

Ethnography of Children's Folklore

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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.

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,¹ 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 sollicitational 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.

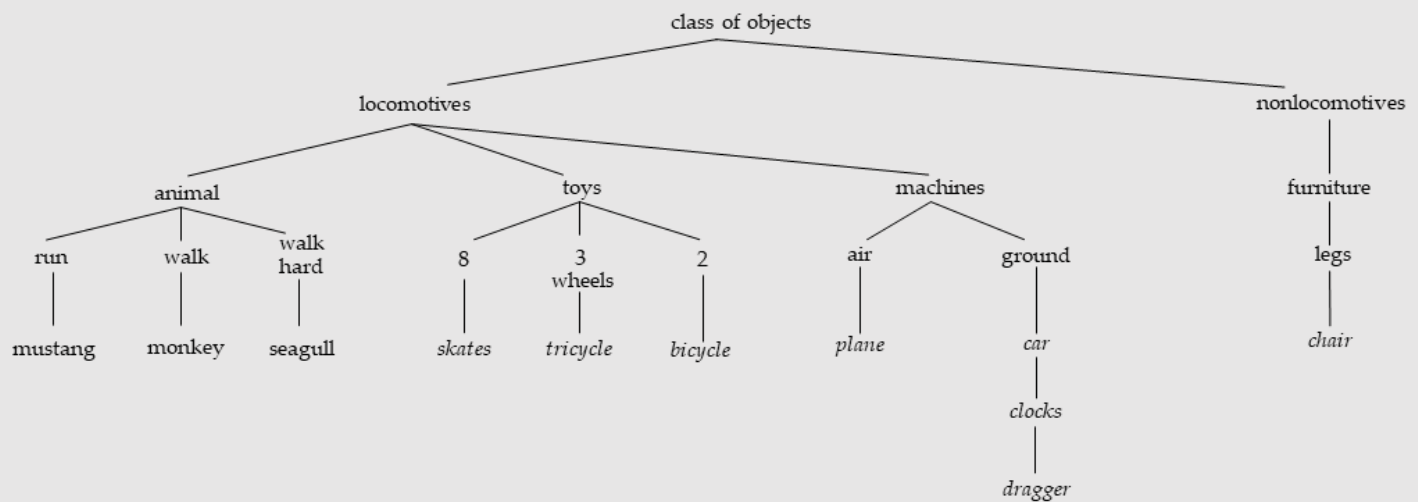


Figure 1: The Taxonomy of Locomotion [From McDowell 1979, 138]

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:

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.² 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.
-- Plátano. | ¿Qué es? |
| 2 | Yo aquí, tu allá.
-- 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 population³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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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¹ 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.

² 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.

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.