Data were obtained from 183 Australia-area children between 5- and 8-years-old who were asked questions about what makes them happy, laugh, frightened, and scared. Children who were selected according to ethnicity, were of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or European descent. Children were interviewed outside schools, on buses, at church, in parks, at the homes of friends and neighbors, in shopping centers, streets, and at a day care center. Responses were first collated into sex, age, and descent categories, and then into topic-based categories. Ten categories of fears, and nine categories of joys emerged. Children were afraid of bedtime and the dark, imaginary and supernatural creatures, physical harm, certain programs on television, separation from family, practical difficulties, and nothing. Children's happiness resulted from funny actions, celebrations, toys, school, friends, physical activity, television, being with family, food, and money.

Cultural trends, age trends, and sex differences are discussed in relation to data, which are presented in 10 tables. Concluding remarks reflect on the research process and indicate the effects of the project on the researchers.
OUTSIDE SCHOOLS, on buses, at church, in parks, in the homes of friends and neighbours, in shopping centres, in the street, and in a day-care centre we asked young children about their joys and fears. Back in our Diploma of Teaching (2nd Year) class we recorded and quantified and graphed and analysed the replies. Our main conclusion is that urbanised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have not lost their culture, despite outward appearances, and every teacher with culturally different pupils in her class must assume that they live very different lives, with very different views of what life is all about, very different hopes, fears, joys, expectations, and needs in school. The item is about how we found this out, and how we realised that our own discoveries are more important than second-hand knowledge.
The Topic

The Joys and Fears of Childhood was chosen because of its interest, and because it captures significant features of the behaviour and development of the child of 3-8 years. Also, a substantial amount of research has already been conducted on this age. The topic reinforced some knowledge we had already gained and gave us the opportunity to challenge and test information in popular literature and text books.

The Sample

We spent a considerable time trying to decide how to select children to interview according to their descent. Aboriginal, Islander or European. We worked hard to clarify what we meant by these categories.

We sampled children in various places: outside schools, on buses, at church, in parks, in the home of friends and neighbours, in shopping centres, in the street, and in a day-care centre. A total of 203 children between 5- and 8-years-old were interviewed, but a total of 183 responses were used. Those not used were inaudible, or responses which were not appropriate, e.g., 'daddy's at work'. Mary could often recall individual children's manners and attitudes as their responses were read.

In small groups and in sessions all together we collated the information, put it in categories, compared and contrasted the ideas, and listed the trends.

We also read a great deal about children's social and emotional development, especially chapters relating to joys and fears and prepared a detailed bibliography and a review of the important articles.

At the end we reflected on the project and wrote an article which appeared in The Aboriginal Child at School, Vol. 15, No. 3.

The Process

We all collected tape recordings and made transcriptions of what each child said when we asked these four questions.

Joys

What makes you happy?

What makes you laugh?

Fears

What makes you frightened?

What makes you scared?

Findings

All the children's responses were collated into sex, age and descent categories.

Then, from the responses, we placed the comments into categories based on topics. It was fascinating to see trends emerging from the massive amount of raw data. And we could often recall individual children's manners and attitudes as their responses were read.

The responses were placed in ten categories for Fears and nine for Joys.

Fears

Of the dark

Bedtime fears 'When it is dark...'. 'At night when I have to go to the toilet in the dark.' 'Walking into a dark, dark room.' 'When the light goes out'.

Separation from family 'When mummy and daddy talk loud and daddy goes away from me.' "When my grandma dies.

Personal physical harm (including punishment) 'When daddy hits me.' 'If I hurt myself.' "Someone with an axe who is going to kill me.' 'When dad hits me when I muck up.' "Getting a beating from mum and dad.' 'Getting into trouble.'

Practical fears 'If I lost my watch.' 'I'm tough.'

TV and mass media 'Scary movies.' 'Creature feature called Spiders.' 'When I watch movies where people are killed.' 'Sharks and vampire movies.' 'When there were wolves come out and there is a full moon.'

Separation from family 'When mummy and daddy talk loud and daddy goes away from me.' "When my grandma dies.

Factual fantasy, e.g., man-made fantasy 'When I wake up and see my dress hanging on the wall.' "The big scary house at the Show" (the ghost train at Townsville Show). 'When I see myself in the mirror and think it is someone else.' "When my uncle scared me with a scary mask.' 'Frights and tricks.'

Fears

Funny actions 'Tickles.' 'When people do funny things.'

Celebrations 'Father Christmas and people that are happy.'

Birthdays: 'When mum gives me a surprise birthday.' 'When I crash on my bike.' "My cars.' A toy gun for a present from my dad.' A day cake.' 'When I'm invited to a party.'

Bedtime fears 'When it is dark...'. 'At night when I have to go to the toilet in the dark.' "Walking into a dark, dark room.' 'When the light goes out'.

Personal physical harm (including punishment) 'When daddy hits me.' 'If I hurt myself.' "Someone with an axe who is going to kill me.' 'When dad hits me when I muck up.' "Getting a beating from mum and dad.' 'Getting into trouble.'

Factual fantasy, e.g., man-made fantasy 'When I wake up and see my dress hanging on the wall.' "The big scary house at the Show" (the ghost train at Townsville Show). 'When I see myself in the mirror and think it is someone else.' "When my uncle scared me with a scary mask.' 'Frights and tricks.'

Practical fears 'If I lost my watch – I’d be in strife.' 'When the big plane flies over my house.' "When I crash on my bike.' "Feeling sick.' "If a stranger took me away.' 'Fire and fireworks.' 'Drunken people.' 'Drunken men fighting each other.' 'Running out of petrol with our car.' 'A big dog barking.'

Nothing 'Nothing.' 'I'm not scared of anything.' "Nothing – I'm tough.'
Friends 'Playing with other people who are happy.' 'When I play with my friends.' 'Playing, having fun and messing around with my friends.' 'Sleeping over at Sharon's place.' 'Going to Jerry's place - Jerry makes me laugh.'

Physical activity 'Swimming.' 'Singing.' 'Playing with my dog.' 'Fishing.' 'Swings and playing in the park.'

TV 'It's a Knockout,' and cartoons.' 'Funny things on television.' 'Watching Inspector Gadget.' 'Fat Cat when he dances.'

Being with family 'When mummy comes home.' 'Visiting grandma.' 'When my mummy helps me look at and bath my baby sister.' 'When daddy takes me to the pool.' 'Going with Grampy.' 'Going fishing at Magnetic Island with dad.' 'Seeing all my cousins at Christmas at Yorke Island.' 'Mum and dad when they play with me.'

Food and money 'Lollies.' 'Biscuits.' 'Eating ice cream, Weet Bix, cake.' 'Money.' 'Money and chocolates and presents.'

The Statistical Results

The trends which are listed under the tables emerged from our discussion as we assembled the tables. Although these trends are specific to our findings, it may provide some interesting research areas for others. The tables show:

Table 1: The Aboriginal descent groups did not register a high response in the 'toy' category. The 'family' figures are very high for Islander and Aboriginal girls and when combined with 'friends' and 'celebrations' indicates a very strong sense of happiness generated from close personal networks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>European</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Islander</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny Actions</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrations</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Activity</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: TV figures are higher for European children. In discussion it was decided that socio-economic factors were not significant in this, as all the children came from urban Townsville and shared similar material standards across the cultural groups. Significant was the revelation that 'family' figures were high, as it reinforced our own feelings of 'onesickness' within family experience. Toys were high for all groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>European</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Islander</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Celebrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Celebrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrations</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>TV</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Celebrations</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Money</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>TV</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: This shows the priority ordering of children's responses in categories according to age. For example, the most frequent response to the question 'what makes you happy?' of five year old girls was 'Funny Actions (tricks, jokes and tickles)'. Whilst eight year old girls responded that 'Toys' were a source of happiness. Overall, 'Funny Actions', 'Toys', 'Family' and 'Celebrations' increase with age, as does the eight year olds' investment in friendships. It is significant that 'TV', 'Food' and 'Money' were not frequent initial responses.

Table 4: This table lists priority of responses for boys. It revealed that 'Toys' were high for 5, 6, 7 Years, and drops off at 8. The 'Family' was a high category in all ages, which increases for 8s. Perhaps in conjunction with that 'Celebrations' are also high for 8-year-olds. It is interesting that 'Money' is an interest of 8-year-olds. We were surprised that 'Physical Activity' was not high at any age. It could be that the nature of the question 'What makes you happy?' makes for an object or emotion as a response, or perhaps there is a genuine lack of pleasure in physical activity? This would be an area for future research.
Nothing Practical fears Factual fantasy Separation TV and media Supernatural Imaginary creatures Bedtime tears Fear of dark

Table 6: European children appear to be much more afraid of the dark than Aboriginal and Islander children, whilst Aboriginal and Islander children are much more likely to be afraid of the supernatural than European children, e.g., afraid of devils. The European children are more often scared by the idea of separation from the family than are Aboriginal and Islander children, but all children have bedtime fears/nightmares and are scared by the supernatural.

Table 7: European children appear much more likely to be afraid of the dark than Aboriginal and Islander children, whilst Aboriginal and Islander children are much more likely to be afraid of the supernatural than European children, e.g., afraid of devils. The European children are more often scared by the idea of separation from the family than are Aboriginal and Islander children, but all children have bedtime fears/nightmares and are scared by the supernatural.

Table 8: Trends in this table are age-based and reflect the 5- to 7-years-old shift from fantasy to factual fears. ‘Dark’ and ‘Bedtime Fears’ are the highest source of fear for girls overall, and ‘Supernatural – ghosts/spirits’ were high also. For the girls ‘TV’ becomes increasingly a source of fear, whereas this is not so for boys. The ‘Nothing’ category reveals that bravado develops at 8-years in girls, whilst boys demonstrated bravado much earlier. It is interesting that ‘Practical Fears’ increase as a child matures and is less concerned with fantasy; for example, ‘Dark’ decreases but ‘Bedtime Fears’ increase.

Table 9: This shows again the concern about fear of the supernatural in all ages. We gained strong insights into the still fragile sense of security in young children. ‘TV’ did not register at all until 8-years in boys, but was a high source of fear for girls. At all ages some boys claim ‘Nothing’, indicating bravado. Once again, imaginary fears (dark, bedtime, monsters) decrease with age and practical fears increase. This finding confirms our current theories of cognitive development for this age group.
4. Of great significance for those of us who are Aboriginal
and Islander was the culture of urban children. At the
beginning of the project we felt that urban Aboriginal
and Islander was the culture of urban children. At the
beginning of the project we felt that urban Aboriginal
and Islander children would have lost most of their cul-
tural differences - they appeared to have adopted Euro-
pean type lifestyles. However, a wealth of cultural train-
ing was evident, especially in the supernatural
categories. We enjoyed explaining the children's answers
to the lecturer and to others in the group. There were
frequent exchanges of stories about beliefs, fears, child
rearing patterns which we were able to identify in the
children's responses, for example, when discussing the
high rate of response in the 'separation from family' cat-
egory, one of us wrote

I've experienced that two years ago when I left my daugh-
ter up in Cairns, with my sister, so that I could do this
course. She was 3-years. When talking to her on the
phone, the very first thing, she would question, 'Why
you have to leave me up here, Mumma?' Always followed
by a very soft crying voice of just a whisper, 'I miss you,
Mumma'. I never knew, until I went through this research
course and learnt, what separation from a mother means
to a child.

When discussing the supernatural category:

In our Islander culture very young children are scared of
ghosts (spirits). It was told by our ancestors that when a
person died his spirit would attack people. They
suggested that on the third day his spirit would walk
through the villages.

To overcome this situation all the relations would stay
in one particular house. The men would build a big long
shed with plaited palm leaves for men to sleep in at
night. The children are sleeping close to their mothers.
The barking of a dog at midnight was a sign of the spirit
passing by.

Also about the witchcraft, people would travel very
fast by using magic words. As for our traditional laws,
the young children are not allowed to be left alone in the
house unless with older members of the family. Even at
night at their own house they will sleep together with
their parents, to avoid the presence of the sorceresses.

Table 10: This records the percentage of total responses to
questions, 'What makes you frightened?,' 'What makes
you scared?'. The trends show high frequency of super-
natural fears and bedtime fears for both boys and girls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supernatural</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedtime</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical fears</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factual fantasy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical harm</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginary creatures</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. A significant discussion for us as trainee teachers focused
on the implications of the research on teaching. At this
stage conclusions are conjecture but they provide some
ideas for future research, for example:

Boys of European descent appear to be very 'object orien-
tated' whereas Aboriginal and Islander children fre-
quently mentioned interpersonal relationships. Early
Childhood teachers should allow children to work to-
gether with other children, and with objects, to maximise
the benefits.

The Effects of the Project on us

We enjoyed the learning experience.

'The research study was something, that was new to all
of us, and a challenge.'

'I feel that the research was very beneficial as you learn
a lot, i.e., through reading books and sharing ideas with
others.'

'The strongest feature of this subject was the research of
children - how we collected materials.'

'The research programme was very interesting, it should
be done again.'

We felt strongly that we had produced valuable data.

We came to realise the changes in teaching style and
expectation that must be made for children of different ages
whilst still ensuring continuity. The project reinforced that
the teacher must not underestimate the role of the parents
and wider family in the experience of children, and should
try to incorporate the family into the life of the school. The
knowledge from lectures became relevant and practical
when we applied it to the children's comments. We
broadened our ability to talk with young children. And we
had the experience of action research and of working as a
team.
Notes:

Alison Searle at the time of this project was a lecturer in Early Childhood Education in the Department of Social and Cultural Studies in Education at James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland, Australia. All the other authors were members of the 2nd year Diploma of Teaching Class.

The earlier account of this project was first published under the title 'Utilising a research project as a teaching/learning strategy', in The Aboriginal Child at School, Volume 15, No. 3, June/July 1987. The Aboriginal Child at School is published from the Department of Education, University of Queensland, S. Lucia, Queensland 4067. Mrs D.M. Muir is the Honorary Editor; the subscription is $10.00.

A later account called 'A cross-cultural study of the joys and fears of young children' was published in the Australian Journal of Early Childhood Education, Volume 12, No. 3, September 1987. This journal is published 4 times a year by the Australian Early Childhood Association, P.O. Box 105, Watson, ACT, Australia 2602; Margaret Clyde is the editor; the subscription is $16.00 for Australia, $25.00 for overseas.

Our thanks to these journals for their help.

Further Reading