

**ITRA NEWSLETTER**  
International Toy Research Association

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**Vol. 3 No 2**                      **FALL 1998**

CONTENTS	Page
Editorial	3
President's Column	3
Member Activities	4
Conference Recounts	5
UNESCO Workshop	5
Conference Announcements	6
Book Publications	6
Journal Publications	8
Research Projects	9
UNESCO Exhibition in Paris	12
EU-Programme "Innovation"	12
New ITRA Members	13
NCFL News	13
News from Toyland	13
Children's Corner	14
Epilogue	15

## Editorial

First I want to thank those of you who have sent in written material to be included in this ITRA Newsletter. There are Member Activities, Book Publications, and New Member presentations. Some of the material connected to the question of toys for handicapped children, a domineering issue for "Fordern durch Spielmittel - Spielzeug für behinderte Kinder e.V." Berlin („Stimulation through play - toys for handicapped children") in cooperation with the German Commission for UNESCO.

In this Newsletter you will as usual find News from Toyland, this time about Toys "R" Us, and Children's Corner with a story teaching us that adult wording can confuse more than one child.

What you won't find in this Newsletter is the list of ITRA members' Fax numbers and Email addresses. Presented in this Newsletter are mail addresses to new members only.

For old members the list of Fax numbers and E-mail addresses in ITRA Newsletter, Spring/Summer 1998 is still relevant. However, the Secretariat is at the moment busy creating an ITRA member book with each member's full address. The book will be revised once a year. In between, whenever there is a new member to present, his/her address will be included in ITRA Newsletter which is issued three to four times a year.

This schedule means that news won't be so old when it reaches you.

## President's Column

In spite of its youth ITRA appears to be well established among associations on the international research arena. Five years after the forming of ITRA, the association has found fruitful ways to communicate both within and outside of the organization.

Thanks to the Newsletter and the frequent communication between members and the ITRA Secretariat, the internal communication is developing very well.

There is, however, more that can be done in order to broaden the interchange between ITRA and other organizations, companies, and universities. One way of getting in touch with partners outside ITRA is to organize conferences and seminars and invite people to come and listen to the latest findings and/or planned studies. That is also exactly what is happening in June 1999 in Halmstad, Sweden, and it is far from the first time.

The first International Toy Research Conference took place in 1996, organized by NCFL at the University of Halmstad, and held to the honor of Brian Sutton-Smith.

In 1997, an International Toy Research Seminar took place in Angouleme, France. It was organized by the then ITRA President Gilles Brougere in cooperation with l'Universite de la Charente.

The 2:nd International Toy Research Conference to be held in Halmstad, Sweden, June 1999, is in fact the third international meeting with focus on toys, is organized by NCFL in conjunction with ITRA.

I hope that ITRA will be organizing several international toy research conferences in the future in order to obtain and spread current findings from the field of toy research.

Hoping that you will have the opportunity to come to the conference in Halmstad in June 1999, I am looking forward to meeting you there.

Krister Svensson  
ITRA President

## MEMBER ACTIVITIES

### USA

Moving from one place to another means a lot of muscular as well as mental energy. One who can testify to this is our board member **Tony Pellegrini**, who not long ago went through the tiring although perhaps positively exciting process of changing his life situation. This is what Tony and Lee did when they left Georgia for Minneapolis, June 15. **Tony** left the University of Georgia (after 19 years) to become Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, where **Lee Galda**, his spouse, will be a Professor of Children's Literature.

Tony writes that "it is a very exciting move" for both of them as "the University of Minnesota has excellent faculty and students in both areas", adding that: "Of course it is much colder in MN than in GA. By our calculations, the mean ambient temperatures for years in GA and in MN should average out to some where near normal! Tony's new address is:

Department of Educational Psychology  
Burton Hall  
University of Minnesota  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
E-mail: pelle012@tc.umn.edu

### Australia

**Wendy Varney**, University of Wollongong, reports she is glad to have the ITRA Newsletter which "seems bigger and newsier each time". As she is "living over the other side of the world", the Newsletter gives her a chance to learn what other researchers are up to.

Here is what she is up to: We all know how 'fragile' University jobs can be. For Wendy the grim reality is that the job she got in Dept of Science and Technology Studies at the University of Wollongong, "runs out" this very month (December). No surprise that it is "due to the rather severe funding cuts we are experiencing here in the tertiary education in Australia". However, Wendy

turns the negative prospect of getting a new job, to a positive by stating that "at least I will be able to get stuck into my research, which is always difficult to do while one is teaching". "In July I gave a paper *Tamagotchis and Teddy Bears*": *The boundaries between the Technological and the Personal*, at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for the History, Philosophy & Social Studies of Science.

The journal *Social Identities*, published her article *Barbie Australis: Reinvention of a National Culture*. (See under Journal Publications in this Newsletter.) Finally, Wendy is co-author of a book coming out on the web about technology and participation. There we shall also meet **Sudarshan Khanna** who has reviewed Wendy's chapter.

### The Netherlands

**Joop Hellendoorn** and her colleagues at the University of Leiden are working on a brief project initiated and paid for by the Dutch association of toy shops. The aim of the project is to generate guidelines for toy sellers to advise their clients on toy choices. Wanted in this project is research literature on toy preferences, and on relationships between toys and specific developmental phenomena (cognition, social or emotional development). "Most of the material we have found is about play in general and not about specific toys. That does indicate that toy research is not very old, but young and healthy". Joop asks if I know of "any other recent work by ITRA members which identifies specific toys (e.g., war toys) which we may not yet know about here, this would also be most helpful". Although I have offered a few titles I throw the ball to you - please take it and send your tips to

Hellendoorn @rulfs.w.fsw.LeidenUniv.nl

## CONFERENCE RECOUNTS

At the OMEP Conference in Copenhagen, August 1998, **Lars-Erik Berg**, NCFL, University of Halmstad, and department of Sociology, University of Goteborg, Sweden. Presented a paper entitled *Developmental play stages in child identity construction: An Interactionistic Theoretical Contribution*.

Abstract: Play has gained interest in developmental psychology, not only as an educational instrument but in its own right. Related disciplines also pay attention to play. The social psychological fragments on child and role-play, developed by G H Mead, are the basis for an interpretation of the development of play in its function for identity construction. Play within the frames of role taking is seen as a necessary condition for an adequate creation, confirmation and integration of personal identity. Essential for these processes are mirroring and repetition. Play forms the basis for mental categories like seriousness vs. fun, freedom vs. constraint, concentration vs. capriciousness and creativity. Also basic motivation is influenced by playful meaning creation.

A sketch of stages in child development is made, where passages between the four stages are marked by changes in the capacity of role taking which develops in and by social life, rather than by individual cognitive maturation. The stages are:

1. The amorphous stage (0-3, where the phenomenon of identity is still lacking,
2. The play stage, (1-7), where identity is discernible but not crystallized,
3. The game stage (3-adolescence), where identity is crystallizing and formalizing, and finally
4. The stage of the Generalized Other (7-through adulthood), where the individual develops the capacity to relate to others from a position of consolidated identity. This sequence has similarities with the Piagetian scheme, but the process is seen from the standpoint of sociality and its creative force on individual psychic development.

If you want the paper in full, contact Lars-Erik Berg, associate professor, docent at the Department of Sociology, Gothenburg University, Box 720, SE 405 30 Goteborg, Sweden, or send him a Fax: +46 31 773 4764, or E-mail: lars-erik.berg@sociologv.gu.se

## First Latin American UNESCO Workshop

### „Toys for Children's Rehabilitation"

The First Latin American UNESCO Workshop took place in Mexico City from the 18th of March to the 4th of April 1998. 25 international specialists, designers, and therapists from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Germany, Great Britain, Honduras, India, Indonesia, and Mexico participated at this workshop. The purpose of this event was to design new toys that would contribute to the educational integration of children with special needs. The event started with a 2-day symposium with lecturers from all over the world.

In the workshop, participants shared knowledge and good practice in the field of rehabilitation and special education. All this contributed to the design and elaboration of 90 educational toy prototypes, of which the 20 most innovative were selected by an interdisciplinary committee.

### The following steps

The 20 most innovative toy prototypes have been duplicated and are currently being tested in various institutions for children with special needs in Germany and Mexico. After the evaluation of these tests, the toys will be reproduced on a larger scale and will be available for rehabilitation processes for people with special needs.

Some of the prototypes have been shown at an exhibition in the headquarters of the UNESCO in Paris in April and May and will be displayed in various Mexican institutions in October this year.

## Conference Announcements International Council for Children's Play (ICCP)

The ICCP Conference will take place at Oslo College, Norway, September 15, 16, and 17, 1999. It will be the 21<sup>st</sup> World – Play Conference [Welt - Spiel - Konferenz] organized by ICCP. The theme is Play and Development [Spiel und Entwicklung]. Although the invitation is written in German, the conference language is English. Papers should be sent in before May 1, 1999, and addressed to Frau Turid Lysell, Hogskolan I Oslo - E.U. kontoret, Pilestrede 52, N - 0167, Norway. Fax: +47 22 45 22 73, E-mail:

Turid.Lysell@lu.hioslo.no

## 18<sup>th</sup> International Humor Conference 11<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Inter-national Society for Humor Studies

is to take place June 29 through July 3, 1999, at the Holy Names College, Oakland, California., USA. For further information contact E-mail: humor99@academic.hnc.edu See also periodically updated web site at <http://www.hncedu/events/humor99>

## 2<sup>nd</sup> International Toy Research Conference

is organized by NCFL in conjunction with ITRA and will take place June 14-19, 1999 at the University of Halmstad.

The theme of the conference, which is arranged in cooperation between NCFL and ITRA is "*Toys as communication*". Within this theme there will be

1. Traditional paper presentations
2. Symposia on the four topics Intertextuality, Gender, Postmodernity and Identity
- 3 Poster sessions.

In the call for papers that have been sent out it is stated that the last date for application is

November 15 and the last date for Abstracts is December 15. **Correct dates should be January 15 for applications and March 15 for abstracts.**

The program will be sent out in January. If you have questions regarding the conference please send them to [conf99@ncfl.hh.se](mailto:conf99@ncfl.hh.se).

You can also visit the conference homepage on Internet:

<http://www.hh.se/dep/ncflweb/Conference1999.html>

For more information welcome to send an Email to [anders.nelson@ncfl.hh.se](mailto:anders.nelson@ncfl.hh.se)

See also NCFL/ITRA website  
[www.hh.se/dep/ncfl](http://www.hh.se/dep/ncfl)

## BOOK PUBLICATIONS

**GARY CROSS**, *KIDS' STUFF: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood*, Harvard University Press, 1997. 283 pp. ISBN 0-674-89830-3

Contents:

1. Their Toys and Ours
2. Modern Childhood, Modern Toys
3. Shaping the Child's Future
4. Freeing of Child's Imagination
5. Building Blocks of Character
6. The Boomer's Box of Toys
7. Spinning out of Control

Publisher's presentation of the book:

"To sort out who's who and what's what in the enchanting, vexing world of Barbies and Ninja Turtles, Tinkertoys, and teddy bears, is to begin to see what's become of childhood in America. It is this changing world, and what it unveils about our values, that Gary Cross explores in *Kids' Stuff*, a revealing look into the meaning of American toys through this century.

Early in the 1900s, toys reflected parents' ideas about children and their futures. Erector sets introduced boys to a realm of business and technology, while baby dolls

anticipated motherhood and building blocks honed the fine motor skills of the youngest children. *Kids' Stuff* chronicles the transformation that occurred as the interests and intentions of parents, children, and the toy industry gradually diverged—starting in the 1930s when toy makers, marketing playthings inspired by popular favorites like Shirley Temple and Buck Rogers, began to appeal directly to the young. TV advertising, blockbuster films like *Star Wars*, and Saturday morning cartoons exploited their youthful audience in new and audacious ways.

Meanwhile, powerful social and economic forces were transforming the nature of play in American society. Cross offers a richly textured account of a culture in which erector sets and baby dolls are no longer alone in preparing children for the future, and in which the toys that now crowd the racks are as perplexing for parents as they are beguiling for little boys and girls. Whether we want our children to be high achievers in a competitive world or playful and free from the worries of adult life, the toy store confronts us with many choices.

What does the endless array of action figures and fashion dolls mean? Are children—or parents—the dupes of the film, television, and toy industries, with their latest fads and fantasies? What does this say about our time, and what does it bode for our future?

Tapping a vein of rich cultural history, *Kids' Stuff* exposes the serious business behind a century of playthings. Gary Cross is Professor of History at Pennsylvania State University."

Half a dozen experts in different academic areas have reviewed Gary's book. Brian Sutton-Smith, states that the book is "wellwritten, provocative, and enlightening, and no less than "quite out-standing". Lisabeth Cohen, Harvard University asserts that it is more than fun to read the book, because "in Cross's competence hands, toys become important stuff".

**BRIAN SUTTON-SMITH** is working on a book called *THE POWER OF PLAY* with two colleagues, Stuart Brown M.D., a neurologist and expert on evolution and animal play, and David Kennard, film producer of many documentaries.

"Now that Garland press has disappeared, I am trying to resurrect our book *CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE : A SOURCE BOOK*, which so far has been stymied by the unwillingness of the new owners of that press to reply to anything. Would be good if we could afford a lawyer. I would like to have Utah State Press (who are interested and who have the folklore archives) pick it up and use the profits for their children's archives. We have already contributed funds to that end and to the establishment of a web site.

As for Toys, my intent has been to edit the Emory Conference, which I organized on the importation of child toy makers to the USA. But so far the Smithsonian have not come through with the computer disc I need for that editing process. As you got from the summary in the last newsletter the attitude of most of the papers was quite sceptical towards the project as first characterized. However if the money becomes available there will be a great multi use folk life toy splash on the DC Mall in the year 2000 covering all the aspects of toy mediation that we can imagine.

**James Christie & Jim Johnson**, *Play and Early Childhood Development*. Longman, December 1998. Ca.370pp. ISBN 0-321-01166-X

Contents:

1. Theories of Children's Play
2. Play and Development
3. Development of Play
4. Individual Differences of Play
5. Play in Diverse Cultures
6. Play, Special Children, and Special Circumstances
7. Adult Involvement in Play
8. Observing Play

- 9. Play Environments
- 10. Play Materials
- 11. Play and Education

**Jeffrey Goldstein** (Ed.) *Why we Watch. The Attraction of Violent Entertainment.* A Project of the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. Oxford University Press, 1998. 288 pp. ISBN 0-19-511821-9 (paper). 0-19-511820-0 (cloth).

Contents:

Introduction *Jeffrey Goldstein*

The Appeal of Violent Sports *Alan Guttmann* Death Takes a Holiday. Sort of. *Vicki Goldberg*

Immortal Kombat, War Toys and Violent Video games, *Jeffrey Goldstein*

"Violent Delights" in Children's Literature, *Maria Tatar*

Children's Attraction to Violent Television Programming, *Joanne Cantor*

"A test for the Individual Viewer": Bonnie and Clyde's Violent Reception, *JHoberman* When Screen Violence Is Not Narrative, *Clark McCauley*

The Presence of Violence in Religion, *Marice Bloch*

The Psychology of the Appeal of Portrayals of Violence, *Dolf Zillmann*

Why We Watch, *Jeffrey Goldstein*

About the book:

Why We Watch is the first book to offer a careful look at why we are drawn to depictions of violence and why there is so large a market for violent entertainment. This arresting collection of essays examines violent imagery not just in contemporary America but across time, from classical antiquity to the present, and not only in film and television but in an array of cultural domains, including literature, religion, fairy tales, video games, children's toys, photojournalism, and sports.

The distinguished contributions, hailing from fields such as anthropology, history, literary theory, psychology, communications, and film criticism, consider a crucial but rarely asked question

in the media violence debate: Why is violent imagery so prevalent? While acknowledging that violent imagery has saturated western cultures for millennia, they aim to define what is distinctive about America's contemporary culture of violence.

## JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS

**Wendy Varney**, University of Wollongong (1998). *Barbie Australis: the Commercial Reinvention of National Culture.* Social Identities. 4(2), 161-176.

Abstract: While the marketing of commodities is certainly being globalised, the goods themselves are slanted towards specific aspects of particular cultures, mainly dominated by commercially-driven North American mainstream culture. The irony is that in this skewed homogenization process, the idea is conveyed that a variety of cultures is represented as is the case, purportedly with 'Dolls of the World Collection' Barbies.

But, as Australian Barbie demonstrates, on closer examination, only the ambience of other cultures is there. The design of such commodities is driven by commercial interests and stereotypes, with a view to what is attractive, marketable and fits prevailing perceptions, misguided or otherwise. In the case of Australian Barbie, the doll must first be true to the image that is Barbie. It need not be true to what is Australian, which is after all much more problematic and contested.

Thus, instead of offering girls a range of positive identities, Barbie simply collapses all identities into her own, robbing children of the breadth of cultural links and understanding of their own cultures and appreciation of other cultures which, arguably, should be open to them.

For the article in full, please contact Wendy on E-mail: [wendy\\_varney@uow.edu.au](mailto:wendy_varney@uow.edu.au)



## RESEARCH PROJECTS

### **USA: Parenting Through PLAY for School Readiness**

Interim Report of Year One Research

Findings, submitted by **Jerome L. Singer**, Ph.D. and **Dorothy G. Singer**, Ed.D. Co-Directors, Yale University Family Television Research and Consultation Center, Department of Psychology, Yale University, September 1998

#### **Summary of the project:**

1) Objectives of This Two-Year Project Develop, test, refine, and nationally disseminate a video-based program to train low-income parents/caregivers to engage their 3-5-year-old children in highly motivating play techniques which research has shown to enhance children's cognitive, social and motor skills for school readiness. Nationally disseminating 2,500 free copies of the empirically tested training video and its printed manual to organizations that serve (and/or train those who serve) low-income families to help train large numbers of parents/caregivers in simple, effective, inexpensive, enjoyable techniques for improving low-income children's schoolreadiness skills. National Significance:

Improve early childhood learning by fully applying video, text, graphics and online media to develop an empirically-tested, lowcost, easily-replicable program for training low-income parents/caregivers to strengthen their children's ready-to-learn skills, through proven techniques similar to those presented in the America Reads Challenge "Ready\*Set\*Read Early Childhood Learning Kit."

#### 2) Year One Objectives

Adapt parent-training curricula by Drs. Jerome and Dorothy Singer of Yale University into "beta" (test) version of the video-based training program with four games to enhance school readiness skills.

Test beta version of program in training sessions with Experimental and Control Groups of low-income parents, and measure their preschool children's ready-to-learn skills before and after intervention. Analyze test results and parent feedback, and refine program contents and format accordingly. This report describes the research evaluation of the Year One training materials and procedures and the effectiveness of the parent training in leading to higher school readiness scores for children from low-income families.

#### General Population Characteristics

The participants were the parents of 103 preschool children (53 girls, 50 boys), ages three and four. The groups were drawn from 5 inner city preschools and randomly assigned to Experimental (Parent-Training) and Control Groups. The average SES level was 6 on a 7 point scale suggesting a relatively economically limited groups with a mix of Caucasian, African-American and Latino children. There were no initial significant differences between Experimental and Control Groups on demographic features or on the initial testing of children using a School Readiness series of measures.

#### Training Procedures

All Experimental Group parents met twice for 90-minute training sessions during a two-week period. Training involved brief lectures on the values of symbolic play, instruction in using our ("beta") printed manuals and viewing with follow-up discussion of our ("beta") training video demonstrating imaginative games that parents could play with their children. These games incorporated School Readiness features such as Vocabulary, Counting, General Information, Nature Knowledge and Awareness of Good Manners. Parents were encouraged to play regularly with their children during a two-week period. They kept logs of their efforts and of their children's responses to the play initiations. Parents also provided qualitative feedback on the games and the training procedures and materials.

### **Child Assessments**

Quantitative and qualitative data from the parents' logs indicate that the children were highly responsive to the games and that parents averaged between 10-45 minutes daily in such play.

Following two weeks of parent training, trained teams of raters, whose reliability had proved satisfactory in an earlier phase of the study, scored the Experimental and Control children with a School Readiness measure and an instrument for assessing behavioural variables.

The major results of the study indicate that the children in the Experimental Group show significantly higher scores than the Control Group children in the total School Readiness Test and specifically in Vocabulary, Nature Knowledge, General Information and Awareness of Good Manners.

### **Implications**

Year One research findings suggest that the types of play-training methods and materials developed for this project can have strong impact on the ability of low-income parents to enhance their children's cognitive and social skills needed for effective school entry. On the basis of Year One testing, in Year Two we will retain the most effective features of the "beta" versions of the training materials, i.e., those elements that led to measure changes in children's skills, such as vocabulary. We will augment those components with new materials to address needs discovered in Year One testing, e.g., the need to include a training component for daycare workers.

We will then test, refine and nationally disseminate 2,500 free copies of the revised, empirically-tested, easily replicable, video-based program to organizations serving low income families with preschool children who will use it to train parents/caregivers to engage 3-5-year-old children in highly motivating play techniques, to enhance children's school readiness skills.

**BRAZIL:** *Painters' illustrations of children's play and toys throughout history*  
**Raquel Zumbano Altman** of Sao Paulo, Brazil, is collecting reproductions of good painters' works from all over the world, where children are represented with their toys and games or playing some kind of play. The idea is to prepare a chronological history of play as far as possible in time till our days and analyze these works trying to identify play and games, as well social behavior of children and adults according to the artists and their time.

The first years of this project, Raquel used to visit museums wherever she happened to stay when travelling. "Nowadays", she explains, "I am searching at art books and also changing letters with museum curators that are always very kind and send me post cards or color xerox's of paintings of their collection as well as some words about the authors. The idea is to present, and comment, probably in slides, if I can afford it or if I succeed in having a sponsor, a gallery of art where the main theme is Children's Play."

Raquel asks the readers of ITRA Newsletter to send works by their national artists or those presented at their neighbor museums. I need to know: Artist's name, time and place of birth, and - if not alive - when and where he/she died. It is also important to have the name of the work and when it was done, the kind of work (oil on canvas, for instance), the dimensions of the work, the place where it is displayed (museum gallery of art) and, if so, from what book the copy was made.

Please send your copies or observations to:  
 Raquel Zumbano Altman, Rua Monte Alegre, 1712, Sao Paulo, Brazil,

**Germany:** *Educational Material for Disabled minors*

Fordern durch Spielmittel - Spielzeug für behinderte Kinder e.V.", Germany, stimulated the **Mexican Ministry of Education** to introduce a special project to

encourage the Integration of Minors with Disabilities by using educational material.

The First Latin American UNESCO Workshop (see CONFERENCES in this Newsletter) was an important step within the project, which was being developed under the coordination of the **Secretaria de Education Publica**, the **Mexican National Commission for UNESCO**, the **German Association Fordern durch Spielmittel e.V.**, the **Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana Mexico D.F.** and „rehabilitARTE" a.c.

The project was started in January and February, when two workshops were held for teachers of special education of all the federal Mexican entities. One took place in the Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana in Mexico City and the second at the Regional Cooperation Centre of Adult Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CREFAL) in Patzcuaro, Michoacan. In October 1998 the next two workshops for teachers will take place in Mexico in cooperation with the Mexican and the German partners.

Siegfried Zoels  
(Chairman of the First Latin American UNESCO Workshop)

For further information, contact: „Fordern durch Spielmittel - Spielzeug für behinderte Kinder e.V." Christburger Str. 14, 10405 Berlin Fax: +49 - 30 - 443 59 214 e-mail: info@spielmittel.de  
web site: <http://www.spielmittel.de>

**France:** *New Post-Graduated Training in Marketing to Children*

The Business Administration Department of the **University of Poitiers** - in collaboration with the **University Paris XIII** and the **National Comics Museum** - has launched in Angoulême in September 1997 a new postgraduated training (Bac+4) entitled "*Marketing to Children*".

This training is supported by the French Federation of Toy and Baby Care Manufacturers.

Our aim is to train future marketing and sales managers able to implement recent and applied knowledge about children development theories in their everyday responsibilities.

The teaching team works in tight collaboration with industries for which children and teenagers are an important commercial target (i.e. Toys manufacturing, Educational software, Video games, Textile and Babywear, Food industries, Sports, Publishing, etc.).

To enrich our 1500 hours training with original field experiences and reflections, a research team called MESIG (Marketing, Children, Society & Global Industries) is just born. This team is willing to develop research projects in three directions:

- Children, subjects and actors: learning processes and consumption contexts
- Marketing to children: conditions of effectiveness and cultural background
- Industries targeting children: strategies to face globalization processes

This team organizes short research seminars in several locations throughout France. Last year, we organized two encounters (in February and May 98) and were very pleased to welcome among other participants:

- Professor **Gilles Brougere** who presented his reflections on "*Possible relationships between research questions in Anthropology and Sociology and Marketing to Children*"
- Professor **Stephen Kline** who gave a lecture on "*Selling interactive play media in North-America.*"

MESIG is coordinated by **Valerie-Ines de La Ville**. The members of MESIG are eager to:

- get in touch with other academic bodies developing specialized training close to our own fields of interest.
- be informed of investigations in progress in other academic or industrial realms worldwide.

- engage in international research projects with foreign partners on topics that meet our own interests.

To get more detailed information, please contact:

Valerie-Ines de La Ville

Centre Universitaire de la Charente

BP 38, 16 400 LA COURONNE

Fax: 33 5 45 91 60 21

E-mail: ines.delaville@cuc.univ-poitiers.fr

## UNESCO EXHIBITION IN PARIS

From April 21 to April 30 the exhibition *Toys For Children with Special Needs* was held at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris during the 154th session of the Executive Board. The exhibition was organised by the association *Fordern durch Spielmittel - Spielzeug für behinderte Kinder, e. V.* Berlin [Stimulation through Play - Toys for Handicapped Children] in cooperation with the German Commission for UNESCO and the UNESCO program *Education for children in need*. It summarized the results of the UN World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1997) project „Toys for Children's Rehabilitation“.

In five creative international UNESCO workshops in Germany with 100 participants in total from about 40 countries living and working two weeks in close contact with handicapped people, more than 140 new toys were designed and produced. These toys aimed at therapeutic and educational functions as well as the promotion of the integration of disabled and non-disabled children while playing.

The visitors to the exhibition stressed the surprising diversity, the therapeutic values and the funny design of the new toys, and many of them expressed the intention to subscribe to the 3 manuals of «Toyworkshop» with building instructions published by „Fordern durch Spielmittel“. First arrangements about future joint workshops, continuation seminars or exhibitions have been made with representatives of organizations and

institutions in European and overseas countries.

Dr. Helmut Tautz

(Member of the Board of the Association „Fordern durch Spielmittel e.V.“)

contact: „Fordern durch Spielmittel -

Spielzeug für behinderte Kinder e.V.“

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http://www.spielmittel.de

## EU-PROGRAMME "INNOVATION"

Currently a new star in terms of creation, implementation and marketing of innovative play products in sheltered workshops is rising on a European level. This was enabled by the EU-programme INNOVATION.

The coordinator of this project „Fordern durch Spielmittel - Spielzeug für behinderte Kinder e. V.“ is a German non-profit organization promoting toys for handicapped children.

Nordic Center for Research on Toys and Educational Media (Sweden) is the contractor, and the British Toy Makers Guild (Great Britain), Associazione Donatella Gazzola, Centro Internazionale Ludoteche (both Italy) and Arto (European marketing organization) are associated contractors.

Within the definition phase (July to October 1998) the partners specified their aims and objectives and the means by which they should be achieved. Their conception was approved and assessed as "highly recommendable" by the European Commission in October. Now the program enters its implementation phase:

During a period of 2 years, the partners are planning to hold several international

creativity workshops, where designers and special-needs teachers will develop innovative play products especially for disabled children. In a second step these innovative playthings will be systematically tested with the aim of establishing criteria for «therapeutically valuable toys». Afterwards it is planned to build up adequate structures for introducing these design innovations into production in sheltered workshops and for their distribution on the European market.

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(Public relations)

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## NEW ITRA MEMBERS

**Dorothy Singer and Jerome Singer**, both at Yale University Family Television Research and Consultation Center, Department of Psychology, Yale University, and certainly well known by most of the ITRA members have joined the ITRA group.  
**Dorothy's** E-mail: orothy.Singer@yale.edu  
**Jerome's** E-mail: Jerome.Singer@yale.edu

**Torben Hangaard Rasmussen**, Masten 38, 3070 Snekkersten, DK. Danish preschool teacher who after studies of sociology and philosophy specialized on children's play. He is working part-time at NCFL, and one of the cooperators in the research project *Toys as Communication*, beside being engaged in his own project *Playing with Toys – a Phenomenological Approach*.

Apart from several articles and conference papers he has written five books focusing on children's play. They are all in Danish, but the titles in English may give a good

indication of their content: The significance of Play, 1978; The Great Play, 1985; Time for Children and Time for Adults, 1990; Order and Chaos, 1992, *Philosopher of the Body*:

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1996. E-mail: han-ras@get2net.dk

**Valerie-Ines de La Ville**, Centre Universitaire de la Charente, La Couronne, France.

E-mail: ines.delaville@cuc.univ-poitiers.fr

## NCFL NEWS

Preparations for the 2nd International Toy Conference June 1999 dominate the activities at the center. Responsible for registering participants, and giving information about almost everything concerning the conference is Anders Nelson. E-mail Anders.Nelson@cfl.hh.se

## NEWS FROM TOYLAND

**TOYS "R" Us** are closing down a total of 90 stores 50 European Stores because of a gigantic saving plan are to be closed down: 40 in USA, and most of the remaining 50 to be found in Germany and France. As for the three stores in Sweden, they are steered from Denmark and won't be affected. Furthermore, 200 of the 700 American stores are being rebuilt to include departments of children's clothing and electronics.

**Ads Help Sale - but don't promise more than you can stick to** Toys "R" Us announced in an ad that they sold a particular doll under cost and promised that any customer, who, within a fortnight, can find an ad offering the same doll at an even lower price, will be paid back the price difference.

A Swedish retailer quickly went to 'TRU' and bought almost the whole stock of the doll. Then he put in his own ad offering the

doll to an even lower price than that Toys "R" Us sold it for, and finally went to the TRU store and claimed the price difference in cash. Without success Toys "R" Us tried to buy the doll back. The Editor of Leksaksrevy remarks that coming from America the company should be familiar with the expression "outsmarting oneself"

### One more consequence

The National Association of Toy Retailers in Sweden has reported Toys "R"Us to the Institute for Consumer Interest for misleading marketing because they claim in the advertisements that their prices are guaranteed to be the lowest in Sweden.

Everybody in the toy trade in Sweden knows that it is a false statement even if it is true that many of their products are sold at a remarkably low price.

Both articles from Svensk Leksaksrevy [Swedish Toy Review]

## CHILDREN'S CORNER

For an adult to tell a joke to a child can be real tough. They either look at you with a blank face or some shrug their shoulders and utter "You're not funny you know".

The reason may be that children have their own logic, often different from ours.

To learn why you are a "not-funny" but merely embarrassing adult, and to meet the child on his or her level of logic it is necessary to take part of their way of thinking. They also take words and names literally, something that the following story about little Johnny can exemplify:

By the age of eight Johnny was already a skilled reader and used to buy and read all kinds of magazines.

One day he came home carrying a *Playboy* magazine under his arm. Mum was a bit taken aback: "Oh dear", she exclaimed, "do you read such magazines, young man?"

Johnny shook his head: "Ne'er again! The salesman duped me by saying it was a gentleman's magazine and as the name is *Playboy*, I was sure it would be just the thing for me." "And now you don't think it is?" mum asked, somewhat relieved. "Nope! Disappointed that's what I am. Look for yourself, not one picture of a motorbike, not one of a car - only a lot of nude ladies on every page".

I found a couple of child pop riddles on Internet where you may find more child humor on <http://www.bayne.com/kaitlyn/>

Here are two examples that make children laugh, at least the questioner who knows the answer.

Q: Why did it take the monster ten months to finish a book?

A. Because he wasn't very hungry.

Q: What goes up when the rain comes down?

A. An umbrella.

The knock-knock jokes are popular among young children. Here is one submitted by five-year-old **Elizabeth Barsalou** in Atlanta, and her dad **Larry**.

Elizabeth: "Knock knock"

Dad: "Who's there?"

Elizabeth: "Cockadoodle."

Dad: "Cockadoodle, who?"

Elizabeth: "Not cockadoodle who, you silly chicken! Cockadoodledo!"

## **Epilogue**

The last year of the 1990s is nearly two months old, a baby with good health and a promising future. The number of members in ITRA is growing all the time, which is encouraging for the toy research around the world. Among our members are practitioners and toy trade representatives, spokespersons for handicraft traditions in toy making.

Children as well as the field of toy research are global in the sense that no matter where children live they play and use toys either home made or industrially manufactured.

This is a fact, which is well nursed by ITRA, because our members represent a variety of nations with different cultures.

In addition, since some ITRA members are productive writing books, a couple of which are announced in the present ITRA Newsletter, the knowledge of toy meanings is spread, among the readers of ITRA Newsletter at least.

The work on the ITRA Newsletter to be sent out in 1999 is due to be started late February-early March. As usual I ask you please to send in (preferably by E-mail) your written material. Somebody who would like to review a book? Planning a book? Planning or being in the middle of a study?

Finally, a financial reminder: When paying your fee, please instruct your bank to forward Payments Orders Collections and Documentary Credits direct to:

Swedbank, S-105 34 Stockholm. Swift address: SWEDSESS, TELEX: 128 26 SWEDBANK S.  
Account 8169-5, 993.860.016

**The ITRA Secretariat wishes you all a good continuation of 1999**