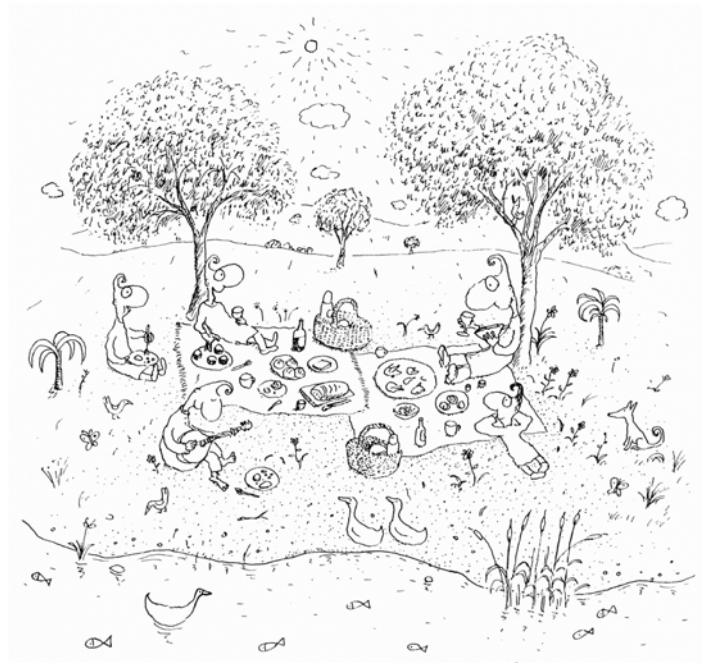


Celebrations for Personal and Collective Health and Wellbeing



(Leunig 2001, p. 6)

**Julianne Hilbers
Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Education
University of Technology, Sydney
2006**

Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

I am grateful to Michael Leunig for permission to include a selection of his cartoons and poems in this thesis. Michael Leunig is an Australian cartoonist, poet and philosopher. He has been declared a national living treasure by the National Trust of Australia. Through his work Leunig often gives voice to the voiceless and uses the every day to explore the inner self and the wider world we live in.

Undertaking this thesis has allowed me the space to listen, explore, reflect and to find voice. This journey has been supported, frustrated and celebrated by a number of people along the way.

I extend my gratitude and thanks to:

Judyth and Beverley for the inspiration and being such great ‘play’ mates.

Everyone who gave took the time to share their thoughts and experiences.

To my lovely friends who provided me with emotional support along the way. In particular,

Kristina, Korina, Sue, Sharon and Wendy.

Andrew and Kerry for your friendship and unconditional love.

Colleen for providing me with such a lovely place to live and work from.

Franziska and my other work colleagues.

Lori for taking on the role of supervisor in the beginning.

Kristina, Andrew and Sue for reading some of my final draft chapters and for your affirmation and feedback.

And special thanks to

Rick Flowers for saying yes to being my supervisor and supporting my phd journey from the start to the finish.

Love is the source

Joy is the power

Life is the celebration

Table of Contents

	Page No.
Abstract	X
Section One Context and Approach	1
Chapter 1 Why Research Celebrations?	3
1.1 Remembering celebratory moments	3
1.2 Research questions	10
1.3 Extent of celebration activity	13
1.4 The scope of this research	16
Chapter 2 The Research Approach	19
2.1 Multiple researcher roles	19
2.2 My influences	19
2.3 My journey	21
2.4 Bodies of data	21
2.4.1 Communities Together funding scheme	22
2.4.2 Academic literature	24
2.4.3 Contemporary discourses	24
2.4.4 Practice-based knowledge	26
2.4.5 Conferences	27
2.5 Analysing the data	27
Chapter 3 Scoping the Literature	32
3.1 Contributions from anthropology, philosophy and sociology	33
3.2 Contributions from mythopoesis, hermeneutics and cosmology	34
3.3 Contributions from event management	35
3.4 Contributions from theology	37
3.5 Contributions from health	37
3.6 Contributions from the creative arts	38
3.7 Contributions from the popular media	39
3.8 Contributions of organisational and business discourses	39
3.9 Analytical accounts of celebration practice	39
Chapter 4 Celebrations: Definitions and Forms	42
4.1 Celebrations, ritual and play	42
4.2 A working definition of celebration for this thesis	45
4.3 Celebratory forms	46

		Page No.
Chapter 5	Celebrations and Contesting Interests in the Australian Context	50
5.1	People, culture and change	50
5.1.1	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	50
5.1.2	Multi-cultural influences	51
5.1.3	Agricultural influences	51
5.1.4	The arts	52
5.1.5	Sport - a national passion	52
5.1.6	Religion, spirituality and secularisation	52
5.1.7	Public holidays	54
5.2	Celebrations as protest	56
5.3	Contemporary influences	56
5.3.1	Socio-economic and political trends	58
5.3.2	Commercial influences	58
5.3.3	Professionalisation	63
5.3.4	Legislation and regulation	68
5.3.5	Media	70
5.3.6	Cultural appropriation	71
5.3.7	A growing concern with the social and environmental impact of celebrations	72
5.4	Taking control	73
Section Two	Celebrations, Health and Wellbeing	76
Chapter 6	Defining Health and Wellbeing	78
6.1	What is health?	78
6.2	Contemporary health discourses	79
6.3	How can celebrations contribute to health and wellbeing?	81
6.4	Current health promotion practices and celebrations	83
Chapter 7	Celebrations, Healthy Lifespan Development, Healing and Hurt	87
7.1	Healthy lifespan development	87
7.2	Rites of passage	89
7.3	Celebrations for healing	96
7.4	Celebrations as difficult times	100
7.4.1	For the individual	100
7.4.2	For communities	103

		Page No.
Chapter 8	Celebrations, Meaning and Identity	107
8.1	Why is meaningfulness important?	108
8.2	Celebrations can foster meaning at an individual, organisational and community level	109
8.3	What is meaningful for one, may be less so for someone else	110
8.4	Accentuating the positive	111
8.5	Celebrations create meaning	114
8.6	Sense of pride	116
8.7	Identity	117
8.8	From the shallows to the depths	119
Chapter 9	Fostering Connectedness through Celebration	122
9.1	Bringing people together	123
9.2	Sense of belonging	127
9.3	Social capital	131
9.4	Social inclusion	138
9.5	Levels of engagement	140
9.6	Connecting to self	142
9.7	Remaining connected across time	143
9.8	Connecting to spirit	143
9.9	Connecting with the earth	147
9.10	Spirals of connection	153
Chapter 10	The Contributions Celebrations can make to Building Community Capacity	155
10.1	Recognising the potential of celebrations to build community capacity	155
10.2	Volunteering: a key indicator of community capacity	158
10.2.1	Challenge of sustaining volunteers and celebrations that build grassroots community capacity	159
10.3	Learning by community, for community and with community	163

		Page No.
Section Three	Planning and Facilitating Celebrations	169
Chapter 11	The Challenges of Creating Celebrations that Foster Unity and Value Diversity	171
11.1	Multicultural celebrations	171
11.2	Positive contributions of multicultural celebrations	172
11.3	Potential limitations of multicultural festivals	178
11.4	Fostering unity	182
Chapter 12	Oppressive and Transformative Celebrations	190
12.1	Oppressive Celebration	191
12.2	Transformative Celebration	193
Chapter 13	Celebration, Creativity and Mythopoesis	199
13.1	Creativity	200
13.2	Celebration as mythopoesis	203
13.3	Story making and telling	204
13.3.1	Naming the world through story	208
13.4	Symbols	209
13.5	Play	211
13.6	Ceremony and ritual	212
13.7	Music, dance and feasting	215
Chapter 14	Celebration Practice	220
14.1	Communities of practice	220
14.2	The celebration context	221
14.3	Practitioner insights and wisdom	224
14.3.1	Deciding on what type of community celebration	224
14.3.2	Getting people involved	228
14.3.3	What makes a celebration authentic	237
14.3.4	Dealing with the challenges of creating and managing celebrations	240
Chapter 15	Revisiting the Celebration Spiral: Reflections and Insights	244
Bibliography		252
Appendix 1	Communities Together Community Celebrations	277

Tables

		Page No.
Table 1	Examination of major influences and trends impacting upon professional celebration practitioners	64
Table 2	Levels of engagement	140
Table 3	Celebration and health gradient	245
Table 4	Celebration practices	249

Diagrams

		Page No.
Diagram 1	Factors impacting on the celebration experience	246
Diagram 2	Moving towards deeper engagement	250

Abstract

Celebrations are pervasive. At a personal level they include birthdays, funerals, weddings, get-togethers, award ceremonies, and parties organised for any number of reasons. At a community level they include faith-based services, public holidays, commemorations and community festivals. These are just a selection. I argue that there is a need to better understand what role celebrations can play to improve health and wellbeing and not just for individuals but for communities.

In this thesis I examine the experiences, context, processes and politics of celebrations and how they contribute to both personal and collective health and wellbeing. Of course, some celebrations make a more meaningful contribution than others. And it is the nature of that difference I seek to understand. The two leading research questions I address are:

- How do celebrations contribute to personal and collective health and wellbeing?
- What is 'healthy' celebration practice?

There are three sections in this thesis. In the first I describe and discuss the Australian context of celebration activities. I also explore definitions of celebrations. I consider celebrations to be an active process made up of both play and ritual. Celebrations seek to focus people's attention, and intention, in a positive way. The resulting celebratory act(s) are a cultural expression of what a particular individual or community values. There are a diversity of celebration forms and practices - open, spontaneous, planned and formal. Each celebration is influenced by, and influences, the context in which it occurs. I will be focusing on celebrations occurring within a community context. A community may be a family, an organization, local community, shared interest group or a whole of society grouping.

In the second section of the thesis I analyse the relationship of celebrations to various dimensions of health and wellbeing. These dimensions include: social connectedness, identity, transitions and lifespan development, and community capacity. A major part of my fieldwork was undertaken in Victoria where I studied 20 community celebrations.

The community celebrations I examined in varying degrees, did positively contribute to personal and collective wellbeing. They did so because they included positive and personally meaningful activities. They explored identity. Celebrations played a role in supporting transitions leading to ongoing healthy development. They provided opportunities for learning; not just knowledge but allowed values to be explored and skills and resources to be gained. They brought people together to interact and fostered a sense of belonging. Celebrations that were health enhancing valued diversity but also explored what unites people. My research confirmed that celebrations can foster our connections; to ourselves, others, the earth, time and the spiritual. They can build relationships between individuals, groups and organizations. They can be spaces that allow for personal and collective healing.

But the degree to which these positive dimensions can be achieved depends on the nature or quality of the celebration practice. And it is the practice of planning and facilitating celebrations that is the focus of the third section of the thesis. Some

celebration practices are health enhancing while others are not. Celebrations can be an opportunity to explore not just ourselves but our communities and how they oppress particular individuals and groups. Many contemporary celebrations do not feel authentic or resonate with people. They often remain at the surface and focus on passive forms of entertainment and the consumption of goods. Deeper engagement can be facilitated through more participatory and creative activities such as dance, playing music, story -making and -telling and ritual; particularly when engaged in with conscious intention.

Celebrations at the individual level can be a positive, affirming experience that is personally meaningful and enables people to move towards their potential. At a collective level they build relationships between the individual, groups and places. They highlight the interconnectedness between all things. And as such they are an integral part of community life.

I conclude by presenting an analytical framework to help understand the nature of celebration practice that is less or more likely to facilitate health and wellbeing. I try to adopt the viewpoint of a practitioner interested in the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. I anticipate this knowledge will stimulate discussion particularly within the health and community sector about how celebration practice can be integrated into the work of health professionals and community workers.