

Editorial: Communication in the Worlds of Children and Youth: Imagination, Language, Performance, and Creative Expression

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We are pleased to present our final issue of *NEOS* as Co-Editors. This diverse and fulsome issue features 15 contributions, composed of 3 invited commentaries and 12 articles, that explore and investigate communication in the worlds of children and youth. Through modes, methods, and approaches centering child-oriented communication—including creative expressions and multimodal methodologies—contributors invite readers into deeper understandings of how children and young people make sense of their world(s) and their place(s) within it. Following the work of Allison James (2007), whom several authors in this issue cite, the pieces collectively work towards seeing “childhood research [as] not simply about making children’s own voices heard in this very literal sense by presenting children’s perspectives. It is also about exploring the nature of the ‘voice’ with which children are attributed, how that voice both shapes and reflects the ways in which childhood is understood, and therefore the discourses within which children find themselves within any Society” (266). Thus, methods, voice, knowledge-creation, and questions about the nature of childhood and communication are central across this issue.

To open this issue of *NEOS*, we offer three commentaries that speak to diverse ways of thinking with children and youth about how they engage in research and communicate about their lives. Julie Spray, author of *The Children in Child Health: Negotiating Young Lives and Health in New Zealand* (Rutgers, 2000), provides us with an illustrated representation of what it looks like to engage young research participants with visual methods. Spray’s illustration reveals so many dimensions of youth-focused research including what it means to build rapport, to be supportive of young people’s efforts amid fear of failure, to do research with (rather than on) young people, and to be reciprocal in our relations. Spray’s work here and elsewhere illuminates the intersections of ethnography, visual representations, and the process of making art as a means of communicating with young people through research.

Like Spray, Caitlin Nunn works at “troubling the borders of both ‘researcher’ and ‘research’” by speaking to arts-based methods that are “affective, embodied, sensuous ways of knowing.” Working with refugee young people, Nunn speaks to how art can illuminate important stories and histories, as well as generate research artifacts that can speak to many different audiences. Nunn reminds readers that pushing the boundaries of research processes and outcomes can be constitutive of a “hopeful practice” among young participants.

And finally, in “Doin’ It Together: Zine Making and Creative Collaboration with Kids and Youth,” carla joy bergman shares about zines as a resource for promoting creative expression and collaboration with people of all ages. bergman’s desire for her family to be deeply connected to a multigenerational community set her on this “joyful path” of zine making. bergman offers key learnings and practical examples for others who may be interested in creative strategies for cultivating community and challenging adult supremacy in their work with children and youth.

The first four research articles closely address the words and actions of young people in what initially seem like minor or innocuous moments of interacting. However, with an ethnographic and child-focused sensitivity to communicative events, Barbara Turk Niskač, Maija-Eliina Sequeira, Nona Moskowitz, and Yael Warshel reveal a richness in children’s expressions of norms, autonomy, identity, or even political resistance under occupation. Each of these authors offers insight into children’s interactions—with peers, teachers, or researchers—by taking seriously how young people navigate their social and political worlds.

In Slovenia, Barbara Turk Niskač examines pre-schoolers’ use of “word play” to creatively engage with objects and imagine them as something else through speech and performance. This word play, however, is also used to navigate, learn, and enforce social norms including fostering inclusion and affirming boundaries. In their sometimes-silly and sometimes-serious back-and-forth conversations, Turk Niskač shows that “children synchronized their conversations in word play and participated in intersubjective meaning-making” to negotiate their place and relations among others.

Similarly, examining back-and-forth dialogue among school-aged children in Helsinki, Maija-Eliina Sequeira explores how children navigate miscommunication and tension. Sequeira observed how tensions grew in a dodgeball game as one young person insisted on playing too aggressively. Several children then tried to communicate their displeasure in order to manage the situation and avoid further conflict, working together to reiterate expected behavioral norms in the game. In both Turk Niskač’s and Sequeira’s articles, children are effectively using their speech, bodies, and actions to navigate relations at school, address tensions around others’ behaviors, and instill fairness and inclusion.

In “A Story of Ideological Becoming: Navigating Self Amidst Competing Ideals,” Nona Moskowitz introduces us to Emiko, a ninth-grade student living in Chichijima, an island several hundred miles from mainland Japan. Moskowitz explores how Emiko navigates the ideological tensions between the competing norms of her home community and mainland society as Emiko prepares to leave her home in Chichijima to attend high school in mainland Japan. Moskowitz provides readers with insight into the complex use of language that young people, such as Emiko, must navigate. For Emiko, language—notably the use of honorifics and self-referential terms—is imbued with ideological significance reflective of her place in the world, emotionally, cognitively, and physically.

Yael Warshel poignantly expands on a seemingly small moment of a Sahrawi child counting numbers on his fingers. With a rich understanding of the religious, ethnic, and national histories of the region, Warshel reads and unpacks this child's apparent miscounting of the number two. Warshel shows how the boy—instead of not understanding his numbers or counting—is instead usurping conventions of counting to demonstrate his political resistance to the Moroccan state. For this boy, a two indicated on his fingers is not a sign for the number two, but rather a call for peace and independence for Western Sahara. Warshel calls for a childist perspective in recognizing the important perspectives and communicative capacities of young people, evoking John Wall's (2019) definition of childism. For Wall (2019), "childism offers the needed critical lens for deconstructing adultism across research and societies and reconstructing more age-inclusive scholarly and social imaginations" (257). Warshel, along with Turk Niskač, Sequeira, and Moskowitz, remind readers that from a childist perspective, it is imperative to take seriously the smaller communicative moments in children's worlds and to take them as meaningful modes of communicating something about their desire to be seen, heard, and included among peers, at school, on the playground, or in the political context of liberation.

While the aforementioned authors are attentive to spoken modes of communication, Laura Moran draws the reader's attention to a pen pal project and the Half-Baked Art Exchange where young people mainly located in the Global North exchange letters with those located in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. Through their letters and artwork, the children begin to convey stories about their lives through a variety of media. The stories further unfold as the artwork is exchanged and morphed between the children. Moran draws upon Hannah Arendt (1958) and Michael Jackson (2013) to speak to the significance of these forms of storytelling; while the artwork may not be coherent narratives in the conventional sense, they are a means of bringing private life into the public realm, cultivating intersubjectivity, creativity, and agency in both process and form. To help the reader see the stories that culminated through these exchanges, Moran includes a photo of the "Full Pink Sun Half a Yellow Sun" in the research article.

Artwork and photographs are also central to Minushree Sharma's research with pavement- and slum-living children in Kolkata. While many of these children recognize the street as their current "home" and attest to the familiarity of their current street life, visual and creative methods revealed their other visions of home. When asked to illustrate "their home and future aspirations" for Sharma as part of the research methodology, many of the young people, however, did not draw the pavement. Instead, they drew sheltered residences away from the streets, often located in their natal villages. Thus, different modes of asking and communicating about "home" reveal the different versions and visions that home can take. Sharma reminds readers that methodological choices have implications for the kinds of answers we may receive and that multimodal research may also illuminate multiple definitions of the concept of "home."

Taking readers into rural India, Jessica Chandras, Devayani Tirthali, and Priya Dabak share maps created by Banjara girls and young women to explore "how [they] make sense of their

identities within a multilingual landscape and its spatial organization through language.” The featured maps introduce readers to the complex and varied ways that young people negotiate emotional, physical, and practical connections to places and spaces in their multilingual world, all of which may be invisible and unnoticeable to adults around them. As Chandras, Tirthali, and Dabak note: “Spaces are not merely dwelled in but are rather constructs of belonging and social relatedness incorporated into how one understands their own identity and position within a location and community.”

Four methodological-oriented contributions in this issue provide readers with examples of arts-based and participatory methods intended to promote deeper insight into the worlds of children and youth through child-centered communication. Exploring the methodological and ethical considerations of ethnographic research with children in care, Christopher Chapman introduces readers to an approach Chapman calls narrative storywork. Chapman details the methodology and shares a story of laughter with three children in foster care, Nanako, Kenji, and Emi, and their foster mother, Misae, prompted by the narrative storywork process. Chapman showcases the diversity of approaches available to researchers using narrative storywork to connect with young people in care and deconstruct barriers in research dominated by verbal modes of communication.

Like Chapman, Abigail Shabtay introduces readers to a creative methodological approach for engaging children and youth in research. Shabtay explores embodied tableaux, a dramatic technique that allows for the visual presentation of themes, stories, feelings, and/or relationships through the construction of a scene frozen in time. Drawing on work with young participants in Toronto, Canada, Shabtay highlights embodied tableaux as an approachable, accessible, and adaptable methodology for young participants of all ages and abilities, allowing youth to draw others into an embodied exploration of how they experience the world. As Shabtay notes, such “arts-based, child-centered techniques can help strengthen communication with participants and contribute to a more well-rounded understanding of children and young people’s lived experiences.”

Continuing the theme of creative and expressive methodological approaches, Élodie Razy and co-authors offer a multimodal article highlighting multimodal approaches to providing feedback to children and youth who participate in research. Razy et al. invite readers to learn about the process and outcomes of a workshop intended to create feedback to share with young participants in various research projects. Razy et al. note that the research feedback process begins by the researcher providing prepared feedback on the results of research to child and youth participants, which is then followed by young participants in turn providing feedback to researchers. To support researchers in moving beyond “ready-made recipes” commonly used in the research feedback process with young people, the workshop offered participants the opportunity to think in creative, novel, and contextualized ways about how to share research feedback with children and youth. In this multimodal article, the authors detail the process involved in the workshop and invite readers to engage with the workshop outputs by visiting links to creations from participants.

In “Navigating Ethical Dilemmas in Participatory Research with Young People,” Harla Octarra importantly speaks to the unexpected occurrences that can emerge in youth-focused and youth-driven participatory research. In the case of this study of sexual abuse among adolescent girls, the youth researchers collaborating on the project took it upon themselves to interview a young sexual abuse survivor. Only learning about it after the fact, Octarra and the research team then had to take several steps to mitigate the impact of the harm including the distress felt by those involved following the interview. The vulnerability of Octarra’s piece and the contemplation of complicated questions around youth autonomy versus researcher control are important ones worthy of our attention. Octarra importantly suggests “it is imperative to engage in further research and exchange of experiences to provide support and guidance to others facing similar ethical challenges in the context of academic and participatory projects.” We offer this as a final piece in the collection of research articles as an opportunity to reflect on situated ethics in participant projects with young people.

And finally, Kate Feinberg Robbins’ manuscript is featured in the standing column on equity and racial justice in the *Constellations* section of this issue. Exploring individual and communal approaches to disciplinary practices in elementary schools, Feinberg Robbins emphasizes the high stakes of schools continuing to rely on individualized disciplinary approaches for Black children, particularly Black boys, and argues for a shift to communal approaches that see every individual as “essential to the functioning of their community” and emphasize shared responsibility for supporting community members to come back into the fold when challenges, conflict, and disconnection arises. While individualized disciplinary approaches promote exclusion and othering, communal approaches foster the inclusion necessary for equity and racial justice.

We offer this final issue with pride for what we have been able to accomplish as the NEOS Editorial Team over the last two years and with gratitude for all of the people who contributed to this endeavor. As we sign off on our final issue of NEOS as Co-Editors, we (Rebecca Sanford and Jennifer Shaw) would like to express sincere gratitude for the tremendous amount of academic, affective, and unpaid labor that has gone into our past issues. This includes the labor of the authors and peer-reviewers who worked through ideas and ripened news ways of thinking about ethnographic methods, ethical research with young people, and conceptual ways of centering children’s and youths’ knowledges and lives. This also includes the labor of the tremendously skillful and committed team of Assistant Editors and Developmental Editors (Anne Marie Bedard, Chelsea Cutright, Alexea Howard, Manya Kagan, and Chang Liu, and Matilda Stubbs), along with those on the team who have contributed as Copyeditor (Sujatha Subramanian), Peer-Review Coordinator (Alexea Howard), Digital Scholarship Intern (Chloe Bozak), and Web Coordinator (Kim Garza). Most of these roles were entirely unpaid and thus depended on the service of graduate students and early-career scholars whose work and expertise does not go unnoticed. Although recognition is not remuneration, we do see and appreciate your behind-the-scenes yet essential work that went into producing so many great issues of NEOS.

It was imperative to us to maintain *NEOS*' commitment to equity including our predecessors' (Courtney Everson and Maria Barbero) standing column on equity and racial justice. We also sought to establish the Developmental Editor role as well as guidelines and processes for the developmental editing track so that early-career scholars and those facing other barriers to publication may be meaningfully included in emerging literature that constitutes child and youth studies within and beyond anthropology. None of this would have been possible without the extremely supportive Anthropology of Children and Youth Interest Group board members including ACYIG Convenors Ida Fadzillah Leggett and Elise Berman, the *NEOS* team, and all the authors and peer reviewers who came along for the ride. We extend our utmost gratitude.

We look forward to the future of *NEOS* with incoming Co-Editors Manya Kagan and Chelsea Cutright. Both have been extraordinary Assistant and Developmental Editors for several issues of *NEOS* — and both are *NEOS* authors. Their skill, experience, and commitment to their scholarship will certainly enable *NEOS* to thrive.

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