Childhood

Children as knowledge brokers of playground games and rhymes in the new media age

Jackie Marsh

The online version of this article can be found at:

Published by:

$SAGE

On behalf of:

Additional services and information for *Childhood* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://chd.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://chd.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://chd.sagepub.com/content/19/4/508.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Nov 22, 2012

OnlineFirst Version of Record - Apr 5, 2012

What is This?

Children as knowledge brokers of playground games and rhymes in the new media age

Jackie Marsh
University of Sheffield, UK

Abstract

This article draws on data from a project on children's playground games and rhymes in the new media age. One objective of the project was to examine the relationship between traditional playground games and children's media cultures. As part of the project, two ethnographic studies of primary playgrounds took place in two schools, one in the north and one in the south of England, over a two-year period. Children in both schools were active participants in the research process. They informed the research design and ongoing data collection through children's panels and children were involved in data collection through the use of video cameras, interviews and diaries. This article reflects on a number of critical issues that are raised when considering the nature of the cultural knowledge constructed by the children as they identify the signifying practices of their play and its relationship with media culture. The concept of knowledge brokering is used as a heuristic device to analyse the nature of children's contribution in participatory research studies.

Keywords

Ethnography, knowledge broker, media, participatory research, playgrounds

This article reflects on data collected in a two-year ethnographic study of a playground in England and introduces the concept of children as 'knowledge brokers' in the research process. As knowledge brokers, children have a key role in organizing and passing on knowledge about their own cultural practices to adult researchers in projects focused on examining the cultures and practices of childhood. This concept is thus distinct from the notion of children as active participants in the research process, as it focuses on their role as mediators of knowledge rather than addressing the way in which children as social agents can be involved in research, although this was also a central aspect of the study in question. The role of children as knowledge brokers is particularly significant in projects such as this in which the focus is children's cultural practices. Children are the experts in

Corresponding author:
Jackie Marsh, University of Sheffield, School of Education, 388 Glossop Road, Sheffield S10 2JA, UK.
Email: j.a.marsh@sheffield.ac.uk

their own cultural practices and have valuable knowledge to pass on to adults who are interested in researching this area. The article begins by outlining the study in detail before I move on to utilize the knowledge broker concept as an analytic device, drawing on interviews with children undertaken as part of the study in the northern school.

The project is located within the rich tradition of 'western' children's folklore, which has a long history. In the 19th century in the United States, William Wells Newell (1963 [1883]) documented the games and songs of English-speaking children. A parallel UK publication emerged in two volumes in 1894 and 1898, *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland and Ireland* (Gomme, 1964). The author, Alice Gomme, collected various versions of over 800 games. In the 20th century, the work of Dorothy Howard (1977) in the US, Brian Sutton-Smith in New Zealand (1959) and Iona and Peter Opie in the UK (1959, 1969, 1997) was highly significant in that their collections of thousands of games, songs and rhymes was undertaken by consulting with and observing children play in streets and playgrounds. In the latter decades of the 20th century, scholars such as Bishop and Curtis (2001), Grugeon (2005) and Marsh (2008) have examined childlore from the perspectives of anthropology and musicology and have identified how the forms, functions and transmission processes involved in playground games and rhymes are both persistent over time and constantly changing. The project reported on in this article built on this work by examining how those transformative processes and the texts themselves are impacted upon by the media cultures in which children are engaged. Many children in developed societies are consumers and producers, from a very young age, of a range of media texts that involve a variety of playful and creative practices (Buckingham, 2000; Marsh et al., 2005; Willett et al., 2009). The 'mediascapes' (Appadurai, 1996) of contemporary digital cultures seep into all aspects of children's lives, including playground activities. This was the case in some of the data collected by the Opies in the 20th century and remains the case today, inevitably, as media pervade the imaginaries of contemporary youth (Ito et al., 2008).

The study which informs this article was a multi-stranded, mixed-method project spanning three universities and involving a collaboration with the British Library.

The main aim of the study was to examine the relationship between children's playground culture and their media culture. The research questions were as follows:

> *Main question:*
> What is the relation between children's playground culture and their media culture?
> *Sub-questions:*
> How are games and songs made and unmade in the process of oral transmission, and how do these transformations incorporate the cultural resources of popular media?
> How do such transformations represent particular social motivations and cultural affiliations especially in relation to contemporary media?

The study had three elements. In the first stage of the study, digital archives were constructed of the corpus of data on playground games and rhymes collected by Peter and Iona Opie in the 20th century (see Opie and Opie, 1959, 1969, 1997). These were placed on an interactive website designed by the British Library,[1] a website which can be accessed by the general public. The second stage of the project involved the collection of

playground games and rhymes through ethnographic studies conducted in two primary schools in England, Christopher Hatton Primary in London and Monteney Primary in Sheffield, over the course of two academic years. In the third stage of the project, an interactive computer game was designed which enabled children to input their playground games. The focus for the discussion in this article is on the ethnographic study conducted in Monteney Primary School.

The purpose of the ethnographic studies was to identify the nature of children's playground games and rhymes in the new media age. Given the focus of the project on children's playground activities, the project drew on the cultural knowledge of participants. A central tenet of the methodological approach was that children should be engaged as active participants in research in order that this cultural knowledge could be passed on in ways that were respectful of children's rights to privacy and autonomy. The children were therefore involved in collecting data; they were observers of their own cultural practices. They collected data through the use of notebooks and video recorders as they filmed and recorded activities in the playground, and they interviewed each other about these activities. The project thus built on work that has recognized children as social agents in the research process.

Children's participation in research

Building on the work of the new sociology of childhood in the last decades of the 20th century (e.g. Alanen, 1988; James and Prout, 1990; Mayall, 2002), there is now widespread acknowledgement that children should and can play a significant role in the research process (Alderson, 2008; Christensen and James, 2008; Kellet, 2010; Tidsall et al., 2009) through the use of participatory methodologies. The notion of participation, however, is one fraught with misunderstandings and there can be forms of participation that range from passive to active (Morrow, 2008). Mason and Urquhart (2001) contend that there are three models of children's participation. In an 'adultist' model, children are viewed from within a traditional approach to childhood and they are passive within the research process. The second model is the 'children's rights' model and this positions children as an oppressed minority who can be active in research if adults are reflexive about the process. In the third model, the 'children's movements' model, children are viewed as experts on their own lives and their involvement in the research process has the potential to challenge adults' views. It is this third model which underpins the approaches undertaken in the present study, in which children have agency within the research design. However, this stance acknowledges the complexities that underpin such an approach, given issues of age and agency, which inevitably impact upon such work (Punch, 2002; Tidsall et al., 2009). Further, it is important to be cognisant of the danger inherent in such approaches, namely the use of participatory methodologies being used to signal the inherent validity of any outcomes. Researchers need to demonstrate reflexivity in relation to issues of power, agency and voice, no matter how inclusive research designs appear to be in relation to children; and simply because a research study employs participatory methods does not mean it is of better quality than studies which utilize non-participatory approaches (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; Holland et al., 2010; Hunleth, 2011). As Jayaratne (1993) suggests is the case in relation to choice of methods, whether

and how far a research study is participatory should relate to issues of fitness for purpose.

Davis (2009: 156) identifies a range of imperatives for involving children as active participants in the research process, one of which is epistemological; in some projects, children's knowledge of their lifeworlds can significantly inform the processes and outcomes of the research. As Sommer et al. (2010: 47) suggest, 'Adult researchers may gain insight into children's worlds, but their knowledge must inevitably be of a different order than the experiential knowledge that children act on in their daily practice'. It is for this reason that children were involved as active participants in the research in this study. Given that the focus was playground games and rhymes, it was important that children's involvement in the project was active, as their experiential knowledge of their own practices was crucial in addressing the research questions. In the study at Monteney Primary School, in addition to other tropes, such as participants as co-constructors of knowledge, that were used to inform the research design and processes, the participants were viewed as knowledge brokers of children's cultural knowledge.

Knowledge brokering

The concept of knowledge brokering was used as an analytic device in this project. It has a long history, particularly in relation to social research (Weiss, 1977). Knowledge brokering involves an intermediary who works as a go-between between two groups, ensuring that knowledge of interest to one party is identified and passed on in an appropriate form. This is not to suggest that knowledge is a material entity that can be easily packaged and passed on, but signals that brokering involves mediation between two sites/ parties. It is a concept frequently used in organization theory (Borgatti, 2006). It is not without its limitations as a concept, given its origin in financial markets. However, as with other concepts that have an economic origin, such as 'capital' and 'currency', the term has been appropriated by social scientists to the extent that it need not be framed within an economic analysis of the construction and exchange of knowledge. Knowledge brokering is a concept that is fully consistent with a view of knowledge as constructed in the process of research. As Meyer suggests:

> . . . brokering involves a range of different practices: the identification and localization of knowledge, the redistribution and dissemination of knowledge, and the rescaling and transformation of this knowledge. Brokering knowledge thus means far more than simply *moving* knowledge – it also means transforming knowledge. (Meyer, 2010: 120)

Meyer argues that the outcomes of this process lead to a new kind of knowledge, termed 'brokered knowledge', which is 'knowledge made more robust, more accountable, more usable; knowledge that "serves locally" at a given time; knowledge that has been de- and reassembled' (Meyer, 2010: 123). The role of the broker is pivotal. She or he needs to assess what is knowable and how that knowledge should be presented and the broker needs to have credibility with both or all groups she or he deals with. In that sense, the broker is both an insider and outsider to the group that is the focus of the research. What is crucial to the success of the brokering role is the ability to gain the trust both of the

group from whom one derives the knowledge and the group to whom one passes the knowledge on. The role also requires a capacity to be clear about what constitutes useful knowledge in the first place. In the next section of the article, I outline the strategies used at Monteney Primary School to ensure that children were clear about the aims and objectives of the project.

Methodological approaches

The ethnographic studies were conducted in two primary schools that were contrasting in nature. Christopher Hatton School serves an ethnically diverse population in inner-city London. Monteney Primary School is situated in an estate which consists of partly privately owned ex-public housing and partly public housing, serving a primarily white working-class community. The studies engaged children as active participants in the research process. Each school had a Children's Panel. This consisted of children from the school who met with researchers on a regular basis throughout the project. The panels served as a means of involving the children in the conduct of the project. To some extent, the meetings were used to discuss issues relating to data collection and data analysis. The identity of the panel members was made public throughout the schools so that children across the school knew who they could approach to discuss the project. The panel at Christopher Hatton Primary School already existed as the school council. However, the panel at Monteney Primary School was set up specifically for this project and was separate from the school council. There were 12 members of the panel in the London school and 24 members of the panel in the Sheffield school, of mixed gender and from across each of the year groups 1–6 (children aged 5–11). Panel members used digital video and audio recording equipment to record playground rhymes and games and panel members at Monteney Primary School used notebooks to record observations. Panel members interviewed children about their playground practices.

At Monteney, all children in the school had opportunities and were encouraged to collect data as part of the project. It was the panel members' responsibility, in addition to that of the adult researchers, to answer any queries that children might have about this process. Researchers also recorded observations of playground games and rhymes and interviewed children regularly about their practices. In addition, children completed online surveys about their media use at home and their knowledge of clapping games. At Monteney, children also drew maps of their playground activities and identified their online and offline social networks. In the closing months of the project, a children's conference was held, at which the research participants from both schools disseminated their findings from the project to each other and to children from different schools.

At the beginning of the project, following a discussion in which children explored the meaning of acting as researchers within this project, the children at Monteney were informed that the notebooks they had been given were their own 'research diaries' and they could use them how they wished. It was suggested that they might want to note down the games and activities they observed in the playground in any modes they wished to employ, e.g. writing and/or drawing. Two whole-school assemblies were also held in order to discuss the processes involved in data collection. In the first assembly, at the start of the project, children discussed the kinds of activities they engaged in on the

playground in order that they could identify the range of practices they might want to capture. Part-way through the project, a second assembly was held and children discussed examples of videos shot by other children in order to identify best practice, e.g. how to frame shots, focus and so on. Regular meetings were held with members of the Children's Panel at which ongoing issues relating to data collection techniques were discussed, along with other issues.

While the children were active in the data collection, the adult researchers managed the project overall and there were limits to the children's engagement. Children were not involved in the determining of research questions or the overall research design, but they were involved in adjusting the research design to suit the children's needs, in selected aspects of the analysis and in dissemination of data. While this could be viewed as constraining, Kellet (2010: 50) argues that this is necessary to avoid exploitation of children if children are not the primary researchers. The project team developed a range of approaches to ethical issues, which included informed consent. The project adhered to the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011) and was approved by a university ethical review panel. Parents of children in Monteney Primary School completed a form which signalled their agreement for their child to participate in the project and be filmed. Separate consent was sought for use of the videos in conferences and the British Library website. Children were informed that they could decline to participate in the project at any point and the concept of 'assent' in addition to consent was important. Regular discussions took place among team members regarding ethical issues that arose in the project.

The analysis in this article is based on interviews with members of the Children's Panel in Monteney Primary School. These data are one element of the entire data collection from the ethnographic studies in both schools. The data are drawn upon in order to reflect on the issue of children as knowledge brokers of their own cultural knowledge. The article features excerpts from interviews with the panel, who were interviewed at various points throughout the project. The interviews were digitally recorded. The interviews explored children's understanding of their role as researchers, their reflections on their role as members of the Children's Panel and their thoughts on the value of children engaging actively in research projects of this nature. In addition to this, two members of the panel, Carl (a 7-year-old boy) and Kate (a 6-year-old girl), were interviewed separately mid-way through the project. These two children were chosen for interview because they were identified as children who had engaged in more extensive use of the research notebooks than other children. They were friends and often played together in the playground. They were interviewed about the way in which they collected data using their research notebooks. They were interviewed at the same time during a playtime period, in a classroom. Both children had their research diaries with them. The interview was video-recorded.

Data were analysed inductively, using the method of constant comparison (Strauss, 1987). Themes which emerged within the datasets were coded and then these codes applied across datasets. Knowledge brokering emerged as a significant theme in the interviews with children and their films. The transcripts from the interviews that have been included in the following section have been selected because they are illuminative of specific issues addressed regarding children as knowledge brokers and reflect the themes which emerged from the data analysis.

Children as knowledge brokers

The data captured by children across all year groups in both schools indicated that they had a strong grasp of what constituted relevant knowledge about children's playground rhymes and games. They captured data across all of the playground categories identified in the project, including high physical (hula hoops), high verbal and musical (e.g. songs) and high physical and high verbal/or musical (e.g. clapping games) content. There were recorded video clips that could not be used for the project due to poor quality (e.g. lack of focus) and clips that did not capture relevant activities but instead consisted of miscellaneous material, such as children saying 'Hello' to the camera. However, the video data captured by children suggested that many children understood the project's aims and objectives and could recognize playful activities in the playground.

There was much overlap between the findings of the adult researchers and the child researchers. All researchers found that children played a rich and varied range of games, songs and rhymes, some of which could be traced back through previous generations, and some of which were new. Media-references and play based on media were extensive in the data and media sources included more traditional media such as television and radio, and new media such as computer games and virtual worlds. For an overview of the findings, see Burn et al. (2011) and Willett et al. (in press).

Children proved to be sensitive from a young age to the need to be accurate in questioning during interviews. As the project focused on playground games and rhymes, there was no need to focus on the games that children played inside the school building. In the interview with Carl and Kate, they were asked what they had been writing in their research diaries. They responded that they had recorded children's favourite games. They were then asked what questions they had asked other children:

Kate:	. . . 'What's your favourite game in the playground, or what's your favourite outside game', or anything like that, didn't we? [*Turns to Carl*]
Carl:	And, 'What's your favourite game?'
Kate:	Yes.
Interviewer:	Right, well, they're very good questions.
Kate:	But, then, if they said an inside game then we said they have to be insi- outside, don't they?
Carl:	We've let Mrs H, 'cos she's a teacher, do an inside game, haven't we?

(MPJM2011-12-21v01682[2])

The children demonstrated the ability to be effective interviewers of other children and to be specific about the kind of information they were seeking. In telling children that they were not interested in their indoor play, Carl and Kate were clearly framing the research study and focusing on the research questions. However, they did not constrain themselves to focusing only on children and chose to interview adults, although they realized that the data gained in this way were somewhat different to the rest. Carl and Kate's responses were indicative of the kinds of choices other members of the panel made throughout the project, although it is notable that in a small minority of cases,

children who were not on the panel filmed indoor activities. It may be the case that membership of the panel intensified children's knowledge about the scope of the study.

There was evidence throughout the project that children were operating as effective researchers of their own childhood cultures. For example, from children's reports it could be seen that they were often reflexive about their role, even if this was not explicitly voiced. Children were free to choose when to take their notebooks out to the playground and Carl and Kate suggested that they had become sensitive to changes in playground play over the course of the project. As the study progressed, they did not take their books out to record play during every playtime, only when it appeared that there was something new or interesting to report. They were asked how they decided when they were going to use their research diaries:

> *Kate:* We look out of the window to see if it looks just like running and stuff or the same old games.
>
> *Interviewer:* And what makes you think, 'Oh well, today's the day where I'll take my book out'?
>
> *Kate:* Because when we look out of the window it looks like people are playing with different people and playing different games and stuff aren't they? [*Turns to Carl*]

(MPJM2011-12-21v01682)

As observers of their peers' play, Carl and Kate had appeared to have reached a stage in which the familiar could indeed seem strange and this parallels the strategies adopted by adult ethnographers when they feel they have reached data saturation in relation to some aspects of the fieldwork (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This data saturation meant that they did not want to record repetitions of games and play that they had already recorded on previous occasions. This was exemplified further by Kate:

> Well I think like our most important job is just making sure we get all the games like we haven't got about ten times like, what me and Carl used to play, like Pokémon and stuff. But after we've got it we don't put it down again do we, Carl, we just put all Tiggys down because everyone were playing Tiggy off ground, Tiggy hiding, and all stuff like that weren't we, so you play at every Tiggy game, I did.

(MPJB2010-10-07at00150)

Given the proliferation of the various forms of Tiggy[3] that exist, this was a sensible distinction for Kate to make.

A further aspect of children's play focused on in this project was that of the role of media. Again, as in relation to the identification of play, children were able to talk about how they could identify play which related to the media that they were familiar with. Carl and Kate reported two ways in which they identified media-related play: through the use of specific actions that are used in films/cartoons and through text-specific vocabulary, such as names. In the following interview, the children referred to Pokémon, which is a media franchise owned by Nintendo and which includes both computer games and a television programme, in addition to a range of other media artefacts:

Interviewer:	When you see games on the playground, how do you know if they are games that children are playing because they've seen them on television or film?
Carl:	'Cos they're, like, in Pokémon there's, like, throwing [*Carl and Kate mime throwing*] like that, throwing balls.
Kate:	And if they're saying, 'Pika', we know they're playing Pokémon.
Carl:	And Pikachu.
Interviewer:	OK, so you can tell that way.
Kate:	Yes, and if they're saying, 'Chimcha', we know they're playing Pokémon, don't we? [*Turns to Carl*]

(MPJM2011-12-21v01682)

Taylor (2010) outlines the way in which 'postural intertextuality' is a factor in children's meaning making. That is, children learn actions/gestures that are performed by characters in films and on television and perform these actions/gestures in their communicative acts, either knowingly or unknowingly. Carl was therefore sensitive to what he felt were moves that originated from the Japanese cartoon *Pokémon* and could identify them in the playground. One of the reasons that children are in a strong position as knowledge brokers in relation to play and media culture is that this is cultural knowledge in which they are normally steeped. It is much more difficult for adults to be as familiar with children's media texts. This is not to suggest that all children are knowledgeable about all aspects of media culture, nor that adults cannot be trained in identifying media-related play, but nevertheless there may have been a certain advantage in this context in having watched many episodes of *Pokémon,* for example, as Carl reported that he had.

Children themselves certainly felt that they were more appropriate researchers of children's cultural practices than adults. Members of the panel were asked why they felt it was important that children were engaged in the data collection. Elsa and Tyrone felt that their peers would feel more comfortable talking with them:

Elsa:	Yeah, because, like, it's . . . we're in school still.
Tyrone:	Yeah, we're in school so we can probably, like . . .
Elsa:	Talk to our friends and . . . when you're friends with someone it's like they tell you more stuff, they're not, like, bothered if they say something wrong. But if someone else, like an adult talks to them, they're like . . .
Tyrone:	They go, 'Ooohhh'.
Elsa:	Yeah, they'd be like . . . whatever.

(MPJB2010-07-21at00141)

Another boy suggested that children might obtain more naturalistic data than adults:

Interviewer:	Now, do you know when we say that children are researchers, do you know what we mean?
Tom:	It means like they actually collect their own games? It's not like you and . . . is it Julia [name of another researcher]?
Interviewer:	Yeah.

Tom:	It's not like you're going round with the cameras, it's actually other children who are, so it's like . . .
Interviewer:	Does that make a difference, do you think?
Tom:	Yeah, I think it does because, like, you know, like, if you were filming other children they'll try really hard to really impress you. If it's another child, they'll play it like they'll normally play and not try and add anything extra special in.

<div align="right">(MPJM2011-12-21at01683)</div>

What Tom's response points to is that the members of the panel were generally very clear about the fact that they thought that children collecting data from other children had a number of advantages. This appeared to impact positively on their feelings about being a member of the panel and having a pivotal role in the data collection.

When acting as knowledge brokers, children made decisions about what they were prepared to pass on to adult researchers. For example, Carl and Kate were explicit about not reporting fighting in case it got children into trouble:

Interviewer:	Are there some things that you wouldn't want to tell adults, that they shouldn't know about?
Carl:	Fighting games . . . I don't really want to tell the teacher that they're playing fighting games but I tell them a different ways [*sic*] and I were thinking.
Interviewer:	Why don't you want to say they're playing fighting games?
Carl:	Because . . .
Kate:	. . . Like, you don't want them to get done.
Carl:	You'll get them in to a lot of trouble.
Kate:	Yeah, but thingy, we're not playing the games in that sort of way, aren't we?
Interviewer:	So you don't put those in your book?
Kate:	We don't put fighting games in our book.
Carl:	What else would you not put in your book?
Kate:	I have got a few fighting games like Power Rangers and Pokémon.
Carl:	Power Rangers and flying . . . they don't do real fighting.
Kate:	No, it's just like pretend fighting, not really touching them. Like that [*mimes pretending to punch Carl*].
Carl:	Power Rangers don't really touch other bad guys in it.
Interviewer:	They just pretend?
Carl:	Yeah.

<div align="right">(MPJM2011-12-21v01682)</div>

It is not possible from this interview to define what both Carl and Kate term 'fighting games', but they appear to distinguish between fighting games in which physical fighting takes place and fighting games in which no touching occurs, both genres prevalent in play (Beresin, 2010). Teachers and teaching assistants, however, frequently intervene in these kinds of play in a premature manner, fearing violence (Holland, 2003). While Carl

and Kate acknowledge that they can recognize fighting games, therefore, they are also aware that their teachers might not appreciate the difference between non-play and play fighting and so do not report this activity to them. This issue is one which highlights the way in which children's emic perspectives are important in research projects such as this, because they enable children to represent their cultures as they wish them to be understood by others.

One of the questions explored with the children at Monteney related to their status in the playground as members of the panel. Children's roles as knowledge brokers could have been compromised by their special status, as other children may then not have wanted to share knowledge with them. This was, overwhelmingly, not the case. There appeared to be some envy of the status of panel member from some children, but otherwise children did not report that it had changed the nature of their play with others in any fundamental manner. Kate, however, did think that some children's responses to her were different from normal and indicated that being a member of the panel meant that other children were kinder to her as they wanted her to video them. There was, overall, a lack of evidence to suggest that the panel members' relationships with others had been affected by their roles, to the detriment of the project's aims.

The data outlined in this article would suggest that the children involved in the research study at Monteney could be characterized as knowledge brokers in a number of ways. First, they frequently acted as mediators between their peers and the adult researchers and wider school community, passing valuable information on to the latter. This 'brokered knowledge' (Meyer, 2010) was important in developing a fuller understanding of the nature of children's play and its relationship to media practices, as it added richly to the information which was gained by the adult researchers. Second, they sometimes filtered this knowledge, deciding what might be information that was too sensitive to pass on. The need for this was inevitable, given how much of children's playground activities are transgressive or scatological in nature and how children can be chastised for engaging in such activities. Third, the panel members often transformed knowledge about children's cultural practices in the process of passing it on. There were numerous instances in which children expanded upon the data they had collected by explaining the practice's origins and reflecting on its significance in the playground. It is important to acknowledge that this analysis does not assume that knowledge is an objective entity that can be passed on in a simplistic manner. In the research process, researchers are constructors of knowledge and, with research participants, co-constructors of knowledge and this was no less the case with the children in the study. The result of this approach is the production of richly layered datasets which complement, supplement and contest each other. Rather than trying to clarify the modalities of these different types of knowledge, we should acknowledge their multi-perspectival nature and accept that there is a need to 'remake social science in ways better equipped to deal with mess, confusion and relative disorder' (Law, 2004: 2).

Conclusion

The children who were members of the Children's Panel at Monteney Primary School had a significant role as knowledge brokers of children's culture. This role brings with it

a range of responsibilities which many took seriously, as the data from this project indicate. The data from the project as a whole suggest that children were cognisant of what was involved in the role of knowledge broker, as they were able to reflect on their ability to mediate effectively between children in the school at large and the adult researchers. The children were sensitive to the nature of their work and identified a range of benefits which they felt might not be available to them if adults were the sole researchers.

There are questions raised by the concept of children as knowledge brokers, however, which point to the limitations of studies of this nature. The first is in relation to what benefits the children might accrue from this role if it is not to be exploitative in nature. In this project, the team attempted to ensure that children benefited from the project by offering a payment to the schools for their participation and by ensuring that there were events that were child-focused, such as a children's conference held at the end of the project. The children received conference packs, which contained collage materials, and they were entertained by a poet in some of the conference sessions. Other conference sessions enabled children to disseminate their findings to each other and children from other schools. There were benefits in terms of learning from the project, although these were not linked to curriculum outcomes in a formal manner; where this is possible, I would argue that this should be pursued in order for the children to enjoy formally recognized educational benefits. The second question raised by the study concerns the effect that acting as a knowledge broker can have on children's social relationships, although there appeared to be minimal impact in this project. That might not always be the case, however; this would very much depend on context and would need considerable reflection on the matter in each case. In addition, careful consideration needs to be given to the difference and relationship between the knowledge gained in this way and the knowledge gained by the adult ethnographers. In some cases, data collected by the children's panel members corroborated data collected by the adult researchers, at times the children's data supplemented the adults' and at other times raised questions about the status of the data collected by adult researchers (Richards, 2011). This is not problematic, rather it points to the need for a critical and complexly layered form of reflexivity (Pillow, 2003) in the research planning, data collection, writing up and dissemination stages.

There are a number of implications of the analysis undertaken here for research of this nature in the future. There is a need for adult researchers to be sensitive to the needs of children as they undertake the role of knowledge broker and to adopt a number of strategies in order to ensure that the children are not exploited. First, children need to be fully informed about the project's aims, research questions and possible consequences of acting as a broker in order that they can make a decision about whether or not they wish to participate; children may also wish to change and/or adapt research questions. Further, children may, as Hunleth (2011) suggests, have their own reasons for wishing to take part in the research, which should be acknowledged and explored. Second, the children need to understand the nature of the role of participant/co-researchers and what it means to be involved in ongoing collection of data. This requires them to be aware of the nature of the data that they need to collect which, in this project, involved understanding what constitutes playground games and rhymes and identifying media-related play. Third, other children in the group that is being researched should be aware

of their peers' standing as knowledge brokers so that they may choose to disclose or refrain from disclosing information to them. Finally, children benefit from opportunities for reflection on their roles in participatory projects in order that they can identify their significance and importance.

The concept of knowledge brokerage is one that can be useful in work with children, as it recognizes that children have distinct cultural knowledge that can be mediated from one group to another. This is not to suggest that adult and child cultures are distinct. As Corsaro suggested in 1993, children engage in 'interpretive reproduction' of adult culture (Corsaro, 1993) and the cultures of adults and children are integrated in many ways, particularly in contemporary commercialized contexts (Cook, 2009). However, playground cultures are distinct in that the playground offers a 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994) in which home and school cultures merge and children can frequently play beyond the direct gaze of adults. Without the central role of child knowledge brokers, the information that adults obtain about these liminal spaces may be more restricted in nature, with consequences for a broad understanding of the nature of contemporary childhoods in the new media age.

Funding

Notes

1. www.bl.uk/playtimes.
2. This number refers to the file name of the original data, which are stored at the British Library for researchers to access.
3. A high physical chasing game in which a player who is 'it' chases other players; when the player who is 'it' touches another player, then he/she becomes 'it'.

References

Alanen L (1988) Rethinking childhood. *Acta Sociologica* 31(1): 53–67.
Alderson P (2008) Children as researcher: Participation rights and research methods. In: Christensen P and James A (eds) *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices.* Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 276–289.
Appadurai A (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
BERA (British Educational Research Association) (2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. London: BERA. Available at: HYPERLINK "http://www.bera.ac.uk/files/2011/08/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf" www.bera.ac.uk/files/2011/08/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf
Beresin A (2010) *Recess Battles: Playing, Fighting and Storytelling*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
Bhabha HK (1994) *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge.
Bishop J and Curtis M (eds) (2001) *Play Today in the Primary School Playground: Life, Learning and Creativity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
Borgatti S (2006) Identifying sets of key players in a social network. *Computational and Mathematical Organization Theory* 12(1): 21–34.

Buckingham D (2000) *After The Death of Childhood: Growing up in the Age of Electronic Media.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Burn A, Bishop J, Jopson L et al. (2011) Children's playground games and songs in the new media age: Final report. Available at: projects.beyondtext.ac.uk/playgroundgames/uploads/end_of_project_report.pdf.

Christensen P and James A (eds) (2008) *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Cook D (2009) Children as consumers. In: Qvortrup J, Corsaro WA and Honig MS (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 332–346.

Corsaro W (1993) Interpretive reproduction in children's role play. *Childhood* 1(2): 64–74.

Davis J (2009) Involving children. In: Tidsall K, Davis J and Gallagher M (eds) *Researching with Children and Young People: Research Design, Methods and Analysis.* London: Sage, pp. 154–167.

Gallacher L-A and Gallagher M (2008) Methodological immaturity in childhood research? Thinking through 'participatory methods'. *Childhood* 15(4): 499–516.

Gomme AB (1964 [1984/1898]) *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland and Ireland: With Tunes, Singing-Rhymes, and Methods of Playing According to the Variants Extant and Recorded in Different Parts of the Kingdom.* New York: Dover.

Grugeon E (2005) Listening to learning outside the classroom: Student teachers study playground literacies*. Literacy* 39(1): 3–9.

Holland P (2003) *We Don't Play With Guns Here: War, Weapon and Superhero Play in The Early Years.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Holland S, Renold E, Ross NJ and Hillman A (2010) Power, agency and participatory agendas: A critical exploration of young people's engagement with participatory qualitative research. *Childhood* 17(3): 360–375.

Howard D (1977) *Dorothy's World: Childhood in Sabine Bottom, 1902–1910.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Hunleth J (2011) Beyond *on* or *with*: Questioning power dynamics and knowledge production in 'child-oriented' research methodology. *Childhood* 18(1): 81–93.

Ito M, Horst HA, Bittanti M et al. (2008) Living and learning with new media: Summary of findings from the Digital Youth Project. The John D and Catherine T MacArthur Foundation Reports on Digital Media and Learning. Available at: digitalyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/report.

James A and Prout A (eds) (1990) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*. London: The Falmer Press.

Jayaratne T (1993) Quantitative methodology and feminist research. In: Hammersley M (ed.) *Social Research: Philosophy, Politics and Practice*. London: Sage, pp. 109–123.

Kellet M (2010) *Rethinking Children and Research: Attitudes in Contemporary Society*. London: Continuum.

Law J (2004) *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research.* London: Routledge.

Marsh J, Brooks G, Hughes J et al. (2005) *Digital Beginnings: Young Children's Use of Popular Culture, Media and New Technologies.* Sheffield: University of Sheffield. Available at: www.digitalbeginings.shef.ac.uk/.

Marsh K (2008) *The Musical Playground.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mason J and Urquhart R (2001) Developing a model for participation by children in research on decision making. *Children Australia* 26(4): 16–21.

Mayall B (2002) *Towards a Sociology for Childhood: Thinking from Children's Lives.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Meyer M (2010) The rise of the knowledge broker. *Science Communication* 32(1): 118–127.

Morrow V (2008) 'We get played like fools': Dilemmas in children's participation in England. In: Invernizzi A and Williams J (eds) *Children and Citizenship.* London: Sage.

Opie I and Opie P (1959) *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Opie I and Opie P (1969) *Children's Games in Street and Playground: Chasing, Catching, Seeking. Vol. 1.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Opie I and Opie P (1997) *Children's Games with Things.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pillow W (2003) Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *Qualitative Studies in Education* 16(2): 175–196.

Punch S (2002) Research with children: The same or different from research with adults? *Childhood* 9(3): 321–341.

Richards C (2011) In the thick of it: Interpreting children's play. *Ethnography and Education* 6(3): 309–324.

Sommer D, Pramling Samuelsson I and Hundelde K (2010) *Child Perspectives and Children's Perspectives in Theory and Practice.* New York: Springer.

Strauss AL (1987) *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Strauss AL and Corbin J (1998) *Basics of Qualitative Research Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd edn. London: Sage.

Sutton-Smith B (1959) *The Games of New Zealand Children.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Taylor R (2010) *Being clouds, pulling teeth and using their breadloaves: Children's multimodal meaning-making.* Unpublished PhD, University of Sheffield.

Tisdall EKM, Davis JM and Gallagher M (2009) *Researching with Children and Young People: Research Design, Methods and Analysis.* London: Sage.

Weiss CH (1977) Introduction. In: Weiss CH (ed.) *Using Social Research in Public Policy Making*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, pp. 1–22.

Willett R, Robinson M and Marsh J (eds) (2009) *Play, Creativity and Digital Cultures.* New York and London: Routledge.

Willett R, Richards C, Marsh J et al. (in press) *Children, media and playground cultures: Ethnographic studies of school playtimes*. Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave.