genre, together with allied conceptions of folklore forms as fixed, traditional texts, and as esthetic vehicles subject to evaluation for the skill and effectiveness with which they are done, make both scholars and lay-men disvalue and tend to disregard flawed performances; who wants to record a garbled rhyme or riddle when it is possible to find someone who can perform it well? Yet these flawed but recognizable attempts at performing traditional genres constitute a significant proportion of the expressive output of young children in their first few years of peer group involvement, say, from 5 to 7.

Take knock-knock jokes, for example, one popular type of solicitational routine. In studying the use of solicitational routines among 5 through 8-year-olds,<sup>1</sup> we collected knock-knocks in varying degrees of approximation to the standard form, such as the following:

- 1     A: Knock, knock.  
       B: Who's there?  
       A: Lisa [child's own name].  
       B: Lisa who?  
       A: Lisa Nora [name of present peer].
  
- 2     A: Knock, knock.  
       B: Who's there?  
       A: Amos.  
       B: Amos who?  
       A: Amos mosquito bit me. Knock knock.  
       B: Who's there?  
       A: Amos mosquito bit me again.
  
- 3     A: Knock, knock.  
       B: Who's there?  
       A: Olive.  
       B: Olive who?  
       A: Olive [I love] you.

Only the last of these is a well-formed traditional knock-knock. What are we then to make of the others, both apparently flawed by the normative standards of the genre?

Matters are clarified somewhat if we reveal that the first of these routines was contributed by a child of 5 years/3 months, the second by a child of 6 years/1 month, and third by a child of 8 years/6 months. The flawed knock-knocks in fact represent stages in a developmental progression, beginning with a stage in which the child has mastered the generic form of the routine but does not recognize the traditionality of the entire routine or understand the speech play in the standard knock-knocks, and so coins her own third line as if she were really presenting herself at the door, and fifth line by arbitrarily conjoining another name from the immediate situational environment with her own. The child who produced the next routine is attempting to repeat a traditional knock-knock (Knock, knock/Who's there?/Amos/Amos who?/A mosquito bit me. Knock, knock/Who's there?/Andy/Andy who? /Andy bit me again), knowing that proper knock-knocks are ready-made, but is again defeated by the speech play, which rearranges lexical boundaries to transform *Amos* to *a mos-quito* (she may in fact not recognize Amos as a name) and *Andy* to *and he*. The final stage in the progression is the correct doing of a traditional knock-knock. Time does not permit me to elaborate more fully on what is involved in this process, though I have treated it at length elsewhere (Bauman 1977b). The point I want to make here is that taking the data as they come, consistent with the ethnographic perspective, allows us to take account of the flawed renditions together with the good ones, and to see them as exemplifying stages in the acquisition of competence to perform a particular genre, and as indices to the range of cognitive and communicative skills implicated in the performance of the genre, not merely as mistakes to be disqualified. This is enculturation within the peer group, not from an adultocentric perspective.

One of the principal hallmarks of recent ethnographically informed folklore research, consistent with the reorientation from a concentration on discrete normative texts, abstracted from context, is its attention to the structure of the situational context of the performance of folklore and the patterning of folkloric performance within such situation or events. Drawing another example from our study of solicitational routines, we may illustrate the productiveness of this analytical focus for the study of children's folklore. The example is drawn from John McDowell's penetrating analysis of a riddling session involving three Chicano children, ranging in ages from 6 to 8 (1979:135-146). Embedded in this session, of approximately a half hour's duration, were eleven routines dealing with the semantic domain of locomotion:

- 1     What has eight wheels and rolls?  
    -- Roller skates.
- 2     What has two wheels and pedals?  
    -- A bicycle.
- 3     What has four wheels, no pedals, and a steering wheel?  
    -- A car.
- 4     What has four legs and can run?  
    -- A mustang.
- 5     What has three wheels and pedals?  
    -- A tricycle.
- 6     What has four legs and can't walk?  
    -- A chair.
- 7     What has two legs, it can walk?  
    -- A monkey.
- 8     What has long legs and its hard to walk?  
    -- A seagull.
- 9     What has two seats, four wheels, and they can roll?  
    -- A car.
- 10    What has lots of windows and they can fly?  
    -- Airplane.
- 11    What are those little clocks and its in your car?  
    -- A dragger.

Two of these, numbers 1 and 6, are traditional riddles; the remaining nine are what McDowell has labeled descriptive routines (1979:34), in which the solicitation is in the form of a question, but the question is not ready-made, i.e., traditional, but rather newly coined by the child, following one of the syntactic and textural patterns characteristic of traditional riddles. Most commonly, the descriptive routine calls on the respondent to identify an object by describing it in the solicitation in terms of one or more (usually more) of its salient attributes. McDowell's analysis demonstrates how, through the exchange of solicitational routines, the children participating in the session systematically construct and explore a folk taxonomy of locomotion, as represented in Figure 1. Though clearly not exhaustive, this taxonomy is yet highly logical and structured by the taxonomic relationships of inclusion and contrast.

McDowell goes on to show how the logic and order of the basic taxonomy is interpenetrated by another type of reasoning, in which prevailing cultural orders are dismembered and rearranged in apparently anomalous ways. The shift resides in items 4 and 6, which, by incorporating ambiguity, depart from the transparent description characteristic of descriptive routines. The metaphorical attribution of legs to chairs, which should thus be capable of locomotion but are not, suggests the possibility of restructuring the taxonomy on another basis, as does the association of an automobile with a wild horse, otherwise in contrast as machine and animal, but alternatively conjoined on the basis of fleetness. McDowell's analysis thus reveals a group of children aware of the dual capacity of language to encode and convey shared cultural meanings, but also to rearrange the structure of those meanings in alternative ways, all explored through the medium of traditionally organized speech play. Consider what an array of "language arts" is implicated here—mastery of generic form, encoding of salient descriptive attributes, logical relationships of inclusion and contrast, ambiguity in metaphor, and so on—not completely evident in the solicitation routine texts taken

singly, or from attention to the traditional riddles alone, but from the systematic analysis of an aspect of the patterning of the event as a whole.

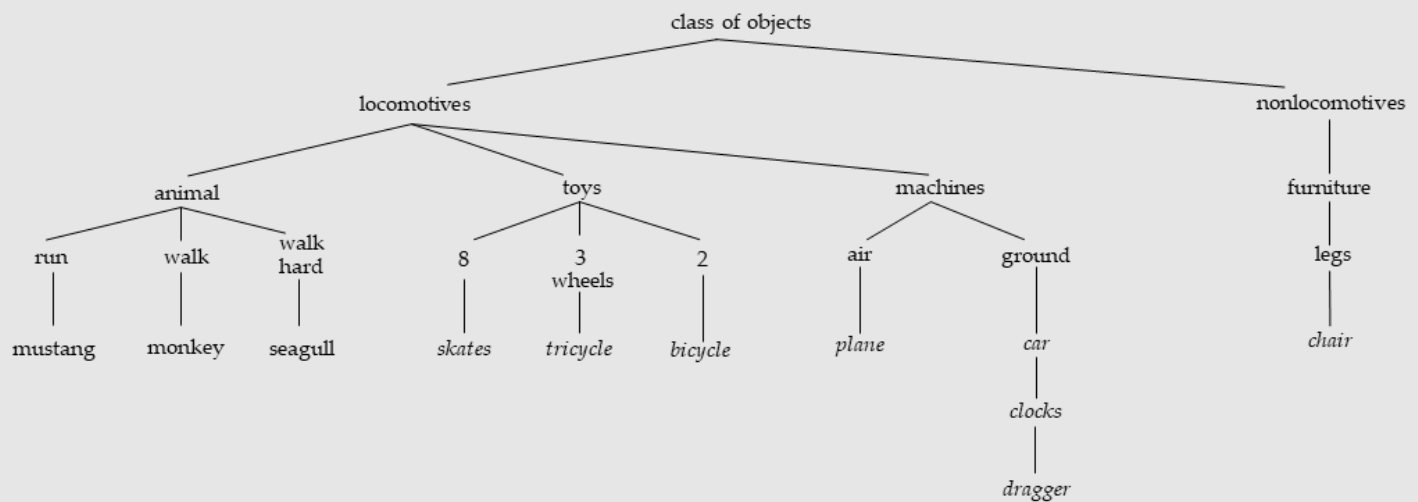


Figure 1: The Taxonomy of Locomotion [From McDowell 1979, 138]

A different kind of confrontation between order and disorder, implicating not so much logic and classification as the very communicative resources and rules by which conversation is conducted, is embodied in a third type of solicitation routine, the catch. Danielle Roemer, who has made an intensive study of these routines (1977), defines catches as two-party, humorous, interactional routines that are strategically designed to effect the surprise and victimization of one of the participants. They provide for the enactment of a stylized conversation between two parties: The child who initiates the exchange assumes the role of the trickster; the respondent acts as the straightman (1977:13). Typical examples of the genre, commonly represented in the repertoire, are the following:

- 1     A: Open up the gate.                     [The ends of A's index fingers are together; his thumbs are pointing up.]  
        B: [Pulls A's index fingers toward himself.]  
        A: Bang, bang, you're dead             [A's hands are now in the shape of Fifty bullets in your head. "guns" which he shoots at B.]  
           Brush your teeth and go to bed.
- 2     A: Say a number after everything I say.  
        I saw a dead buzzard layin' in the road.  
        I one'd it.  
        B: I two'd it.  
        A: I three'd it.  
        B: I four'd it.  
        A: I five'd it.  
        B: I six'd it.  
        A: I seven'd it.  
        B: I eight [ate] it.
- 3     A: What's your name?  
        B: Jane.  
        A: What's this?                         [Points to her own nose.]  
        B: A nose.  
        A: What's in my hand?                 [Shows empty palm.]  
        B: Nothing.  
        A: Jane knows nothing.

The catch, as a genre that almost universally incurs the disfavor of adults because of its violation of the interactional ideals of trust and reciprocity, its licensed physical aggression and verbal insult, and its encouragement of profanity, albeit in a playful way, must depend for its survival on the oral tradition of the peer group, receiving little or no reinforcement from polite riddle books, educational television shows, or teachers. Yet, if we can suspend moral judgment long enough to examine catches in their own terms, we find them to involve a remarkably sophisticated structure, centering on the manipulation of linguistic and social interactional resources and their interrelationships.

The principal communicative resource exploited in catch routines is the interpretive frame, the metamessage signaling how a particular message is to be interpreted. Through the mechanism of the routine, a context is established by the trickster that keys a particular range of meanings to lead the straightman on to further participation. At the end, however, the apparently harmless message keyed by the original frame is 'subtly reframed, to challenge or destroy the reputable social self of the straightman through licensed aggression, embarrassment, or other means of degradation. Even worse, this is done in such a manner that the straightman is revealed to have collaborated in his own fool-making. In the examples just presented, straightmen variously find themselves inviting symbolic aggression as an innocuous gesture is transformed into a symbolically dangerous one, admitting to the eating of carrion (consisting of a dead buzzard, which is itself an eater of carrion and so doubly polluted) by a shift from one meaning of a homonymic pair to the other, or constructing a verbal admission of their own ignorance through the establishment of discourse cohesion uniting three apparently unrelated utterances, one of which is itself reframed by a similar homonymic shift.

These catches are thus a striking lesson in the sensitivity of meaning to its context of use. Catch routines, thus analyzed, reveal their users not only to be possessed of a range of interesting linguistic competencies, but of a striking awareness of sociolinguistic nuances as well, all mobilized in the playful service of social disorder.

So far, I have been talking of children's folklore in fairly generalized terms, without much regard-to the many dimensions of diversity that characterize American children. To a certain extent, this is warranted by the substantial degree of sharing of repertoire that does in fact exist among children throughout the country; I have a vague hunch that children's folklore may be more homogeneous nationwide than any other part of our American expressive repertoire. Nevertheless, there are many lines along

which the repertoire is diversified as well, paralleling those that underlie the diversity of American society at large.

Exploring this diversity is a dual problem, part ethnographic, part comparative. The relationship between the two in anthropological inquiry has been treated by Dell Hymes elsewhere in this volume, so I will not dwell on it here, but simply suggest a few of the dimensions of social variability in the children's folklore repertoire. In doing so, I want to make clear that none of these dimensions operates in discrete isolation, sorting the children and their folklore into neat boxes. It is more accurately the case that such demographic factors as age, sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and language may all bear a simultaneous and inter-related influence on such folkloric variables as generic preference, performance style, content, and participation structures. Although the relative associations along these sets of variables is certainly amenable to statistical analysis, the work remains to be done. I can only suggest in fairly broad terms how some of the factors may sort themselves out.

I pointed out in an earlier example how developmental differences may affect the production of knock-knocks. To continue further with solicitational routines, it is clearly the case for the Austin children we studied that while Anglo and Chicano children both have a substantial investment in riddling, the Chicano children care relatively little for a range of solicitational routines, like knock-knocks and others I have not discussed here, that are great favorites among the Anglo children.<sup>2</sup> Older Chicano children, though, beyond our 5 through 8 age range, do enjoy an adapted form of knock-knock that plays on code switching, as in:

- 1     A: Knock, knock.  
       B: Who's there?  
       A: Apio verde [celery].  
       B: Apio verde who?  
       A: Apio verde (happy birthday) to you.

or

- 2     A: Knock, knock.  
        B: Who's there?  
        A: Sue.  
        B: Sue who?  
        A: Sue [su] madre.

On the other hand, there is a particularly intriguing type of solicitation routine that we collected only from Chicano children, and only in Spanish. These involve a solicitation in the form of a statement in which the answer is concealed by the arrangement of word boundaries and can only be guessed by rearranging syllables, morpheme; or lexemes across these boundaries. For example (McDowell 1976: 176):

- |   |  |          |
|---|--|----------|
| 1 | Oro no es, plata no es.<br>-- Plátano. | ¿Qué es? |
| 2 | Yo aquí, tu allá.<br>-- Toalla.        | ¿Qué es? |

There are traditional English routines analogous to these (Emrich 1970: 58-59), but they are not current among our Anglo population.

Even for forms that are popular in both ethnic groups, there are subtle differences of emphasis. In riddles and descriptive routines, for instance, the Anglo children's repertoire shows a far greater penetration of influences from popular culture—figures from television and comic books, for example—than does that of the Chicano children, reflecting perhaps the greater accessibility of these elements of mass culture to the more affluent Anglo children (McDowell 1979:Ch. 8). By contrast, the Chicano riddlers exploit body parts as comparisons and solutions far more than their Anglo counterparts, which McDowell convincingly attributes to a closer adherence to

traditional riddling content, for body parts are unquestionably prominent in older riddling traditions.

By contrast with both the Anglo and Chicano children, the children in our black population<sup>3</sup> have very little interest in traditional, ready-made solicitational routines of any kind within the peer group, with one notable exception. The one form of solicitational routine that is popular, though, is a form of rhyming speech play that represents a kind of catch.<sup>4</sup> Some of these are traditional, such as:

- 1     A: Say blue.  
        B: Blue.  
        A: You got the flu.

or

- 2     A: Say brown.  
        B: Brown.  
        A: You're a clown.

Moreover, these are often associated, in performance, with other rhyming forms that are also contestive, putting down the person to whom they are addressed much as catches do, but not in solicitational form, as in,

My acka backa,  
 My soda cracker,  
 My B 0 booty hole.  
 Your mama, your daddy,  
 Your great granny  
 Got a hole in her panty,  
 Got a big behind  
 Like Frankenstein,  
 Don't eat no meat  
 On Lincoln Street,  
 Don't drink no wine  
 On Chicago line.

Just scratching the surface in this manner, we have touched on ethnic and linguistic differences relating to generic preference and content. Let us invoke some other factors by reference to another genre, namely, handclaps, routines that involve a pattern of handclapping with one or more partners to the accompaniment of a sung or chanted rhyme. Handclaps are preeminently a girls' form, with a substantial sharing of the rhyme repertoire among the three ethnic groups we studied. The differences to be found here have principally to do with participant structure and style. Thus, Beverly Stoeltje (1978) has noted that among black girls, the signal offering to begin handclapping is nonverbal, i.e., the presentation to one's potential partner of the hands in the position for the opening clap: left palm up, right palm down. If the invitation is accepted, the initiator launches into the chosen rhyme, picked up immediately by her partner. Among Anglo girls, the invitation to handclap is made verbally: "Let's do Miss Mary Mack," or whichever rhyme the presenter wishes to perform. Again, black girls are far more likely than Anglo girls to use syncopated rhythms in handclaps, e.g., a three-beat handclap pattern in conjunction with a 2/4 musical rhythm in the rhymes, while the standard Anglo pattern is a two-move handclap with the same 2/4 rhymes.

### **Education and the Ethnography of Childlore**

Now, what do all these commonalities and contrasts imply for education? Beyond highlighting the unities and diversities of our society and culture in general, it is very difficult to say precisely at this early point in the research what the meaningful differences are, let alone what their educational implications may be. To be sure, certain hypotheses do suggest themselves as especially worthy of further research. To take only one example, drawing again on solicitational routines, it seems to me that insofar as riddles are expressive models of the kind of interrogation and interaction that is ubiquitous in the school setting (cf. Roberts and Forman 1972; Mehan 1982),

engagement in riddling may have real adaptive value for children in the 5 through 8 age range we studied, as they come to terms with the participant structures of schooling in our society. Put another way, our prevailing educational practices may select against children, like the black children in our Austin study population, who, for whatever social or cultural reason, do not engage in speech play of this kind, though their expressive repertoire may be very rich in other forms that the Anglo children don't do. But the point is that the Anglo children don't lose anything in the classroom by not doing them.

Concerning the potential educational relevance of the ethnography of children's folklore, however, I can speak with more confidence. Here, I would stress two points. I am convinced, first of all, that the most significant potential contribution that the close study of children's folklore can make is in revealing the truly impressive range of linguistic and sociolinguistic competencies that is fostered by the children's own peer group culture.<sup>5</sup> To repeat an earlier point, nothing having to do with the competencies of children should be foreign to education, and children's folklore shows children at their natural virtuoso best, mobilizing skills that are not evident in their social life outside the peer group. What makes this point still more telling is that proficiency in the peer group is not necessarily correlated for all groups of children, or individuals, with success in the classroom. I am far from the first to point out that for minority children especially, various kinds of true communicative virtuosity and communicative leadership may be excluded from or selected again in the school; William Labov has argued as much most impressively' (1972), as have others. Surely, a humane and rational educational system ought to be responsive to such factors, by profiting from and building on the in-sights that the ethnography of childlore can provide.

The other major concluding point I would make stems from my conviction that the arts should play a significant role in education and my clear impression that

increasing numbers of educators are coming to share this conviction. This suggests that children's folklore, representing what might aptly be called the indigenous art forms of childhood, unquestionably valued and enjoyed by the children themselves, might constitute a significant resource in the development of culturally responsive, locally relevant arts programs in the schools, together with--perhaps as an ante--cedent point of departure for--the general run of arts curricula that are oriented more to the fine art forms of western culture.

How these suggestions might best be implemented remains an open question, calling for a substantial amount of further research and program, development. There are certainly problems to be confronted in the course of this research and development, not the least of which is the danger of sapping the vitality and spontaneity of children's folklore by neutering and sterilizing it for classroom use or polite consumption. What seems to me clear, though, is that the results of investigating children's folklore will amply repay the effort, and above all that ethnography must play a leading part in these efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> The following discussion of knock-knock routines draws upon unpublished work by Andrea Meditch, undertaken as part of the above-mentioned research project on children's folklore, under the sponsorship of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, Texas.

<sup>2</sup> Note carefully that there is no implication here that they can't do them, or that they are in some way deficient for not doing them, simply that empirically they don't do them.

<sup>3</sup> The discussion of black children's folklore draws upon unpublished work by Margaret Brady, in conjunction with the children's folklore research project mentioned earlier (see note 1). See also Brady and Eckhardt 1975.

<sup>4</sup> Note again that I am not saying they don't have the capacity for them, only that they are not a real part of their repertoire, any more than Spanish language sollicitational routines that depend upon rearranging word boundaries are part of the Anglo children's repertoire. They do other things.

<sup>5</sup> These same children's folklore materials are also highly illuminating of cognitive abilities, which are outside the scope of this paper. See Park 1972; Shultz 1974; Sutton-Smith 1976; Whitt and Prentice 1977.

# Riddling and Enculturation

## A Glance at the Cerebral Child

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*This paper attempts to illustrate with concrete data that riddles serve as a didactic device to sharpen the wits of young children. The riddle is described as a verbal routine which adapts the interrogative system of a speech community to purposes of play. Riddles concerning motion or locomotion of animals, machines, and toys were collected in a single riddling session, from three Chicano children aged 5-7. The output of these neophyte riddles is discussed in the context of the acquisition and refinement of cognitive categories, and a folk taxonomy focused on the semantic domain of locomotion is suggested. Riddling is viewed as a didactic mechanism conducive to experimentation with received notions of order, and elaboration of novel cognitive orders. In riddling, at various stages, children learn to formulate culturally acceptable classifications; to articulate classifications at variance with cultural conventions; and finally to assess language and classification as arbitrary instruments reflecting only partially the continuous texture of experience.*

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The present paper, dealing with a form of children's riddling which lacks cultural saliency, represents another assault on what Brian Sutton-Smith has felicitously termed the triviality barrier (Sutton-Smith 1970). Childish behavior is so thoroughly stigmatized in our canons of adult comportment that much of the spectrum of characteristically children's activity has been systematically neglected or at best observed with disdain or apology in our social sciences. We owe to Johan Huizinga the definitive affirmation of the importance of play, adult's and child's, in the shaping of culture:

Play is more than a mere physiological phenomenon or psychological reflex...It is a significant function—that is to say, there is some sense in it. In play there is something "at play" which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. (1950:1)

Subsequent research, taking as fundamental the notion advanced in the above statement, has demonstrated beyond any measure of doubt the non-trivial nature of children's play. It would be possible, on the basis of a growing body of research too extensive to review here, to characterize the play of children as a crucial function, central in the acquisition, maintenance, and modification of culture (see Piaget 1965; Roberts, Arth, and Bush 1959; Roberts and Sutton-Smith 1962; Sutton-Smith 1967; Sanchez and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1971; McDowell 1974). Moreover, as Huizinga's initial effort intended, the study of the play motive in culture has blossomed into a powerful analytical tool, with major applications in several domains of human activity (Huizinga 1950; Abrahams 1973).

The riddle, with which we will be concerned in what follows, is among the most venerable of the genres of folklore, a source of instructive play in many societies, the Venda for example (Blacking 1961), and an enduring puzzle and challenge to students of expressive culture. Simply defined the riddle is a verbal routine which adapts the interrogative system of a speech community to purposes of play. The question, a fundamental speech resource, normally employed in the exchange of information, serves in the riddling context as a means of examining wrinkles or ambiguities latent within the verbal code (see Abrahams 1972). Riddles, like other ludic forms, reverse the pattern of expectations normally associated with the activity involved. The serious question enables the questioner to solicit information unknown to him (except in the instance of rhetorical questions, which arguably constitute an elaboration of basic questioning procedures). In riddling, on the other hand, the questioner solicits information already known, indeed the riddler alone determines correct and incorrect responses. Some contemporary riddling makes this reversal all the more conspicuous by citing an answer for which the riddles must then provide an appropriate question.

Riddling competence necessarily builds on prior interrogative competence. For this reason we rarely find children riddling before the age of 5 or so. Even so, the 5 or 6 year old riddler makes of riddling something rather different than the practiced routines of his adolescent counterparts. As Sutton-Smith has remarked, the former is prone to view the riddle as "a puzzling question with an arbitrary answer" (Sutton-Smith 1972). In another variation, the younger riddler is likely to design riddles which are transparent questions, lacking the characteristic block element responsible for the semantic confusion normally generated in the riddle. The block element, revolving on metaphor or another form of artful obfuscation, remains somewhat beyond the grasp of the riddling neophyte (see Georges and Dundes 1963). The initiate riddler captures first the aural texture and rhythm of the riddle, and only later adjusts to the more demanding strictures of riddle content.

Riddling at each stage along the journey to artful ambiguation apparently serves functions connected to the acquisition of cognitive and interactional skills (McDowell 1974). In making this assertion we cross the triviality barrier and attribute vital functions to a form of child's play often annoying to mothers, and until recently entirely invisible to scholars. In the remainder of this paper I will discuss and interpret the output of riddling neophytes during the course of a single riddling session. This riddling will be viewed in the context of the acquisition and refinement of cognitive categories. The riddles were collected by myself in Austin, Texas, from a trio of Chicano children, ages 5-7. This riddling session structured itself around one specific theme, addressed in several of the individual riddles, concerning the motion or locomotion of machines, animals, and toys. As a text for the present purposes, I have extracted and present here those routines touching on this particular topic. Other intervening material has been edited out. My presentation here retains the original order of occurrence.

- 1) What has 8 wheels and rolls?  
Roller skates.
- 2) What has 2 wheels and pedals?  
A bicycle.
- 3) What has 4 wheels, no pedals, and a steering wheel?  
A car.
- 4) What has 4 legs and can run?  
A mustang.
- 5) What has 3 wheels and pedals?  
A tricycle.
- 6) What has 4 legs and can't walk?  
A chair.
- 7) What has 2 legs, it can walk?  
A monkey.
- 8) What has long legs and its hard to walk?  
A seagull.
- 9) What has 2 seats, 4 wheels, and they can roll?  
A car.
- 10) What has lots of windows and they can fly?  
Airplane.
- 11) What are those little clocks and its in your car?  
A dragger.

We have here, then, a corpus of interrogative routines of the transparent sort, involving unambiguous questions (with one or two exceptions, to be dealt with below) whose answers are uniquely determined by the interrogator. In point of fact, items #4 and #6 above, the two exceptions, allow us to call this sample a transitional one between neophyte and more experienced riddling. The riddlers have mastered the texture and rhythm of their genre, and are making tentative stabs into appropriate content.

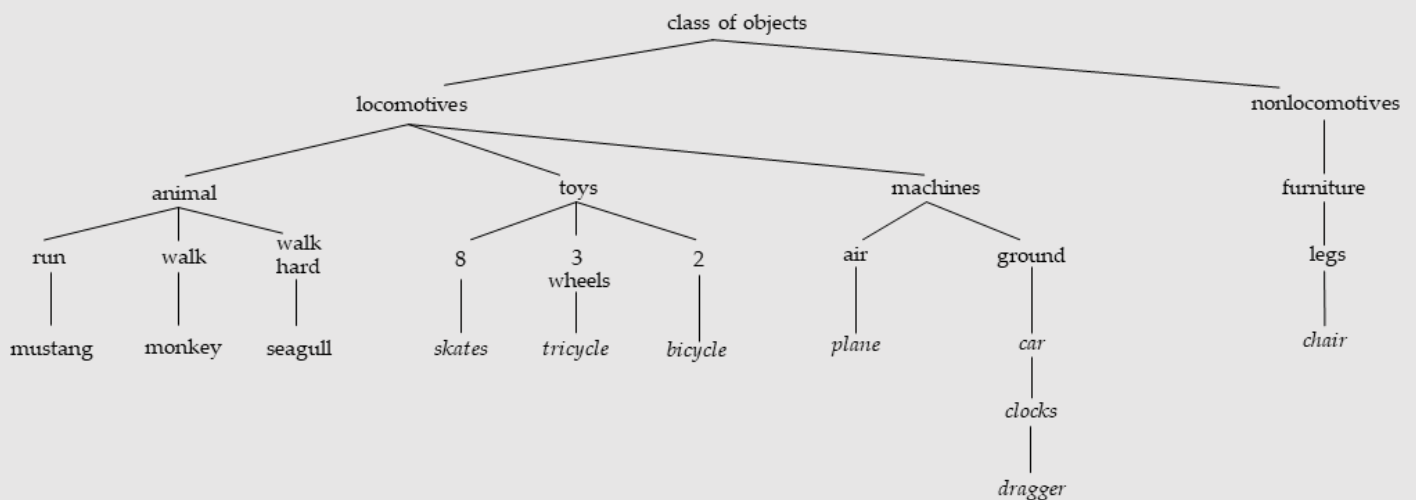
In order to convincingly penetrate the triviality barrier with this folkloric material, I will have recourse to the concept of folk taxonomy. The starting point in the analysis may as well be Ward Goodenough's formulation of the cognitive approach to culture:

A society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members... It is the forms of things that people have in their mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them. (Goodenough 1957:167)

Culture, in this formulation, consists in mental structures, or to follow contemporary parlance, folk taxonomies. These folk taxonomies organize the experiential world into discrete and logically ordered semantic domains. The cognitivist argues that all human behavior derives from these models, mental structures, or folk taxonomies (Sturtevant 1964).

Returning to our corpus of children's riddles, I would contend that the riddles centering on locomotion demarcate this theme as a semantic field, and provide substantial detail concerning the structure of its component categories. The riddles themselves provide only the tokens, or concrete objects in the taxonomy, and the distinctive features, or points of significant contrast. The entire taxonomic apparatus, consisting of segregate labels, must be provided in this instance by myself, the analyst. Given, then, by the children, is the following set of tokens: roller skates, bicycle, car, mustang, tricycle, chair, monkey, seagull, airplane, dragger. In addition, the riddles provide the following distinctive features: wheels, pedals, legs. Yet as the theme of locomotion is explored and developed, one routine begetting another, one senses that underlying this contemplative kind of performance there lurks a fairly rigorously organized taxonomic structure.

The chart given below presents one possible taxonomy of the semantic domain of locomotion capable of accounting for the riddles in our corpus. This chart is truly the product of a collective effort, first on the part of the children, whose verbal interaction created the corpus, and second, on my own part, in creating a feasible taxonomic environment for their empirical observations. Whether this chart or one like it resides in the children's consciousness or subconsciousness is an issue entirely beyond the scope of my judgment.



We have here a folk taxonomy focused on the semantic domain of locomotion. While the taxonomy is obviously not exhaustive, it is equally obviously highly structured and logically ordered within its chosen realm. There are several tiers to the taxonomy, connecting the tokens at the most particular level to the unique beginner at the most general. Segregate categories delimit the relationships of exclusion and inclusion obtaining in the taxonomy. Criterial attributes distinguishing the members of a single segregate category are provided immediately above the tokens.

The logical relationships inherent in the children's riddling and captured (hopefully) in this taxonomy can be isolated through a distinctive feature analysis of the segregate categories. With reference to a small number of critical variables, each

segregate category exhibits either a positive or negative value. The constellation of such values should be unique in each case. Here is the entire set of contrasts:

<u>animals</u>	<u>toys</u>	<u>machines</u>	<u>furniture</u>
+legs	-legs	-legs	+legs
-wheels	+wheels	+wheels	-wheels
-pedals	+pedals	-pedals	-pedals
+mobile	+mobile	+mobile	-mobile

We can readily perceive some of the differences between folk and scientific taxonomy. The folk taxonomy is adapted to practical purposes, while the scientific taxonomy attends rigorously to all of the phenomena within its ken. The practical orientation of the folk taxonomy emerges from the following children's riddle:

What's the difference between a loaf of bread and an elephant?

Response: I don't know.

Catch: I won't send you to the grocery store for bread.

The classification system contained in folk taxonomies sustains basic cultural competence even at the most mundane level. The folk taxonomy is a working taxonomy, facilitating, as Goodenough observes (see above), culturally acceptable action. Scientific taxonomy, on the other hand, seeks to make explicit the structure of semantic domains beyond the scope of any ordinary utility. Thus in this example the children need not be concerned with marginal cases such as the wheelchair, nor with the exceptional status of skates which are toys but lack pedals. In point of fact, discrepancies of this nature are particularly conducive to true riddles with metaphoric content, as we shall see below.

Nonetheless, the taxonomy presented here is not unscientific. In their grouping of tokens the children have suggested a structure transcending what Levi-Strauss calls "classification at the level of sensible properties" (1966:15). The taxonomy sketched in

above rests on the union of form and function. Wheels, legs, and pedals are not casually, but causally, related to locomotion; they are the empirically available markers of specific modes of locomotion. Legs correlate with self-generated motion; pedals, with mechanical motion based on the expenditure of human energy. Wheels without pedals entail in most cases some exterior source of energy. These distinctive features go beyond mere empiricism, by linking external form or anatomy to function. The formulation of such a taxonomy, emerging as it does in the arena of verbal play, is no mean or trivial task.

In the analysis thus far, we have viewed the children in their structuring persona, dwelling rather methodically in the course of the riddling session on the order prevalent within their cognitive systems. We have seen a diverse collection of material objects, some commonplace, others exotic, systematically compared and contrasted, on the basis of a very few criterial attributes. Children's play across the whole spectrum of verbal and non-verbal genres exhibits this ordering facet, and one might speculate that without the informal, entertaining format provided by the ludic genres, children might acquire only with great difficulty the fundamental cognitive and interactional abilities required of adults in their society. Indeed, the practice gained in the arena of children's folklore would appear to be a critical aspect of the enculturation process.

Resting our case here, however, with the ordering facet of children's play, would be a grave mistake. There is present in most children's folklore an opposite tendency, and this too contributes vitally to the enculturation process. Returning to our riddling corpus, we find two routines which are extraordinary in that they depart from transparent questioning procedures and involve, whether intentionally or not, linguistic ambiguity. These two routines, #2 and #6, tend to subvert the very same taxonomy being developed in the other riddles in our corpus. As with the proverbial sand castle,

the children no sooner become adept at building a structure, than they learn to dismantle it.

The notions subversive to our taxonomy appear in the guise of metaphor, in both cases involving a single word with two rather different referents. The metaphor resurrects a prior logic, the logic which enabled in the first place the extension of a single morpheme to two referents. This logic of the metaphor, however, stands apart from the organizing logic of the taxonomy. One of these metaphors comprises the block element of the only true riddle in the corpus:

What has 4 legs and can't walk?  
A chair.

In the context of the other routines, legs serve as a distinctive feature, setting the category animals apart from toys and machines. As we have seen, this feature has both formal and functional cogency in the folk taxonomy represented in our corpus of riddles. In this metaphor, however, the legs of a person or animal are analogized to the legs of a chair on formal grounds only, since the chair's legs are not correlated to the chair's mobility. The metaphor thus proposes another logic, one at variance with the logic of the taxonomy. Or to put the matter differently, the metaphor proposes another taxonomy, one in which legged furniture and animals would be subsumed together under a single rubric constituted on the basis of the shared feature (+legs). This metaphor is subversive precisely because it broaches the possibility of alternate slicings of the experiential world. Other, ghostly, taxonomies flicker into existence, challenging momentarily the taxonomy under elaboration.

The other metaphor resides in the word mustang, which names both a type of horse and a car model, tokens which are cognitively separated in the taxonomy into the segregates animal and machine respectively. These tokens are cognitively conjoined in

this metaphor, which proposes a grouping of diverse tokens united in their fleetness, or what we might refer to as locomotive expertise. As in the previous example, this metaphor throws into relief an alternative taxonomy, knitting some of the same tokens into a quite different logical structure. The children are evidently at that watershed point in their development, in which they become aware of the dual potencies of language, to render shared cognitive structures, and to rearrange these structures into alternative forms. Each of these processes is adequately reflected in our riddling sample.

It is noteworthy that the conventional taxonomy, with its solid foundation on formal and functional equivalence, prevails over the alternate taxonomies lacking as substantial a footing. The metaphorical connections remain pale and fleeting, in the context of the more highly elaborated taxonomy of locomotion. In fact, we tend to measure the departure of each metaphor using the locomotive taxonomy as a standard. Thus, the leap of metaphor between the segregates furniture and animal is long indeed, since these two are dominated by the generic node in the taxonomy. The segregates animal and machine, on the other hand, momentarily aligned in the word mustang, are dominated by a lower node in the taxonomy. This latter metaphor consequently covers less cognitive distance. In this fashion the deviant visions of taxonomy actually reinforce the standard taxonomy, at least in the riddling corpus under consideration here. We might adduce from this fact that the children who produced these riddles are still primarily rooted in the utilitarian facet of language, the potency of language to render shared cognitive structures. Later, as their riddling and other verbal expertise develops, they will acquire the notion that language is in reality a human tool, equally capable of clarification and obfuscation.

A few pages back, I alleged that both the ordering and disordering facet of children's folklore, and riddling in particular, have great consequence in the process of enculturation. Concerning this point, Ian Hamnet observes as follows:

Classification is a pre-requisite of the intelligible ordering of experience, but if conceptual categories are reified, they become obstacles rather than means to a proper understanding and control of both physical and social reality. The ability to construct categories and also to transcend them is central to adaptive learning. (1967, 385)

We have in the riddling sample herein treated an exemplification of precisely the point made by Hamnet. Cognitive skills central to the mastery of culture, "the ability to construct categories and also to transcend them," are fostered in the enjoyable format of children's riddling.

In the way of a conclusion, I will simply tie up some of the loose ends left hanging over the preceding pages. William Bascom has noted that in some settings "riddles serve as a didactic device to sharpen the wits of young children" (1954:294). The overall thrust of this paper has been to illustrate with concrete data this observation which has become fairly conventional in folkloristics. But the present exemplia further illustrates the nature of wits and what might be involved in the sharpening of them. We are concerned here with cognitive skills associated with the classification of the tokens of experience; with the capacity to articulate shared cognitive structures, and the complimentary capacity to transcend these. In this context, riddling may indeed be viewed as a didactic mechanism, conducive to experimentation with received notions of order, and elaboration of novel cognitive orders. Riddling as an enculturating device allows children to work through the dual vectors of language, towards order and towards anti-order, in a stimulating and enjoyable social context. In riddling, at various stages, children learn to formulate culturally acceptable classifications; to articulate classifications at variance with cultural conventions; and finally to assess language and

indeed classification as arbitrary instruments reflecting only partially the continuous texture of experience.

We can perhaps anticipate yet another great humanistic wave, the discovery of the cerebral child. Levi-Strauss in particular introduced us to the cerebral savage, whose primitive speculation represents another, not an inferior, science (Levi-Strauss 1966). The time may be ripe to turn our humanistic energies to those savages among us, and recognize at our very portals the cerebral child, concerned in his verbal routines with complex matters of rationality, sociability, and aesthetics. Certainly in the riddling corpus discussed above we find prolonged contemplation of a cognitive field, transpiring in a format conducive to artful speech and dependent on some degree of social harmony. Crossing the triviality barrier, we readily perceive the consequential nature of children's verbal play. A folkloristics of enculturation must be developed to fully investigate the place of children's folklore in the persistence and modification of culture.

Finally, returning to the Chicano children who produced this riddling corpus, we must inquire into their choice of semantic fields. The field of locomotion is a most interesting one, and the content patterning within this field even more so. In the first place, the environment in which the riddling transpires exerts considerable influence on content to be included. We were surrounded by cars and bicycles and airplanes, as one generally is in the urban setting. Through the process of scene incorporation, these tokens found their way into the riddling. It is of interest that other tokens, far removed from the interaction, also turn up, such as monkeys, seagulls, skates. The classification begins with the familiar and expands outward to encompass the exotic.

The basic antinomy established in the riddling might well be the contrast between animals and machines. At the very least, this topic could be said to be one of

the central concerns evinced in the riddles. This antinomy is of course crucial in the context of modern, industrial society, in which the machines rather than our animal brethren surround us with animistic contrast to ourselves. This development may well be all the more intensified among Central Texas Chicanos, who have very recent pastoral roots, but currently reside primarily in urban environments. James Fernandez remarks that in urban industrial settings children play at being machines, while in pastoral settings children play at being animals (1974). The folk taxonomy presented in this paper, straddling as it does both the pastoral and mechanical universe, may well reflect the transitional status of the Chicanos, and indeed, our entire society, between a rural past, reflected in oral tradition, and an urban present. Would it be possible to suggest that the children, in this riddling session, are working through basic contradictions in their cultural apparatus, in much the same fashion as primitives examine apparent contradictions through the logical tool of mythology, to borrow the diction of Levi-Strauss? (See Levi-Strauss 1963.)

While the suggestion might seem a bit far-fetched, I would like to leave it on the books for corrective purposes. Certainly, to argue that the riddling considered in this paper constitutes a symposium on matters of conscious and subconscious concern to the children, does less violence to scholarly countenance than to assert that these materials are trivial and of no consequence to social science at all. As the pendulum shifts from the extreme position characteristic until recently, which dismissed much of children's folklore as inconsequential, we will come to an accurate understanding of the proper place for these materials within the science of man.

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Coast (*University of New Mexico Press, 2015*); to the mythic consciousness of Andean peoples, in *Sayings of the Ancestors: The Spiritual Life of the Sibundoy Indians (1989)* and "So Wise Were Our Elders": Mythic Narratives of the Kamsá (1994), both published by the *University Press of Kentucky*. Lately, he is collaborating with the *Diverse Environmentalisms Research Team (DERT)* to explore the concept of *ecosovereignty*, in *Performing Environmentalisms: Expressive Culture and Ecological Change (University of Illinois Press, 2021, co-edited with Katey Borland, Rebecca Dirksen, and Sue Tuohy)*.

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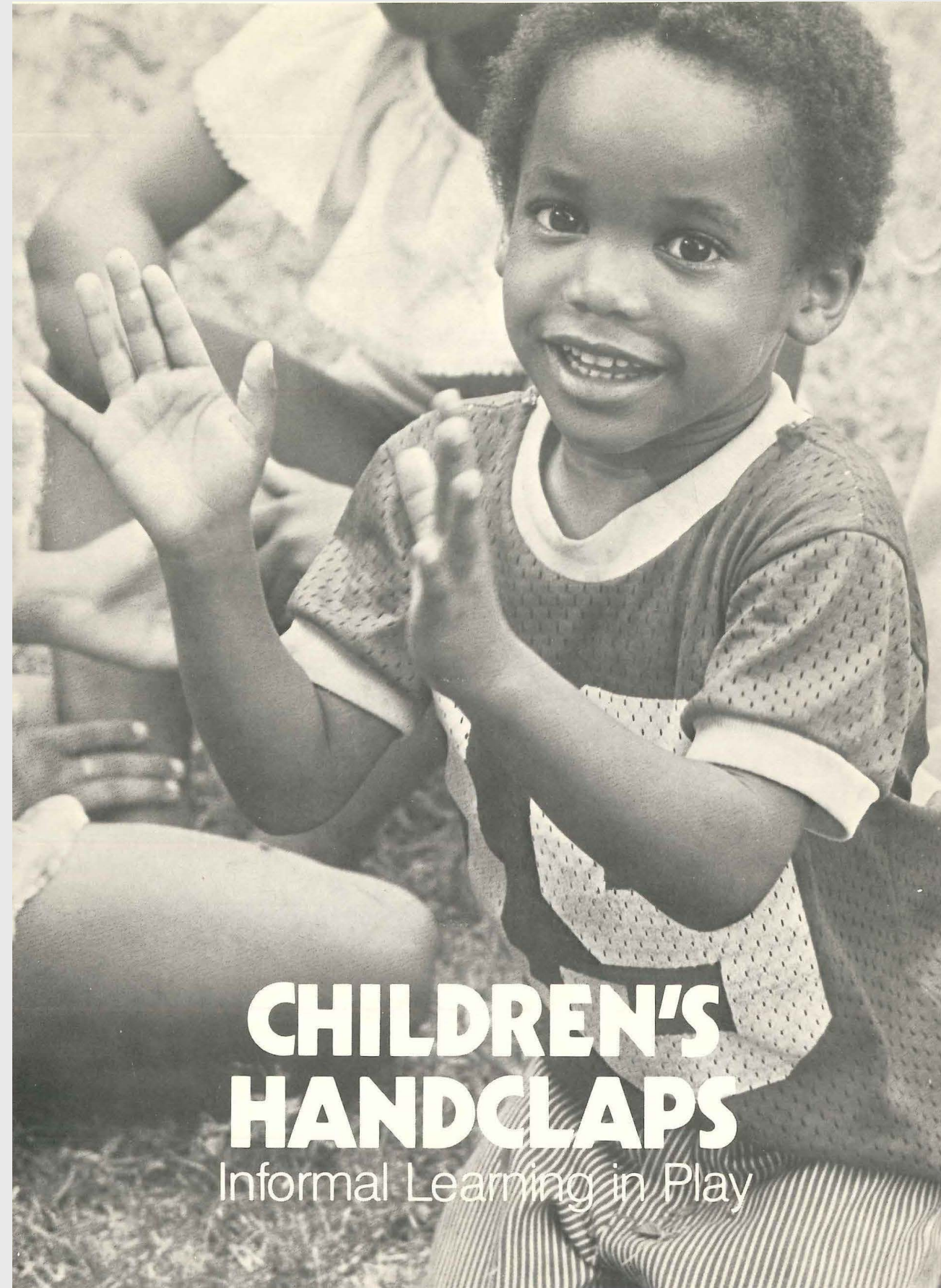
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# CHILDREN'S HANDCLAPS

Informal Learning in Play

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*James H. Perry*  
*Executive Director*

**Southwest Educational Development Laboratory**

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Richard Bauman*

The handclaps presented in the pages that follow represent a form of children's folklore, the traditional formalized play activities of children that are engaged in and maintained by the children themselves, within the peer group. Familiar genres of children's folklore include, besides handclaps, riddles, games, jokes, taunts, retorts, counting out rhymes, ring plays, jump-rope rhymes, and many other forms, some of which go back to remote antiquity and have parallels that span vast portions of the world.

Children's folklore forms are display forms, public means for the presentation and representation of oneself and one's culture to others in ways that underscore both their meaningfulness to the group and one's own competence as a member of it. The forms of children's folklore are the special traditionally shared means for displaying one's competence to and with others, subject to evaluation for the skill and effectiveness of the performance—the most artful and valued ways of speaking and behaving in the children's peer group repertoire. As such, children's folklore is an index to what is important to children in the peer group, and their communicative competence within it.

This work is presented in the conviction that children's folklore, representing what might aptly be called the indigenous art forms of childhood, unquestionably valued and enjoyed by the children themselves, can constitute a significant resource in the development of culturally responsive educational programs. The author, Beverly Stoeltje, has singled out handclaps as an especially interesting and attractive part of the children's folklore repertoire, in an effort to make them accessible and useful to teachers. The children, given the chance, will do the rest.

## II. HANDCLAPS

Beverly J. Stoeltje

Handclapping, a traditional children's activity of singing and clapping in rhythm, brings two or more children together in face-to-face performance involving music, poetry and motion. Children who do handclaps are engaged in a cooperative artistic act which nurtures social, verbal and motor skills. (See Section VIII C for further detail.) While these universal features are characteristic of all handclapping, cultural differences are exhibited in handclapping styles. These differences contribute to the unlimited variations which can be incorporated into the basic form. And further, this activity establishes a common ground for children from heterogeneous backgrounds to meet and participate in an activity from the world of children (See Section VIII, A and B for elaboration.) Handclaps, like other folklore forms, thus represent an important potential resource for educators.

### Texts

For those of you familiar with handclaps, perhaps from your own childhood, or perhaps from observing students, you may only need to see the texts of the individual handclaps to remember the tunes and motions. Others may be curious to see the words in print as they are often difficult for the non-handclapper to comprehend due to the rapidity with which handclapping is performed. For these reasons, the texts are presented initially as a group.

Following these texts you will find the procedures for teaching the handclaps to a group and six examples complete with texts, music and teaching instructions. Additional texts follow, including some improvisations which demonstrate children's experimental use of language.

And finally, some further discussion on handclaps in the schools is included which will aid in understanding the relevance of this activity to the children of today.

### Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack

Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack  
All dressed in black, black, black  
With silver buttons, buttons, buttons  
All down her back, back, back.

She asked her mother, mother, mother  
For fifteen cents, cents, cents  
To watch the elephant, elephant, elephant  
Jump over the fence, fence, fence.

He jumped so high, high, high  
He touched the sky, sky, sky  
And didn't come down, down, down  
'Til the Fourth of July, ly, ly.

She cannot read, read, read  
She cannot write, write, write  
But she can smoke, smoke, smoke  
Her daddy's pipe, pipe, pipe.

### Billy Boy

When Billy Boy was zero  
He learned to be a hero  
Hero yoka, hero yoka  
Half past zero, cross down.

When Billy Boy was one  
He learned to suck his thumb  
Thumb yoka, thumb yoka  
Half past one, cross down.

When Billy Boy was two  
He learned to tie his shoe  
Shoe yoka, shoe yoka  
Half past two, cross down.

When Billy Boy was three  
He learned to climb a tree  
Tree yoka, tree yoka  
Half past three, cross down.

When Billy Boy was four  
He learned to shut the door  
Door yoka, door yoka  
Half past four, cross down.

When Billy Boy was five  
He learned to swim and dive  
Dive yoka, dive yoka  
Half past five, cross down.

When Billy Boy was six  
He learned to pick up sticks  
Sticks yoka, sticks yoka  
Half past six, cross down.

When Billy Boy was seven  
He learned to climb to heaven  
Heaven yoka, heaven yoka  
Half past seven, cross down.

When Billy Boy was eight  
He learned to shut the gate  
Gate yoka, gate yoka  
Half past eight, cross down.

When Billy Boy was nine  
He learned to cut a vine  
Vine yoka, vine yoka  
Half past nine, cross down.

When Billy Boy was ten  
He learned to say the end  
End yoka, end yoka  
Half past ten, cross down.

### Tiny Tim (Variation of *Mommy, Mommy, I Feel III*)

Miss Lucy had a baby, she named him Tiny Tim.  
She put him in the bathtub to see if he could swim.

He drank up all the water, he ate up all the soap.  
He tried to swallow the bathtub but it wouldn't go down his throat.

Miss Lucy called the doctor, Miss Lucy called the nurse.  
Miss Lucy called the lady with the alligator purse.

In walked the doctor, in walked the nurse.  
In walked the lady with the alligator purse.

Out walked the doctor, out walked the nurse.  
Out walked the lady with the alligator purse.

### Playmate

Say, say, oh, playmate  
Come out and play with me

And bring your dollies three  
Climb up my apple tree

Slide down my rain barrel  
Into my cellar door

And we'll be jolly friends  
For ever more more, more more more.

So sorry playmate  
I cannot play with you

My dollies have the flu  
And we might catch it too

I have no rain barrel  
I have no cellar door

But we'll be jolly friends  
For ever more more, more more more.

**My Sailor**

My sailor went to sea sea sea  
To see what he could see see see  
But all that he could see see see  
Was the bottom of the deep blue sea sea sea.

My sailor went to chop chop chop  
To see what he could chop chop chop  
But all that he could chop chop chop  
Was the bottom of the deep blue chop chop chop.

My sailor went to China  
To see what he could China  
But all that he could China  
Was the bottom of the deep blue China.

My sailor went to oowasheewash  
To see what he could oowasheewash  
But all that he could oowasheewash  
Was the bottom of the deep blue  
oowasheewash

**When Sally was a Baby**

When Sally was a baby, a baby, a baby  
When Sally was a baby, she went like this  
Ummmm, this-a-way, ummmm, that-a-way,  
Ummmm, this-a-way, one-two-three.

When Sally was a schoolgirl, a schoolgirl,  
a schoolgirl,  
When Sally was a schoolgirl, she went like  
this:  
Two plus two is four, four plus four is eight,  
Eight plus eight is sixteen, sixteen plus  
sixteen is thirty-two.

When Sally was a teen-ager . . .

When Sally was a wife . . .

When Sally was a mother . . .

When Sally was a grandmother . . .

When Sally was a skeleton . .

When Sally was a nothin . . .

**Candy on a Stick**

Candy on a stick makes me sick.  
Makes my stomach go two four, six.

Not 'cause it's dirty, not 'cause it's clean.  
Just 'cause I kissed a boy behind a magazine.

Girls, girls, have some fun.  
Here comes Johnny with a miniskirt on.

He can wobble, he can wobble, he can do all  
that stuff  
But I bet he can't do this.

Close your eyes and count to ten.  
If you mess up, start it over again.

One, two, three, four, five,  
six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

**Take Me Out to the Ball Park**

Take me out to the ball park.  
Take me out to the crowd.

Buy me some peanuts and cracker jacks  
I don't care if we never get back, so it's

Root, root, root for the home team.  
If we don't win, it's a shame, cause it's

One, two, three strikes you're out at the  
Old Ball Game.

**My Momma, Your Momma**

My momma, your momma, live across the  
street  
Eighteen-nineteen Marble Street

Every night they have a fight and  
This is what they say.

Boys are rotten just like cotton  
Girls are dandy just like candy

Akawasaboos, akawasaboos  
Akawasasodawater, I love you.

**I Wish I Had a Nickel**

I wish I had a nickel  
I wish I had a dime  
I wish I had a boyfriend  
To kiss me all the time.

My mother gave me a nickel  
My father gave me a dime  
My sister gave me a boyfriend  
Who kissed me all the time.

My mother took my nickel  
My father took my dime  
My sister took my boyfriend  
And gave me Frankenstein.

He made me scrub the kitchen  
He made me scrub the floor  
And when he wasn't looking  
I kicked him out the door.

**Have you Ever, Ever, Ever**

Have you ever, ever, ever in your long-  
legged life  
Seen a long-legged sailor and his long-  
legged wife?

No, I never, never, never in my long-legged  
life  
Seen a long-legged sailor and his long-  
legged wife.

Have you ever, ever, ever in your short-  
legged life  
Seen a short-legged sailor and his short-  
legged wife?

No, I never, never, never in my short-legged  
life  
Seen a short-legged sailor and his short-  
legged wife.

Have you ever, ever, ever in your pigeon-  
toed life  
Seen a pigeon-toed sailor and his pigeon-  
toed wife?

No, I never, never, never in my pigeon-toed  
life  
Seen a pigeon-toed sailor and his pigeon-  
toed wife.

Have you ever, ever, ever in your bow-  
legged life  
Seen a bow-legged sailor and his bow-  
legged wife?

No, I never, never, never in my bow-legged  
life  
Seen a bow-legged sailor and his bow-  
legged wife.

**Down by the River**

Down by the river, down by the sea.  
Johnny broke a bottle and blamed it on me.

I tole Momma, Momma tole Poppa  
Poppa tole Johnny he was gonna get a

H-O-T-T-T

**Miss Sue from Alabama**

Miss Sue, Miss Sue  
Miss Sue from Alabama.  
They call her hickory stick, oh yeah.  
They call her hickory stick, oh yeah.

Miss Sue, Miss Sue  
Miss Sue from Alabama.  
They call her hickory stick, oh yeah.  
They call her hickory stick, oh yeah.

(Monica),\* somebody's callin' your name.  
(Monica), somebody's playin' your game.  
(Monica), somebody wants you on the tele-  
phone.  
Tell 'em I'm not home.

\* Name of one handclapper

Miss Sue, Miss Sue  
Miss Sue from Alabama.  
They call her hickory stick, oh yeah.  
They call her hickory stick, oh yeah.

Miss Sue, Miss Sue  
Miss Sue from Alabama.  
They call her hickory stick, oh yeah.  
They call her hickory stick, oh yeah.

(Reneé),\*\* somebody's callin' your name.

\*\* Name of other handclapper

(Reneé), somebody's playin' your game.  
(Reneé), somebody wants you on the tele-  
phone.  
Tell 'em I'm not home.

Miss Sue, Miss Sue  
Miss Sue from Alabama.  
They call her hickory stick, oh yeah.  
They call her hickory stick, oh yeah.  
They call her hickory stick, oh yeah.  
They call her hickory stick, oh yeah.

### THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN HANDCLAPPING

The sound of singing, clapping children takes on special meaning for you as a teacher when you observe that the participants are learning interactional behavior, expressing creativity, utilizing syncopated rhythm, and "doing" poetry. In recognition of the important fact, however, that the formal and informal contexts for learning may utilize different processes, some principles are outlined below to assist you in teaching this play activity.

Handclaps are traditional, folkloric play and therefore they may be performed with wide variation in stylistic features. Your effectiveness in facilitating this activity will be increased by giving special consideration to these variations which may be influenced by cultural background,\* exposure to the form, age, or participant interaction.

#### Age Range

When a child learns to do a handclap is largely determined by when the opportunity arises. Therefore, some kindergartners may be able handclappers while some fourth graders may be totally unfamiliar with the activity. Handclapping is of interest generally, however, to

\* See *Cultural Variation*, p.33 .

children between the ages of 5 and 12 years. You may determine your students' familiarity with handclapping by demonstrating a handclap and inquiring if any of the students know how to do it or some other handclap. The casual demonstration is important in communicating exactly what you mean. It is well to remember that some handclaps are more complex than others. (A notation is made for each handclap included here as to its appropriateness for beginners or for accomplished handclappers.)

#### Context for Learning

Children learn handclaps with the greatest ease if they learn from each other in an informal setting. This method should be encouraged if there are several children capable of teaching others. Shy children may respond to a teacher's suggestion that a specific child can show how handclaps are done, on a one-to-one basis. If the teacher is also a participant on occasion, both as teacher and learner, uncertain children will be encouraged to learn.

However, for classes in which the majority of children do not know handclaps, a method is suggested here, "Teacher and Group of Non-handclappers," which can be used for teaching a group, or preferably, small groups, by a more

formal method. Once the activity is familiar, a more informal environment can be reestablished for learning further handclaps.

#### "Doing" Handclaps

As children clap together they exchange variations and create new ones, increasing their own possibilities for artistic expression. When laughter and giggles occur or negotiations take place in the midst of a handclap, the participants are exploring variations in their play, learning patterns of social cooperation, and

attending to the physical maneuvers of the performance. Humor is an important characteristic for both you and the children, for laughter emphasizes the play element so important to the success of this activity.

In your role as teacher you may stimulate and encourage this play-learning known as handclaps by introducing the activity, directing attention to it, assisting children in acquiring the ability to handclap, and demonstrating appreciation for the children's performance of the activity.

### TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. You the teacher should learn to do a simple handclap **before** introducing the activity to the children. (Notations are made in the instructions for each handclap as to its difficulty.)
2. Listen to the accompanying cassette tape to familiarize yourself with tunes and rhythms.
3. Remember that children learn this activity faster than adults.
4. Be prepared to laugh, and expect laughter from children, when you make mistakes as all learners do.
5. If you remember handclaps from your own childhood, teach in the style which is comfortable for you.



#### A. Students as Teachers

Determine whether your students are familiar with handclapping, by inquiring and simultaneously demonstrating informally.

When a student indicates familiarity with handclapping, you may ask the child to demonstrate "doing" a handclap with you or with a friend who also indicates familiarity with the activity.

You may then arrange the children in pairs, a competent handclapper with a nonhandclapper, encouraging both the "teacher" and "learner."

More direction from the teacher may be needed if social barriers inhibit the natural informal context.



If your students' style differs from the instructions included here or from your own, it is equally "correct" as long as it works.

### B. Teacher and Group of Non-Handclappers

For the class in which handclapping is unfamiliar to the majority, you may organize small groups and demonstrate with one child, or possibly "borrow" a child from another class, or bring in another adult to demonstrate handclapping.

1. With the attention of the class or a small group of the class, demonstrate a simple handclap, such as *Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack*, singing the words or playing the tape:



### *Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack*

Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack  
All dressed in black, black, black  
With silver buttons, buttons, buttons  
All down her back, back, back.

She asked her mother, mother, mother  
For fifteen cents, cents, cents  
To watch the elephant, elephant, elephant  
Jump over the fence, fence, fence.

He jumped so high, high, high  
He touched the sky, sky, sky  
And didn't come down, down, down  
'Til the Fourth of July, ly, ly.



Miss M<sup>á</sup>ry M<sup>á</sup>ck, M<sup>á</sup>ck, M<sup>á</sup>ck

All d<sup>í</sup>ressed in bl<sup>á</sup>ck, bl<sup>á</sup>ck, bl<sup>á</sup>ck

With síl<sup>é</sup>ver bú<sup>ú</sup>tt<sup>ó</sup>ns, bú<sup>ú</sup>tt<sup>ó</sup>ns, bú<sup>ú</sup>tt<sup>ó</sup>ns

All d<sup>ó</sup>wn her bá<sup>á</sup>ck, bá<sup>á</sup>ck, bá<sup>á</sup>ck

6. Say the rhyme and clap on the accented syllable only.

7. Then clap your hands on every syllable, stressing the accented syllable, clapping also in the blank spaces (where there is a beat but not a word).

M<sup>í</sup>ss M<sup>á</sup> r<sup>y</sup> M<sup>á</sup>ck \_ \_ M<sup>á</sup>ck \_ \_ M<sup>á</sup>ck

Áll d<sup>í</sup>ressed ín bl<sup>á</sup>ck \_ \_ bl<sup>á</sup>ck \_ \_ bl<sup>á</sup>ck

Wíth síl<sup>v</sup>er bú<sup>ú</sup>tt<sup>ó</sup>ns \_ \_ bú<sup>ú</sup>tt<sup>ó</sup>ns \_ \_ bú<sup>ú</sup>tt<sup>ó</sup>ns

Áll d<sup>ó</sup>wn h<sup>é</sup>r bá<sup>á</sup>ck \_ \_ bá<sup>á</sup>ck \_ \_ bá<sup>á</sup>ck \_ \_

She cannot read, read, read  
She cannot write, write, write  
But she can smoke, smoke, smoke  
Her daddy's pipe, pipe, pipe.

2. The second step is teaching the clap pattern. The clap pattern for *Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack* is based on the Up-Down Pattern, (see p.10). Practice these hand motions with your children, clapping slowly at first, and then with increasing speed as students demonstrate competence.

3. Teach the one-two (in musical terms, two-four) rhythm pattern. Clap your hands or tap a pencil on a desk in rhythm while counting aloud: "one, two, one, two." At first, practice accenting the "one" count. Then repeat the counting, accenting the "two" count. (Some verses accent the first syllable in a line, others accent the second syllable.)

4. Walking in a line or a circle, continue clapping as above, walking in step with the "one, two" rhythm.

5. Select a simple handclap, such as *Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack*, teaching the words of one verse, one line at a time, without clapping. Repeat the words in rhythm, stressing the accented syllable. (In the example below, the second syllable is accented, placing the stress on the "two" count.)

8. When students are familiar with clapping their own hands in rhythm with the words, review the basic clap pattern taught earlier, and combine it with the words in the rhythm, chanting the simple tune on page.

9. When students are familiar with clapping to the first verse, teach the words to the remaining verses for as long as their attention is engaged. When the children are learning additional handclaps, many of the above procedures may be dropped as the children will be familiar with the clap pattern, rhythm, and accents.

**BASIC CLAPPING PATTERNS**

The two clapping patterns used as the basis for the following handclaps are illustrated below. Either of the patterns may be used for any of the handclaps. Afro-American children more commonly use the Up-Down pattern while Anglo children seem to prefer the Right-Left pattern.

Many handclaps add variations to the basic pattern. These variations are described with the individual handclaps. It is important to remember that the clap variations, like the words, may vary from one group to another, or from one week to the next. Through these variations, cultural differences and individual creativity are expressed. Children may occasionally disagree on specific items of the form, but they are usually able to resolve the differences themselves.

The coding system used to describe the two basic clap patterns is consistent throughout. Variations are described with the handclap in which they appear.

Both you and your children will find it easier to learn these basic clap patterns before learning specific handclaps.

**A. Up-Down Handclap Pattern**

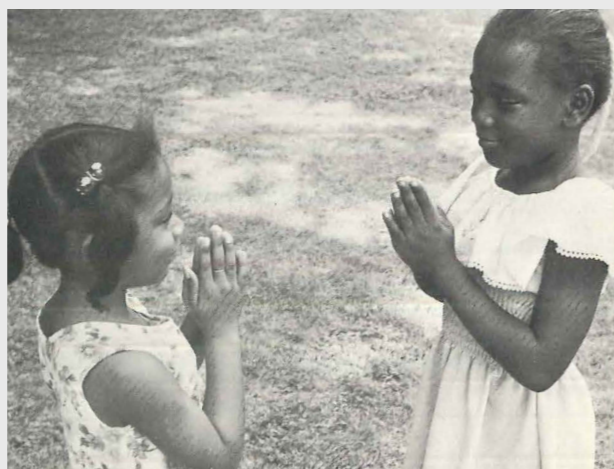
*Description:* This move begins with the left hand extended from the waist, palm up, and the right arm raised above the head, hand extended forward, palm down. When the partner's hands are in the same position, clapping begins. Hands are brought together in the up-down (U-D) position at the mid-body for the clap. Then partners clap both (B) of the other's hands in vertical hand position; then partners clap their own (O) hands together. This completes the pattern, and it begins over again.



(U-D) Up-Down together (clap)



(B) Both partners' hands vertical (clap)

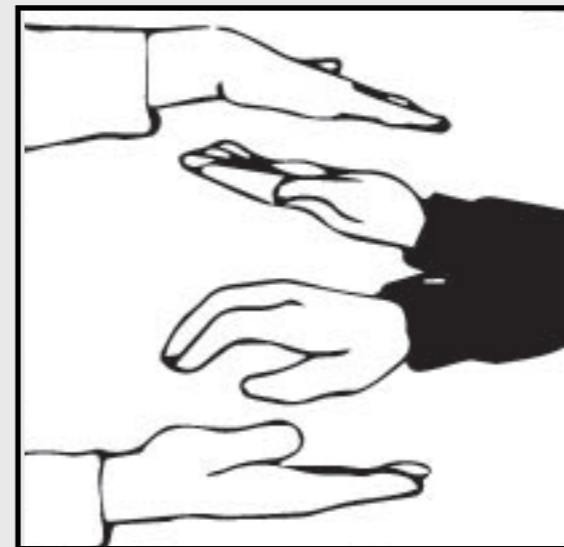


(O) Own hands (clap)

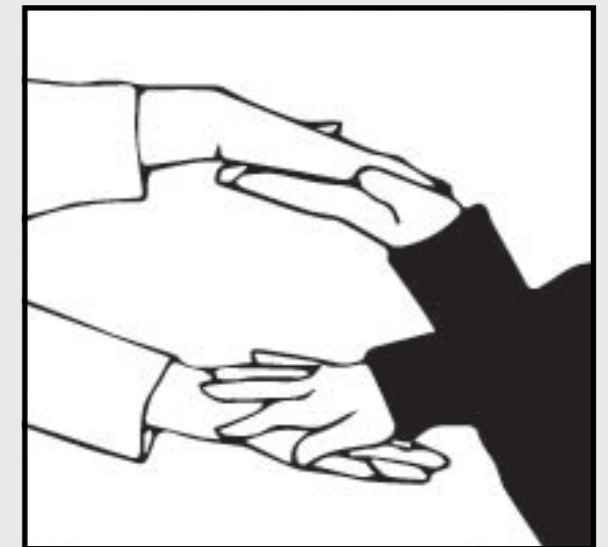
The wide space of the U-D position is not usually maintained throughout the clap because of rapid movement. There are three basic moves in the patterns: U-D, B,O.

Among Afro-American children especially, the wide up-down position is often used as a signal to another child that one wishes to do a handclap.

**Up-Down Handclap Pattern**



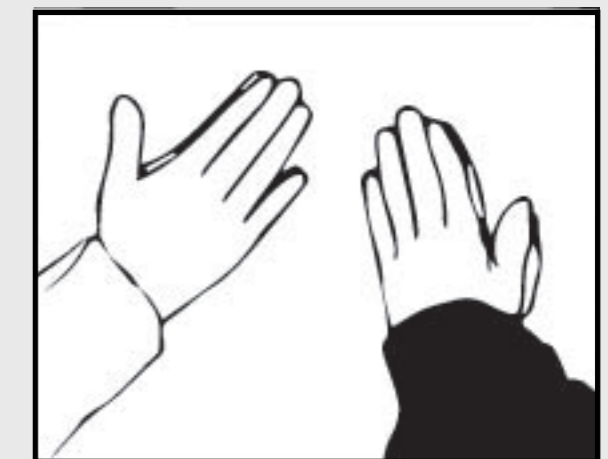
(U-D) Up-Down, wide space



(U-D) Up-Down together (clap)



(B) Both partners' hands vertical (clap)



(O) Own hands (clap)

**B. Right-Left Handclap Pattern**

*Description:* This pattern begins by clapping one's own hands, (O), then partners clap right hands (R), clap own hands again (O), partners clap left hands (L), and then it begins over

again. Variations generally come before or after the basic pattern. This pattern is somewhat simpler for some children because it does not involve the up-down position. There are basically four moves in this pattern: O, R, O, L.

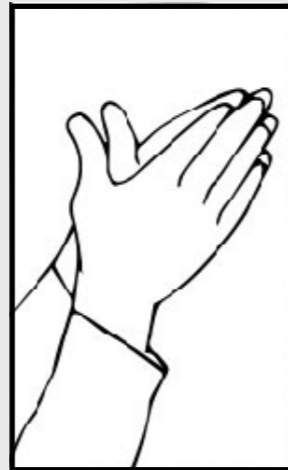
RIGHT-LEFT PATTERN



(O) Clap own hands



(R) Partners clap right hands



(O) Clap own hands



(L) Clap left hands



**HANDCLAPS WITH TEXTS, MUSIC, INSTRUCTIONS**

**A. Miss Mary Mack Mack Mack**

Short and simple, this handclap is based on a chant and utilizes the cross down movement at the beginning of the clapping. Features of special interest are the repetition of the same rhythm pattern in each line and the repetition of the last word of each line. This dominance of repetitive forms contributes to facility in learning the handclap and to the creation of new verses. It is recommended for beginners.

**Complete Text**

Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack  
 All dressed in black, black, black  
 With silver buttons, buttons, buttons  
 All down her back, back, back.

She asked her mother, mother, mother  
 For fifteen cents, cents, cents  
 To watch the elephant, elephant, elephant  
 Jump over the fence, fence, fence.

He jumped so high, high, high  
 He touched the sky, sky, sky  
 And didn't come down, down, down  
 'Til the Fourth of July, ly, ly.

She cannot read, read, read  
 She cannot write, write, write  
 But she can smoke, smoke, smoke  
 Her daddy's pipe, pipe, pipe.

**Rhythm**

The rhythm is based on the one-two rhythm pattern. The accent falls on the second syllable in the line through the entire handclap.

Accented beat: / Unaccented beat: -  
 Beat without a word \_\_\_\_

Clap own hands in rhythm with the words.

Mi<sup>ss</sup> Má r<sup>y</sup> Má<sup>ck</sup> \_\_\_\_ Má<sup>ck</sup> \_\_\_\_ Má<sup>ck</sup>  
 Á<sup>ll</sup> dré<sup>ss</sup>ed inblá<sup>ck</sup> \_\_\_\_ blá<sup>ck</sup> \_\_\_\_ blá<sup>ck</sup>  
 W<sup>ith</sup> sí<sup>l</sup> v<sup>er</sup> bú<sup>tt</sup>ons \_\_\_\_ bú<sup>tt</sup>ons \_\_\_\_ bú<sup>tt</sup>ons  
 Á<sup>ll</sup> d<sup>ow</sup>n h<sup>er</sup> bá<sup>ck</sup> \_\_\_\_ bá<sup>ck</sup> \_\_\_\_ bá<sup>ck</sup> / /

**Clapping Pattern**

Either the up-down or right-left pattern may be clapped here. The clap begins with cross-down; however for beginning handclappers clapping own hands twice may be substituted. (See *Billy Boy* for illustration of cross down.)

**Right-Left**

- C cross (hands on own shoulders)
- D down (slap hands on thighs)
- O own hands
- R right hands
- O own hands
- L left hands
- O own hands
- R right hands

(Repeat above four times for each verse, once for each line, with two claps at the end.)

**Up-Down**

- C cross
- D down
- UD up-down
- B both
- O own
- UD up-down
- B both
- O own

(Repeat above four times for each verse, once for each line, two claps at the end.)



**Expansions**

In addition to the repetition of words and rhythms, this handclap rhymes the second and fourth lines and utilizes exaggeration in the character of the elephant who jumps to the sky, both features important in poetry.

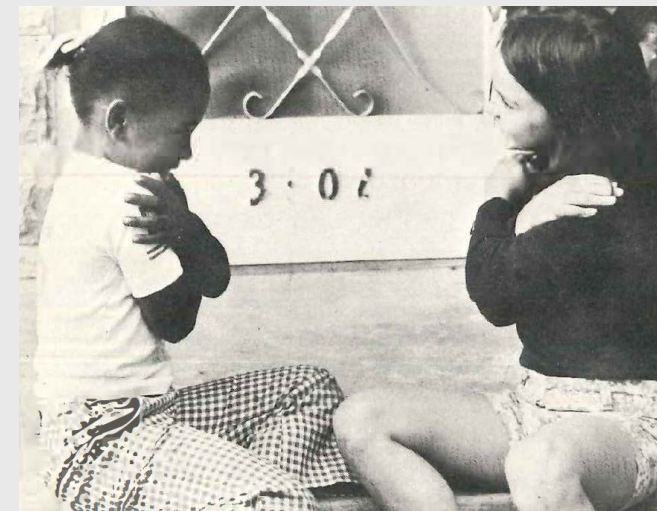
child's growing-up from age zero to ten years. The variation move, *Cross Down*, is pictured (page below). The movement is rapid, in rhythm with the *one, two* count. This is recommended for beginners after learning at least one other handclap.

**B. Billy Boy**

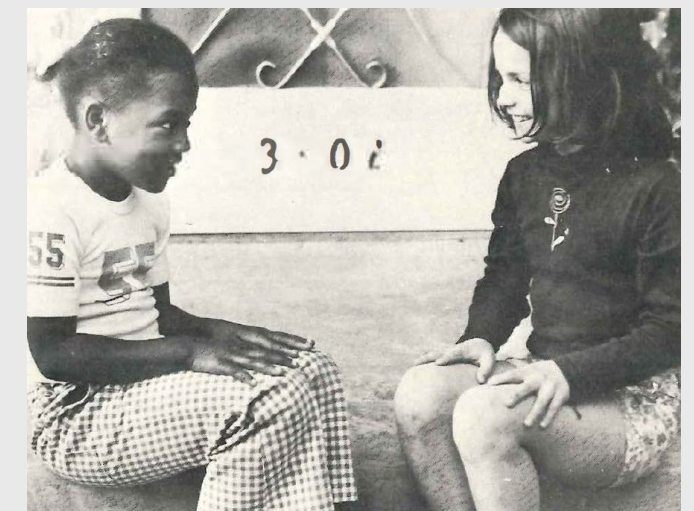
This handclap is sung to the familiar tune of *I Am a Pretty Little Dutch Girl*. Its theme is a

When Billy Boy was zero  
He learned to be a hero  
Hero yoka, hero yoka  
Half past zero, cross down.

M̄iss	M̄a	ry	M̄ack	-	M̄ack	-	M̄ack	
c	d	o	r	o	l	o	r	
C	D	UD	B	O	UD	B	O	
Āll	dressed	in	bl̄ack	-	bl̄ack	-	bl̄ack	
c	d	o	r	o	l	o	r	
C	D	UD	B	O	UD	B	O	
W̄ith	sil	v̄er	but̄tons	-	but̄tons	-	but̄tons	
c	d	o	r	o	l	o	r	
C	D	UD	B	O	CD	B	O	
Āll	down	h̄er	bāck	-	bāck	-	bāck	
c	d	o	r	o	l	o	r	o
C	D	UD	B	O	UD	B	O	O



Cross



Down

The following materials are presented in a pattern consistent with the "Teaching the Handclaps" procedure. Thus the verse is presented with the accents marked, then the clap pattern is combined with the words, and finally the complete text is presented.

**Rhythm**

The beat may be counted out as "one, two, one, two." In the first two lines the accent falls on the second syllable of the line. In lines three and four the accent falls on the first syllable. Beats are marked as follows:

Accented beat: / Unaccented beat: -  
Beat without a word \_\_\_\_

In all handclaps, one-syllable words may be divided to match the rhythm, and two syllables are occasionally joined together in one beat.

(If you find it comfortable to sing the words you should do so; if not, the tune may be added after teaching the clap pattern. The clap pattern should be taught before clapping the words.)

Clap own hands, accenting the clap on the accented syllable as follows.

When Bil ly Boy was ze ro  
He learned to be a he ro  
He ro yo ka, he ro yo ka  
Half past zero, cross down.

(At the beginning of a new verse the accent shifts again to the second syllable. There is no pause between verses.)

**Clapping Pattern**

When children have mastered clapping in rhythm with the words, the clap pattern may be introduced in combination with the words and rhythm.

At the end of each verse are the words "cross down." The motion which accompanies these words is demonstrated in the photographs (p. 15). On the word "cross," cross arms over chest with hands on own shoulders; on the word "down," slap both thighs with own hands. This is a rapid movement in rhythm with the one-two beat, and no beats should be lost before beginning the next verse.

Either of the basic clap patterns may be used for this handclap.

**Right-Left**

O own hands  
R right hands  
O own hands  
L left hands  
CD cross down  
(repeat pattern seven times plus OR and cross down for each verse)

**Up-Down**

U-D up-down (horizontal clap)  
B clap both partner's hands (vertical)  
O own hands  
CD cross down  
(repeat basic pattern 10 times plus cross down for each verse)

**Rhythm, Words, Clap Pattern**

When	Bil	ly	Boy	was	ze	ro	/	
o	r	o	l	o	r	o	l	
ud	b	o	ud	b	o	ud	b	
He	learned	to	be	a	he	ro	/	o
o	r	o	l	o	r	o	l	b
o	ud	b	o	ud	b	o	ud	b
He	ro	yo	ka,	he	ro	yo	ka	
r	o	l	o	r	o	l	o	
o	ud	b	o	ud	b	o	ud	
Half		past		zero,	cross	down.		
r	o	l	o	r	c			
b	o	ud	b	o	c			

**Complete Text**

Though only one version of each verse is presented here, children may vary the verbs and nouns throughout the verses, always rhyming with the age in the verse. For example, in the last verse Billy Boy may learn to chase a hen, rhyming with ten.

When Billy Boy was zero  
He learned to be a hero  
Hero yoka, hero yoka  
Half past zero, cross down.

When Billy Boy was one  
He learned to suck his thumb  
Thumb yoka, thumb yoka  
Half past one, cross down.

When Billy Boy was two  
He learned to tie his shoe  
Shoe yoka, shoe yoka  
Half past two, cross down.

When Billy Boy was three  
He learned to climb a tree  
Tree yoka, tree yoka  
Half past three, cross down.

When Billy Boy was four  
He learned to shut the door  
Door yoka, door yoka  
Half past four, cross down.

When Billy Boy was five  
He learned to swim and dive  
Dive yoka, dive yoka  
Half past five, cross down.

When Billy Boy was six  
He learned to pick up sticks  
Sticks yoka, sticks yoka  
Half past six, cross down.

When Billy Boy was seven  
He learned to climb to heaven  
Heaven yoka, heaven yoka  
Half past seven, cross down.

When Billy Boy was eight  
He learned to shut the gate  
Gate yoka, gate yoka  
Half past eight, cross down.

When Billy Boy was nine  
He learned to cut a vine  
Vine yoka, vine yoka  
Half past nine, cross down.

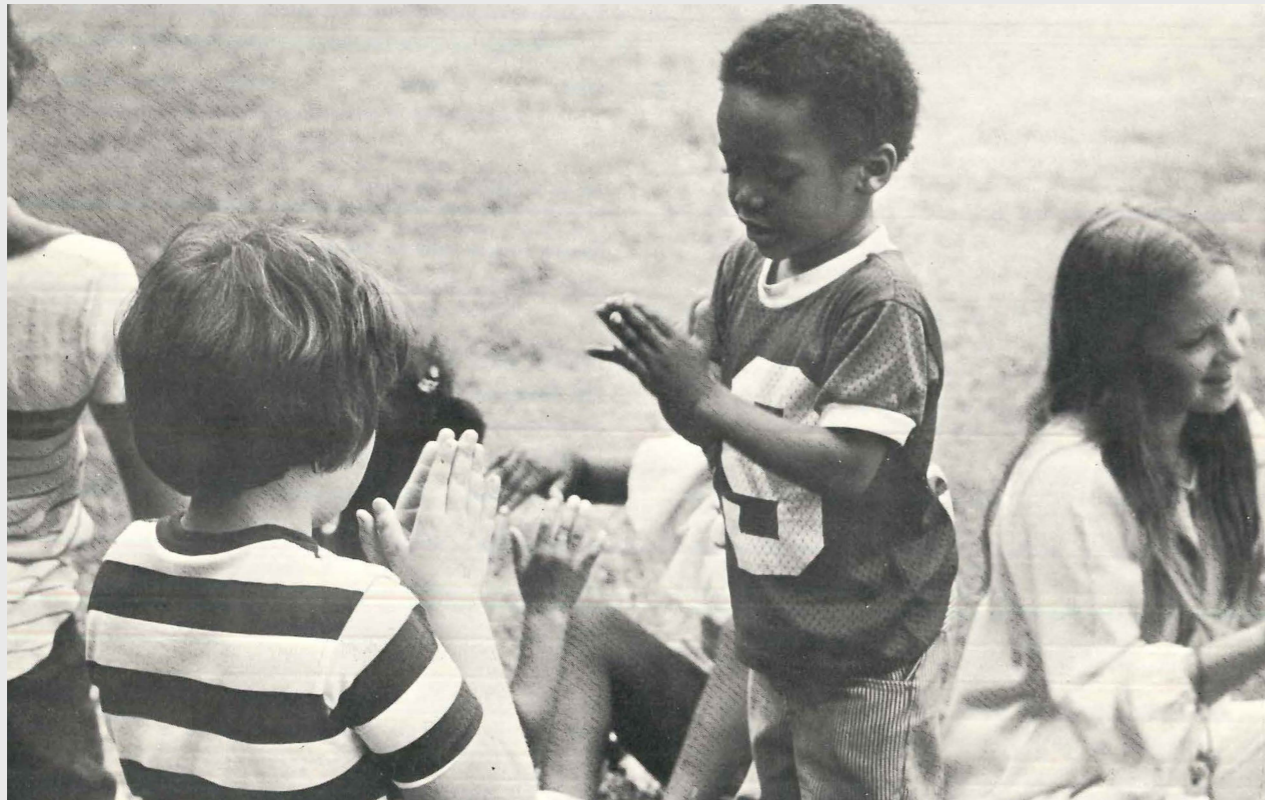
When Billy Boy was ten  
He learned to say the end  
End yoka, end yoka  
Half past ten, cross down.

**Expansions**

In its content, *Billy Boy* moves progressively from age zero to age 10, providing a familiar context in which the participant may increase his understanding of sequencing at the same time as giving order to the concept of growing up.

Verbal structures focus on rhyming and utilize the particular rhyme pattern: abba, (zero, hero, hero, zero), familiarizing the child with poetic forms. Competence in the use of word order is increased by means of the changing nouns and verbs in each verse.

The two rhythmical structures in each verse (accenting the first syllable, accenting the second syllable), increase the performer's awareness of rhythm, both in language and in body movement.



Beginners learn this one quickly.

**C. Mommy, Mommy, I Feel Ill**

The common experience of childhood illness forms the subject of this handclap which is chanted without a tune. The accent is on the first syllable of the line, and the rhythm is the familiar one-two pattern. Simple to learn and popular because of its simplicity and familiar theme, it is especially good for beginners.

Mommy, Mommy, I feel ill  
Send for the doctor over the hill.

In came the doctor, in came the nurse  
In came the lady with the alligator purse.

Out went the doctor, out went the nurse.  
Out went the lady with the alligator purse.

**Rhythm**

Clap own hands in one-two rhythm, accenting the first syllable of each line.

Móm m̄y Móm m̄y Í fēel íll \_\_\_  
Sénd for̄the dóc t̄or ó ver̄the híll \_\_\_

**Words and Clap Pattern**

Móm	m̄y	Móm	m̄y	Í	fēel	íll	___
O	R	O	L	O	R	O	L
UD	B	O	O	UD	B	O	O
Sénd	for̄the	dóc	t̄or	ó	ver̄the	híll	___
O	R	O	L	O	R	O	L
UD	B	O	O	UD	B	O	O
In	camēthe	dóc	t̄or	in	camēthe	nurse	___
O	R	O	L	O	R	O	L
UD	B	O	O	UD	B	O	O

Ín camēthe dóc t̄or ín camēthe nūrsē \_\_\_  
Ín camēthe lād̄y wíth̄the allí gātor pūrsē \_\_\_  
Óut wēnt̄the dóc t̄or óut wēnt̄the nūrsē \_\_\_  
Óut wēnt̄the lād̄y wíth̄the allí gātor pūrsē \_\_\_

**Clapping Pattern**

When students are familiar with clapping out the rhythm and words, include the clap pattern. Either basic clap pattern may be used. There are no variation moves in this clap.

**Right-Left**

- O own hands
  - R right hands
  - O own hands
  - L left hands
- (repeat twice for each line)

**Up-Down**

- UD up-down
  - B both hands
  - O own hands
  - O own hands
- (repeat twice for each line)

∕ In O UD	ca <sub>̄</sub> me <sub>̄</sub> the	∕ lady O O	with <sub>̄</sub> the	∕ alli O UD	gator <sub>̄</sub>	∕ purse O O	— L O
∕ Out O UD	went <sub>̄</sub> the	∕ doc O O	tor <sub>̄</sub>	∕ out O UD	went <sub>̄</sub> the	∕ nurse O O	— L O
∕ Out O UD	went <sub>̄</sub> the	∕ lady O O	with <sub>̄</sub> the	∕ alli O UD	gator <sub>̄</sub>	∕ purse O O	— L O

### Variations

Children vary this handclap at the beginning of the line rather than the end. Here they change the actor and action of the sentence, leaving the object (the rhyming words) the same. For example:

I don't want the doctor,  
I don't want the nurse,  
I don't want the lady  
With the alligator purse.

They may be encouraged to create their own variations if you point out these opportunities for variation.

\_\_\_\_\_ the doctor  
\_\_\_\_\_ the nurse  
\_\_\_\_\_ the lady  
\_\_\_\_\_ the purse

A slightly different variation of this handclap is known as *Tiny Tim*.

Miss Lucy had a baby; she named him Tiny Tim.  
She put him in the bathtub to see if he could swim.

He drank up all the water; he ate up all the soap.  
He tried to swallow the bathtub but it wouldn't go down his throat.

Miss Lucy called the doctor, Miss Lucy called the nurse.  
Miss Lucy called the lady with the alligator purse.

In walked the doctor, in walked the nurse.  
In walked the lady with the alligator purse.

Out walked the doctor, out walked the nurse.  
Out walked the lady with the alligator purse.



**D. Playmate**

A very popular handclap, especially among accomplished handclappers, this one has been adapted from the popular song, *Playmate* and is sung to that tune. Movement variations are illustrated in the photographs below. The additional verses at the end of this section provide an example of children's creative efforts in constructing new interpretations using basic patterns.

Say, say, oh, playmate  
Come out and play with me

And bring your dollies three  
Climb up my apple tree

Slide down my rain barrel  
Into my cellar door

And we'll be jolly friends  
For ever more more, more more more.

**Rhythm**

The rhythm is the one-two pattern with the accent on the *second* syllable.

**Clapping Pattern**

The beginning move is a swing (S) in which partners hold both hands, one partner holding palms up, fingers curled over, the other partner holding palms down, fingers curled (see photograph). The movement is from side to side, then up to clap own hands. Variations in movement are clapping backs of both hands (BH), coupled with clapping both hands vertically, palms together. (B). These two moves replace the two swings after the first series of movements.

- S Swing
- S Swing
- O clap own (O) hands
- R right hands (R)
- O own (O) hands
- L left (L) hands
- O own (O) hands
- O own (O) hands
- BH clap backs of both hands (BH)
- B clap both hands vertically (B)
- O
- R
- O
- L
- O
- O



Swing (S)



Backs of both hands (BH)

**Rhythm and Clap Pattern**

S̄ay	S̄ay	ōh	play	—	mate	—	/		
S	S	O	R	O	L	O	O		
C̄ome	out	and	play	with	me	—	/		
BH	B	O	R	O	L	O	O		
And	bring	your	dol	lies	three	—	/		
BH	B	O	R	O	L	O	O		
C̄limb	up	my	ap	ple	tree	—	/		
BH	B	O	R	O	L	O	O		
S̄lide	down	my	rain	—	barrel	—	/		
BH	B	O	R	O	L	O	O		
In	to	my	cel	lar	door	—	/		
BH	B	O	R	O	L	O	O		
And	we'll	be	jol	ly	friends	—	/		
BH	B	O	R	O	L	O	O		
For	ev	er	more	—	more	—	/	/	/
BH	B	O	R	O	L	O	B	B	B

**Additional Verses**

So sorry playmate  
I cannot play with you  
My dollies have the flu  
And we might catch it too  
I have no rain barrel  
I have no cellar door  
But we'll be jolly friends  
For ever more more, more more more

Say, say, oh, vampire  
Come out and bite with me  
And bring your fangs three  
Climb up my spookie tree  
Slide down my blood vein  
Into my coffin door  
And we'll be jolly friends  
For ever more, more, more more more.

**E. My Sailor**

In *My Sailor* words are used in linguistic play and motions are demonstrated which express these words. These motions may be expressed in any form which is meaningful to the performers. Commonly found motions are included below in the photographs.



Salute

My sailor went to sea sea sea  
To see what he could see see see  
But all that he could see see see  
Was the bottom of the deep blue sea sea sea.

My sailor went to chop chop chop  
To see what he could chop chop chop  
But all that he could chop chop chop  
Was the bottom of the deep blue chop chop chop

My sailor went to China  
To see what he could China  
But all that he could China  
Was the bottom of the deep blue China

My sailor went to oowasheewash  
To see what he could oowasheewash  
But all that he could oowasheewash  
Was the bottom of the deep blue oowasheewash

My sailor went to eye eye eye  
To see what he could I I I  
But all that he could I I I  
Was the bottom of the deep blue I I I

My sailor went to love, love, love  
To see what he could love, love, love  
But all that he could love, love, love  
Was the bottom of the deep blue love, love, love.

My sailor went to you, you, you  
To see what he could you, you, you  
But all that he could you, you, you  
Was the bottom of the deep blue you, you, you

My sailor went to I love you  
To see what he could I love you  
But all that he could I love you  
Was the bottom of the deep blue I love you

**Clapping Pattern**

The variations in motion are expressions of the last words in each line, and are performed in accompaniment with the singing of those words. Thus when the word is "sea, sea, sea," the performer salutes; when the word is "chop, chop, chop," the performer does a chopping



Chop



China

motion on his/her own arm while singing the word, etc. These motions are described below as well as shown in the photographs.

**Sea, Sea, Sea**

- S sea/see—place right hand on forehead as in a salute, repeat three times
- C chop—chop own left arm with right hand
- CH China—place both hands together under chin and slowly bend knees
- OO Oowasheewash—place hands on hips and wiggle while bending knees, down and up

**I Love You**

- I I/eye—point finger to own eye or to body
- L love—cross hands over chest
- Y you—point with finger to partner
- ILY all three motions or simply hand over chest.

**Complete Pattern****Sea, Sea, Sea**

O R O L O S S S  
O R O L O C C C  
O R O L O CH CH CH  
O R O L O OO OO OO

(Repeat each four times)



Oowasheewash

**I Love You**

O R O L O I I I  
O R O L O L L L  
O R O L O Y Y Y  
O R O L O ILY ILY ILY

(repeat each four times)

O My sail - or went to sea sea sea, O To  
 R see what he could see see see, O But  
 R all that he could see see see, O Was the  
 bot - tom of the o - cean sea sea sea.

### Expansions

The text of this handclap focuses on word-play—homonyms and parts of speech. By repeating the same word in a different functional slot in the sentence, such as a noun in a verb slot and a verb in a noun slot, nonsense is created. This increases awareness of word recognition and parts of speech.

The nonsense word, “oowasheewash,” and the entire text of *I LOVE YOU* are based on wordplay. The artistic form of the verse makes it possible for a child to perform wordplay with sentence structure before encountering the

concept formally. The child’s language skills are expanded and formal concepts made familiar through verbal play.

Expressing a verbal concept through motion, as each of the movement variations does, provides a vehicle for comprehension of word sense as the performer demonstrates the meaning of the word in the performance.

Mastering this handclap thus involves several sensory modalities—acting out concepts, creating nonsense in words and sentences, and coordinating a variety of physical motions with another person in rhythmical form.

### F. When Sally Was A Baby

The performers sing through an entire life cycle from baby to the grave in this ancient and very popular song. Its basic feature is the acting out of the role in each verse: thumb sucking for a baby, kissing and hugging for a wife, etc. The motions and the words vary with the particular group of children, expressing their own perceptions of roles and rhythms.

The forms below may be considered a model from which the children may add or subtract or alter. They may add other roles such as aunt or teacher, they may change the name Sally to another name or to *I*, various people may die before Sally herself, and she may go to heaven and shout. The choice of motion to be demonstrated for each role and how it will be acted out is associated with the child’s image of that role and the ability to express that image within the artistic form. In some versions the “ummm this-a-way” is replaced by descriptive words as in the second verse below; in others it provides an accompaniment for a motion without descriptive words as in the first verse.



Baby



Mother



Grandmother

Verse

When Sally was a baby, a baby, a baby  
 When Sally was a baby, she went like this  
 Ummmm, this-a-way, ummmm, that-a-way  
 Ummmm this-a-way, one, two, three.

When Sally was a schoolgirl, a schoolgirl, a schoolgirl,  
 When Sally was a schoolgirl, she went like this,  
 Two plus two is four, four plus four is eight,  
 eight plus eight is sixteen, sixteen plus sixteen is thirty-two

When Sally was a teen-ager . . .

When Sally was a wife . . .

When Sally was a mother . . .

When Sally was a grandmother . . .

When Sally's husband died . . .

When Sally was a skeleton . . .

Motion

thumb sucking motion,  
 body sways in rhythm to  
 "this-a-way, that-a-way"

motion is replaced by words

talks on phone or slaps knees

kissing and hugging motion

rocking baby motion

bent over with an aching back

hands over face

shake arms loosely

Another version utilizes the rhythmical phrase,  
 "oooo, aah, cha, cha, cha," and always ex-

presses the role in action rather than words.

Verse

When Mary was a baby  
 A baby, a baby  
 When Mary was a baby  
 She went oooo, aah, cha, cha, cha.

When Mary was a teen-ager,  
 A teen-ager, a teen-ager,  
 When Mary was a teen-ager,  
 She went oooo, aah, cha, cha, cha.

When Mary was a teacher . . .

When Mary was a mother . . .

When Mary died . . .

Motion

thumb sucking motion

talks on phone or dances

shakes finger

rocks baby

twists up face

Clapping Pattern

Either the up-down pattern or the right-left pattern may be used. The clapping continues through the singing. Clapping does not continue through *ooo, aah, cha, cha, cha* or through *Ummmm this-a-way*.

Up-Down

Right-Left

ud  
 b  
 o

O  
 R  
 O  
 L

Building the Repertoire of Handclaps



When handclapping is established as a familiar activity of informal play among children, new handclaps and variations on familiar ones are readily learned. The following texts are presented to expand the repertoire. It is likely that some children will already know many of them, and a reminder will be a sufficient stimulus to activate their performance.

The same teaching procedures already pre-

sented can be applied to the following texts, and the two basic clap patterns, Up-Down and Right-Left, are used for these claps as well. The claps are sung or chanted on the accompanying tape. Notations are given here for significant variations. Where there is a clap without a word, a blank line has been included in the text.

**A. Candy on a Stick**

This verse is chanted without a tune. It is simple to learn and is very popular with beginning handclappers. The boy's name is usually changed each time it is performed. Excitement is created in this handclap by the focus on male and female roles. The verse also provides practice in learning numbers. Counting by fives, tens, etc. can be substituted for the one to ten count.

Candy on a stick \_\_\_\_\_, makes me sick \_\_\_\_\_,  
Makes my stomach go two-four-six \_\_\_\_\_.

Not 'cause it's dirty \_\_\_\_\_, not 'cause it's  
clean \_\_\_\_\_,  
Just 'cause I kissed a boy behind a maga-  
zine \_\_\_\_\_.

Girls, \_\_\_\_\_ girls, \_\_\_\_\_ have some fun \_\_\_\_\_.  
Here comes (Jimmy) with a miniskirt on.

He can wobble, he can wobble, he can do all  
that stuff

Take \_\_\_\_\_ me out to the ball \_\_\_\_\_ park \_\_\_\_\_  
Take \_\_\_\_\_ me out to the crowd \_\_\_\_\_

Buy me some pea nuts and crack \_\_\_\_\_ er jacks \_\_\_\_\_  
I \_\_\_\_\_ don't care if we nev er get back, so it's

root \_\_\_\_\_ root root for the home \_\_\_\_\_ team \_\_\_\_\_  
If we don't win it's a shame \_\_\_\_\_, cause it's

one \_\_\_\_\_ two \_\_\_\_\_ three strikes you're out at the  
old \_\_\_\_\_ ball \_\_\_\_\_ game \_\_\_\_\_.

But I bet he can't do this \_\_\_\_\_.

Close your eyes and count to ten \_\_\_\_\_.  
If you mess up, start it over again \_\_\_\_\_.

(eyes closed but still clapping)

one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight,  
nine, ten

**B. Take Me Out to the Ball Park**

The familiar popular song has been adapted to handclapping, which makes this one particularly easy to learn. Unlike most others, however, it is a one, two, three rhythm. This rhythm makes the up-down clap pattern a more effective one for this handclap. Unlike many others also, the clap begins on the accented beat. Though the tune is familiar, the unusual rhythm pattern can create difficulty unless it is learned slowly in the beginning.

**C. My Mama, Your Mama**

From the name of the street in the beginning to the nonsense at the end, this verse lends itself to variation and is seldom performed exactly the same way. Collected from Afro-American and Mexican-American groups of children, these two variations demonstrate cultural as well as individual patterns in the varying word choices.

Either clap pattern is appropriate for this verse, though the right-left pattern is somewhat easier to learn with this one. The words are chanted. It begins on the accented beat and has a one-two rhythm pattern.

My mama, your mama, live across the  
street \_\_\_\_\_

Eighteen-nineteen Marble Street \_\_\_\_\_  
Every night they had a fight and  
This is what they say \_\_\_\_\_

Boys are rotten just like cotton  
Girls are dandy just like candy  
Akawasaboos, \_\_\_\_\_ akawasaboos \_\_\_\_\_  
Akawasasodawater, I love you.

Si, si, si, si  
My mother, your mother, lives across the  
street

Eighteen nineteen Canterbury Street \_\_\_\_\_  
Listen what they say \_\_\_\_\_

Boys are rotten just like cotton  
Girls are honey made of candy  
No pizza pie, \_\_\_\_\_ no pizza pie  
But a piece of bubble gum \_\_\_\_\_  
No pizza pie, \_\_\_\_\_ no pizza pie  
But a piece of bubble gum.

**D. Improvisations**

Some of the verses below are improvisations on recognizable tunes while others are newly created verses set within the rhythmical form of the handclap. They are included here as examples of children's experimentations with the elements of handclaps.

I wish I was a apple hanging from a tree  
I wish somebody'd come and put his arms  
around me

I wish I was a apple, a sweet apple.  
I am a sweet apple, I am a sweet apple.

I am a watermelon, hanging from a sweet  
tree

I know I am a sweet watermelon  
Sweet watermelon, sweet watermelon.

Please don't eat me from the tree  
From the tree, from the tree.  
Just let me free, just let me free.

I wish I was an apple hanging from the tree  
Hanging from the tree, hanging from the tree.  
Somebody come and eat me, eat me from  
the tree.

Eat me, eat me to the bone  
eat me, eat me to the peeling  
peeling, peeling, peeling, peeling.

My mother, your mother, live across the  
street

That's so I can play just with you  
Not with nobody else, not with nobody else  
Just with you and me, say who  
Say who, say Ray.

Mrs. Folly had a dolly  
A dolly who was sick, sick, sick  
She called a doctor to be quick, quick, quick  
The doctor gave her a rubber bed  
He wrote on a paper for a bill, bill, bill  
I'll be back in the morning with the pills, pills,  
pills.

Si, si, si  
When Peter went to the circus  
And then when he saw some carrots, carrots  
He got inside the sto-ore  
He eat all the carrots.

When he got sick and his mother said no  
You never better not eat no more  
Because you might die in your heart  
Because you know in the store, store, store.

Sí, sí, sí  
 Cuando un turkey cuando  
 Cuando la comieron-on-on  
 Cuando la hicieron y la comieron

Sí, sí, sí  
 Georgie Porgie what he got  
 He got a bicycle and he ride it a lot  
 Then when he went and he fell down  
 When he cried all up and down  
 Then he went to call his mother  
 His mother put in a, a bandaid  
 When he went to ride it again

And when he fell down again  
 And when he fell down again  
 And then when he fell down again  
 And then he hurt himself  
 And then they take him to the doctor  
 And then when they fixed him up he was  
 alright  
 And then buy him a little bicycle  
 And then when he ride it he didn't fell down.

Gimme me a nickel, gimme a dime  
 I wanna see my honey bun all the time.



## HANDCLAPS IN TODAY'S SCHOOLS

Handclapping, a traditional children's activity of singing and clapping in rhythm, brings two or more children together in a face-to-face event of artistic communication. In stimulating this form of play, you as teachers encourage the informal learning process. This process focuses on self-motivated learning through observation and experience in a child-directed environment. Social interaction and culturally distinctive behavior are fostered in the informal context.

### A. Cultural Variation

The environment which encourages the performance of culturally learned artistic activity also nurtures the child's identity, both as an individual and as a member of a specific ethnic group. Particular cultural interpretations are reflected in the rhythmic, textual and kinesic elements of handclapping. For example, in Mexican-American culture groups handclaps generally begin with "si, si, si." Among Afro-American groups the signal to begin handclapping is nonverbal: the up-down clap position. Among Anglo-American children the intention to handclap is announced verbally, "Let's do the one . . ."

Stylistic variations in doing handclaps will appear in the choice of words, in rhythms and their combinations, and in the way in which children arrange their space for handclapping. For example, Afro-American children are more likely than Anglo children to use nonsense words because of the stress in Afro-American culture on verbal art. Thus the sounds of the words themselves, a feature of the poetic use of language, may be of primary importance in word choice. Further, linguistic differences will be noted grammatically between different cultural groups. Thus children from Spanish-speaking cultures, those from Afro-American culture, and native speakers of English may use word order, tenses, and pronunciation

quite differently, yet in accord with their own culture's standards for speech play. Recognizing the difference in a grammatical exercise and verbal play is an important distinction, for speech play encourages the poetic use of language consistent with culture-specific standards rather than textbook grammar.

Rhythmical patterns also vary from culture to culture. Therefore, it will be noted that Afro-American children are more likely than Anglo-American children to use syncopated rhythms in handclaps. The combination of the up-down pattern, which has three moves, with a one-two (2/4) musical rhythm, is an example of this syncopation. Afro-American children generally prefer this rhythm combination, and Anglo-Americans generally use the right-left clap pattern, based on two moves, in combination with the one-two (2/4) musical rhythm pattern.

### B. Individual Variation

Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget stresses that learning is based on a process of discovery, construction, and re-invention. An "active methodology" in teaching makes available appropriate materials with which the child may re-invent and thereby experience learning. (1972: 26-27). Handclaps are based on traditional materials—the formal patterns of rhythm, motion, and verse. The natural environment for handclaps is children's informal play. Characteristic of handclaps is repetition of tune, movement, words. Equally characteristic are the individual and cultural styles which combine with the formal elements to create infinite variations. The artistic, ritualized pattern of the activity provides familiarity while the variations create novelty. Each performance is a re-creation, different from every other one, depending on how it is enacted and by whom.

Described by Erik Erikson as "playful ritualization," play which is based on ritualized pattern is inherently both personalized and tradi-

tional, improvisational and formalized (1972: 143). The participants in such play experience a mutuality in performing the known materials together; yet there is a distinctiveness for each individual in the act of interpretation.

Innovation is apparent in "Playmate" with the addition of children's verses to the original popular song. Within the verses individual choice determines whether children sing of "jolly" friends or "best" friends, of "cellar doors" or "jelly spoons." Different concepts of life and death are expressed in "Sally." For some children Sally dies and becomes a "nothin'," and for others Sally dies, goes to heaven, and shouts. Each handclap performance thus constructs a living artistic event, based on formal patterns and given cultural and individual interpretations by the performers.

Through observation of these folkloric activities you may gain knowledge of your students' abilities which do not appear in a formal learning context. Children frequently exhibit previously unrecognized leadership qualities, linguistic competence, and motivation in ritualized play. Possessing an understanding of these activities provides you with a set of tools by which you can informally nurture and evaluate children's ability to integrate their verbal, cognitive, and motor capacities in an act of artistic communication.

You may also discover that the overall experience of learning is enhanced through cooperative artistic performance which engages the child's full attention and increases self-assurance while encouraging social growth.

### C. Relevance to Concepts of Learning

Because no special equipment or space is required to handclap, it is a good activity for the playground, for rainy days in the classroom, for waiting in line, and for other settings which are not routinely structured. Teachers may also wish to consider how the formal elements of handclapping are related to concepts of formal learning. Some suggestions are listed below.

Elements which relate to **physical education** and **music education** are based

especially on coordination of motion within a rhythmical pattern. These include hand-eye coordination, left-right discrimination, and moving in rhythm. Observational skills are developed in both the learning and performing of a handclap. Memory skills are combined with observational ones as the participants must remember a series of movements, words, and tunes to perform a handclap. The acting out of concepts requires comprehension of word meaning and the ability to express it in a motion. Children gain familiarity with music, both tune and rhythm, through the singing and chanting. And most important is the integration of skills which must be utilized simultaneously—mental, verbal, physical, musical—to perform a handclap.

Concepts of formal learning which relate especially to the **language arts**, **mathematics**, and **social sciences** are revealed particularly in the texts of handclaps. Without conscious knowledge of the textual features, performers manipulate verbal and conceptual materials to achieve the overall effect. The interest of many texts depends on language play. In some cases the variation in each verse depends on the selection of a rhyming word to fill the slot of noun or verb which must change in each verse. In others, the same word is used repeatedly for all parts of a sentence, creating nonsense.

In either of the above instances sentence structure is the focus of attention. Rhyme and meter are in constant use. Homonyms and synonyms are frequently employed. Ordering occurs both in counting out numbers and in the ordering of actions such as life cycles and narratives. Sounds and rhythms of words are used for their own sake, stressing both auditory discrimination and the poetic use of language. Especially important in handclaps is the figurative use of language. The words and motions serve the purpose of creating images, many of which are humorous or nonsensical, illustrating the importance of words to communicate ideas and actions.

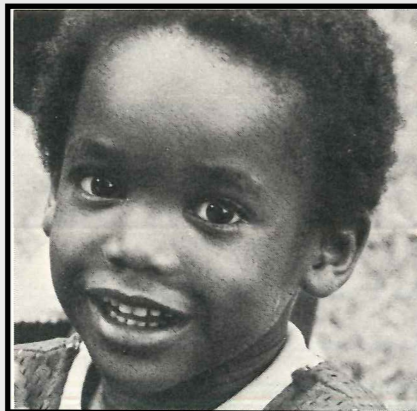
As the activity is mastered, participants apply the traditional form to the creation of new verses and to new handclaps based on traditional tunes, television commercials, popular

songs and other familiar materials. Some new creations are refined through usage and become a part of the larger repertoire while others

are never incorporated. Yet all of the efforts engage the participants in mastering basic skills of communication within artistic play.

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**CHILDREN'S  
HANDCLAPS**

Informal Learning in Play

# Children's Folklore Review

## Part III

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# Texas Children's Folklore Project A Bibliography



# A Bibliography of Publications Related to the Texas Children's Folklore Project (TCFP)

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## Richard Bauman publications relating to TCFP

- 1971 "An Ethnographic Framework for the Investigation of Communicative Behaviors." *ASHA* 13(6): 334-340.<sup>1</sup>
- 1975 "Preface." In *Black Girls at Play: Folkloric Perspectives on Child Development*, by Margaret Brady and Rosalind Eckhardt [full bibliographic entry below]. Austin: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
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## Margaret Brady publications relating to TCFP

- 1975 *Black Girls at Play: Folkloric Perspectives on Child Development*. Austin: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. (with Rosalind Eckhardt)

1978 "Peer Group Evaluation of Narrative Competence: A Navajo Example." Texas Working Papers in Sociolinguistics 4. Austin, TX.<sup>3</sup>

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1976 "Riddling and Enculturation: A Glance at the Cerebral Child," *Working Papers in Sociolinguistics* 36 (16 pages).<sup>4</sup>

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### Beverly J. Stoeltje publications relating to TCFP

1978 *Children's Handclaps: Informal Learning in Play*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A precursor, setting out the frame of reference that shaped the TCFP, this article was reprinted in *Language and Cultural Diversity in American Education* (1972), edited by Roger D. Abrahams and Rudolph Troike and published by Prentice-Hall.

<sup>2</sup> See the reprinted version of "Ethnography of Children's Folklore," here: [doi.org/10.14434/cfr.2024.vol42.39023](https://doi.org/10.14434/cfr.2024.vol42.39023).

<sup>3</sup> An updated version of this article was republished in 1980 as "Narrative Competence: A Navajo Example of Peer Group Evaluation" in *Journal of American Folklore* 93(368): 158–81. <https://doi.org/10.2307/541010>.

<sup>4</sup> "Riddling and Enculturation: A Glance at the Cerebral Child" was re-issued in Richard Bauman's and Joel Sherzer's (editors) *Language and Speech in American Society: A Compilation of Research Papers in Sociolinguistics* (1980, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory). See, also, the reprinted version of "Riddling and Enculturation" in this special issue: [doi.org/10.14434/cfr.2024.vol42.39024](https://doi.org/10.14434/cfr.2024.vol42.39024).

<sup>5</sup> This article also appears in the 1982 issue of *Aztlán: Chicano Journal of the Social Sciences and the Arts* 13(1-2): 165 193.

<sup>6</sup> *Children's Folklore* was reprinted by Utah State Press in 1999 and is available via [Utah State's Digital Commons](#).

<sup>7</sup> Available via the Children's Folklore Review archives, [here](#).

<sup>8</sup> PDF pending restoration; availability forthcoming via Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), [here](#).

<sup>9</sup> Available online via Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), [here](#).

<sup>10</sup> See the reprinted version of *Children's Handclaps* in this special issue: [doi.org/10.14434/cfr.2024.vol42.39025](https://doi.org/10.14434/cfr.2024.vol42.39025).