

Visual and Performance-Based Research Feedback for Children and Youth: at the Crossroads of the Arts and the Social Sciences

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The [workshop](#) “Giving research feedback to children: beyond ready-made recipes and asymmetric relationships?” was initially intended as a so-called “Lab” of the [Anthropology of Children and Youth Network](#) for the [2020 EASA Conference](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, it took place on June 5th and 6th, 2023 at the [University of Liege](#) (Belgium).

The [workshop](#) was designed to share researcher experiences on the intersection between the arts and the social sciences and its role in the creation of child- and youth-oriented analyzed ethnographic findings. The outcomes of this workshop were intended to create feedback for children and youth once researchers return to the field. The idea grew out of method-centered publications and reframed some of the arguments of the collective book “[Children in Ethnographic Restitution: Standpoints, Mechanisms, Processes](#)” on research feedback (“restitution”¹) to children from a methodological and a political perspective:

Restitution is used here in its broadest, all-encompassing, and operational meaning. It designates an occasional mechanism as much as a continuous one, conceived from the start of fieldwork and aiming to share the products of the work carried out with the

individual and collective participants, during and after the research, but also a dynamic mechanism, or even daily spontaneous exchanges, material and immaterial, apparently trivial, and often invisible, the “services” given and received by the anthropologist during and after fieldwork. (Razy et al. 2022)

Research feedback is considered as a double (or more) and bi-directional process (researcher/children and children/researcher). The first step is to give feedback to children; the second step is the feedback of the children to the researchers’ feedback. This can be repeated as many times as needed in a participatory and iterative perspective.

For an in-depth understanding of communication processes, the workshop aimed to concretely test the use and effectiveness of artistic media and to measure the added value of collaborative work in addressing the results feedback process to children and youth in research projects. This process of checking and discussing our analysis and interpretations with these young people follows our research – including fundamental, participatory-action, and community-based approaches – that are part of our methodology (Atalay et al. 2019; Bonanno 2018; Tondeur 2018; Sarcinelli et al. 2022), and all of which are ethically important to children and youth in the field.

Through their artistic skills, which are often handcrafted, eighteen researchers from six different countries participated in the workshop and responded to the following question: how can the arts-based feedback process grounded in the field be ethically and epistemologically improved to help mitigate too often asymmetrical relationships, such as between children/adults, generations, researchers/children but also between genders, classes, “races,” and south/north? How can the cross-fertilization between arts and science move us beyond ready-made recipes when it comes to feedback?

A traditional research article would not enable us to share our creative and collective reflections: “Patch-working and weaving together thoughts and expressions by multiple hands went hand in hand with the visualizations” (Sarcinelli et al 2022, 153). For this reason, we share here a multimodal paper, interweaving links to the digital exhibition (paintings, singing, poetry, collages, games, storytelling, mapping, music) of the workshop’s results already published online: “[Giving research feedback to children. Connecting Arts and Social Sciences.](#)”.

Context and rationale

Methodological literature in Childhood Studies generally includes ready-to-use tools or guidelines and often fails to consider the children’s overall social contexts and their “cultures of communication” (Christensen 2004), while not always achieving “ethical symmetry” (Christensen and Prout, 2002). Such a position often implies that using participatory or collaborative methods is **the only** way to promote the participation of children and youth. Doing so, it renders a critical debate on feedback impossible (Razy et al. 2022).

Notwithstanding, feedback can dispense with any participatory or collaborative mechanism and pre-existing protocol. Moreover, researchers can unintentionally be adult-centric, failing to understand children as a socially and historically situated category (Sarcinelli 2015). On the contrary, they may essentialize stereotypical representations of local or globalized childhood (Johnson et al. 2012; Veale 2010). For instance, drawings or photographs are used to make children and/or anthropologists generate data in an original and critical perspective (Spray 2021; Morelli 2021-22), but they can also be tools used for ease, with an apparent positive pay-off, although superficial and without any epistemological or ethical basis. Therefore, collaborative data production does not necessarily guarantee ethical feedback. Sometimes, feedback is also not recommended (Dominguez Reyes 2022).

In order to explain the workshop's approach, two points relating to key contextual elements need to be addressed. First, researchers may work with artists during or after their research due to a dedicated budget (Massart and Denommée 2020; Morelli 2021). Others, by choice or due to budget constraints, will rely on their own skills. Secondly, the question of feedback is linked to the current policy on Open Science and communication with civil society and two different situations need to be distinguished: feedback addressed to the children and youth who participated in the research and feedback destined to a wider audience concerned by the issue (i.e. "[L'alimenpédie enfantine](#)").

Collective thinking and collaboration

By bringing together social scientists conducting fieldwork with children and youth, this workshop adopted a collaborative and innovative stance in a context where lone work is considered the usual standard. Researchers were given arts and crafts material, a guitar, access to the Internet, printers, etc., after viewing or listening to [inspiring alternate feedback for children](#) based on artistic methods (Vaucher, an illustrated book; Sarcinelli, a comics strip; Dobbels, an audio-video book; Willemsen, a rhyming music piece).

Within the framework described above, inspired by these examples and encouraged throughout the sessions, participants worked on their own but also helped each other. They chose either to work on feedback aimed at the children and youth who participated in their research or on feedback aimed at those from the wider public.

The workshop started with *small groups* (three to four people) in order to choose which of their own findings to work on. Group sessions alternated with individual or paired work intended to transform intentions into [a series of small, concrete artistic creations](#).

Group sessions aimed to open the floor to collective critical reflections and proposals to deepen the rationale and dynamic of feedback. An *initial group session* helped individuals to make decisions concerning the findings to be presented and the medium to be used for feedback; a *second group session* was dedicated to sharing the results selected for feedback.

Paired work was based on the research subject or the research participants' age group or social and health conditions. Artistic skills were worked on in depth in a collaborative way in order to *initially* co-develop a draft output of the feedback to convey and *later* further develop the feedback presentation for the exhibition. Finally, *individual* work was aimed at completing the [individual feedback project](#).

These various working modes allowed each researcher to be guided by and to benefit from new ideas, or to receive artistic support, rooted in a comprehensive approach to the context, the issues and the audience, and facilitated through dialogue between researchers. For example, [Sow, an anthropologist and musician, improvised an emotionally appropriate guitar piece to Nona's lyrics](#). Working on divorce among African migrant families in Belgium, the latter wrote a text on the analysis of the children's and youths' words of pain about their parents' separation. With the children in the field being familiar with slam poetry and short descriptive lyrics being more accessible, the mediating role of this form of expression helped the researcher render his findings more easily understandable to the children. This could be a first step towards hearing the children's perspective on the analysis and recognizing their suffering by amplifying their voice on an issue where they are usually silenced and feel ignored. Following this first step, co-writing workshops could then be organized by the researcher.

Alternating in-depth small-scale work and collective artistic cross-fertilization with questions, ideas, critiques, and support improved the final productions. Sharing and the time devoted to the creations allowed workshop participants to put aside their inhibitions ("I can't draw", "I can't sing") in a co-constructed collaborative safe space.

Conclusions: childhood, children, youth, researchers and arts beyond ready-made recipes

In individual research projects, the process of providing feedback results to the people involved in the research process is often a solitary and an intimate quest for the benefit of children and youth. The challenge of the workshop was to collectively call upon the many skills of the different workshop participants in creating feedback consistent with the experiences and aspirations of children and rooted in their daily lives.

Researchers made ethical use of ethnographic knowledge on the children's communities, social contexts, and "cultures of communication" (Christensen 2014) specific to each research study (Razy 2018). The workshop was meant to create a space for researchers to engage with research feedback to children and youth through artistic productions. This includes displaying or performing and further assessing such analyses and interpretations in the field with the people involved.

Using their own fieldwork as a starting point, workshop participants cross-culturally reflected on (micro)local and globalized representations of childhood and youth. They guided each other through skills development and initiated grounded visual or performance-based feedback

(singing, reading, drawing, painting...) in order to communicate with children in a more comprehensible and inclusive way during the first step of the feedback process and during the following steps in a dialogical approach. This experience allowed for innovation, facilitated overcoming one's fears, and led to challenging oneself and getting out of one's comfort zone during the research feedback process.

To conclude, several lessons can be drawn from this workshop. First, one should give oneself permission to try; in fact, anyone can work on their research feedback through their own skills, including those with a limited budget or who feel untalented. When preparing in-depth grounded feedback, the researchers noticed that ready-made recipes were often useless given the diversity of contexts and issues and the specificity of their participants' situations. They also noted that multiple resources can be used at both an individual and a collective level. Finally, we can argue that feedback proposals are the outcomes of various compromises between (1) the personal competencies of social scientists, (2) the budget and time at researchers' disposal, (3) researchers' knowledge of the children's communities, and (4) the experiences and aspirations of children which are rooted in their daily lives. The feedback process considered as a compromise represents an opportunity to renew ways of thinking, doing, and undertaking the data analysis process itself.

Whilst the importance of research feedback is increasingly recognized in the social sciences, the richness of an arts-based collaborative approach is yet to gain acceptance (Sarcinelli et al. 2022). By sharing experiences and questions, making use as a group of appropriate media, and applying a collaborative approach, workshop participants made arguably better concrete feedback proposals within the digital exhibition. Thus, the whole process guaranteed more ethical feedback, with the hope of mitigating asymmetrical relationships. Finally, these lessons should contribute to the general debate on research results feedback towards all audiences, in particular the more vulnerable ones. We believe that interdisciplinary dialogue within the social sciences, and beyond, could help develop this culture of feedback ethically and epistemologically grounded in the field to the benefit of participants. Another direction for future research concerns the necessary thoroughness of the use of the arts in the social sciences. Finally, it seems imperative to study the effects of the local uses of research results by the populations concerned (as the following steps of the feedback process) to both further develop co-constructed knowledge and its social and political situatedness.

Notes

¹ Due to the limited word count, the book's discussion of the feedback process, based on the notion of 'ethnographic restitution' from an intercultural and translinguistic perspective, cannot be presented here (see Razy et al. 2022).

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Author Biographies

Élodie Razy ([profile](#)) is a professor of Anthropology at the Faculty of Social Sciences (FaSS, [IRSS-LASC](#), University of Liège, Belgium). She studies the early (gendered) genesis and restructuration of the body, the person, affects, and identities at the intersection of the social and cultural constructions of childhood and the agency of children. Her research on family and institutional configurations is carried out in various field sites and contexts (e.g., kinship, religion, migration, environment) in Mali, Mexico, and Europe. She currently co-leads a project entitled "[Early childhood and the challenge of gender in an intercultural context](#)." She is Co-Chair of the Anthropology of Children and Youth Network ([EASA](#)) and the journal *AnthropoChildren*, and Editor-in-Chief of the "[Mondes de l'enfance](#)" publication series (PULg).

Charles-Édouard de SUREMAIN ([profile](#)) social anthropologist at the Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD), is Director of the PALOC team “[Patrimoines locaux, environnement et mondialisation](#)” at the Musée national d'Histoire naturelle de Paris (MNHN) in France. He is co-chair of the Anthropology of Children and Youth network ([EASA](#)). He has worked on children's feeding practices, care and associated domestic rituals (Congo, Bolivia, Peru). In Mexico, he is studying the role of children in patrimonialization and food transition, to better understand the dynamics of local knowledge transmission, inequalities, and the place of the “future generations” in a globalized world. He is co-editor of two online journals: [Anthropology of Food](#) and [AnthropoChildren](#).

Mélanie Vivier is a PhD candidate in Social and Political Sciences (anthropology) and forms part of the [Food2Gather](#) project. Her research interests cross the fields of anthropology of childhood and children, anthropology of migration and the anthropology of food. Her thesis focuses on the place and the role of food in the daily life of children and family in asylum-seeking situation in the Province of Liège (Belgium). She is a member to the Laboratory of Social and Cultural Anthropology (LASC) at the Institute of Research in Social Sciences (IRSS), part of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FaSS, University of Liège, Belgium).

Mathewos Belissa is an Assistant Professor in the Institute of Cooperatives and development studies in Ambo University, Ethiopia, and currently carrying out PhD research with Addis Ababa University in areas of social capital. He has been involved in research and development related to children, including Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) focusing in particular on the empowerment of children and the role of Children in social networking. He also led a project on the impact of Warsa (the tradition of sharing wife) on the development of children and their siblings (from a different father). Children and youth related studies and development interventions are his areas of expertise and experience. Email: matibelissa@yahoo.com

Léa Collard completed her master's degree in anthropology at the University of Liège (Belgium) in 2021. She currently works as an assistant at the Faculty of Social Sciences (FaSS, IRSS-LASC, ULiège) and as a researcher in a project led by Professors Florence Pirard and Élodie Razy, entitled “[Early childhood and the challenge of gender in an intercultural context](#).” As part of this project, she conducts fieldwork in two day nurseries located in Wallonia, Belgium. Her overarching areas of interest lie at the confluence of childhood, the relationship with nature, and gender.

Marie Daugey ([profile](#)) is a post-doctoral researcher in Anthropology and associate member of the Laboratory of Social and Cultural Anthropology (LASC) at the University of Liège. Her PhD thesis (2016) focused on the relationships between initiation rites and territorial connections among the Kabyè people in Togo. For 5 years, her postdoctoral research (Fyssen Foundation & FRS-FNRS, ULiège) dealt with the way in which children participate in rituals in this same society, and in doing so, take part in certain social changes. She continues to be

interested in childhood and children in her more recent research on the social uses of jewelry and adornments in Africa.

Rachel Dobbels is a PhD candidate at IRSS-LASC (FaSS, ULiège, Belgium), works on migration, politics, religion, food, and heritage within marketplaces. Her thesis focuses on the construction of identities at the heart of interactions between salespeople and shoppers, examining the dialectical relationship between authenticity and otherness. Her fieldwork takes place in Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom.

Fanny Dragozis is a second-year Master's student in Anthropology at the University of Liège. Her dissertation focuses on gender and intercultural issues in early childhood, as part of the project entitled "[Early childhood and the challenge of gender in an intercultural context](#)." She is particularly interested in the place of children and young people both in society and within the discipline of anthropology.

Éloïse Maréchal, PhD candidate in Anthropology at the University of Liège (IRSS-LASC, FaSS), has been working on blood donation in French-speaking Belgium since her master's thesis. After studying professional practices during blood drives, she worked on developing an understanding of the motivations for giving blood as well the social life of blood between donors and recipients in Belgium. The main themes she explores are: bioeconomies, the body, and the social life of things, techniques and biomedicine. In her thesis, she examines the development of "blood products" through sociotechnical processes within the Blood Service of the Red Cross and their use in a hospital context.

Perry Msoka is a third-year PhD candidate at the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research. She is also engaged in a research project by Professors Ria Reis and Dr. Marion Sumari entitled "Implementation of Point of Care HIV Viral Load Monitoring to Improve Viral Load Suppression among Children, adolescents and Young People Living with HIV in East Africa". In this project, she coordinates research assistants, field staff and data managers in their work.

Edouard Nona Ibunda is a PhD candidate in Social and Political Sciences (Anthropology), at the Faculty of Social Sciences (FaSS, ULiège, Belgium). His research interests include the anthropology of migration, kinship, religion and, to a certain extent, the anthropology of childhood. His thesis focuses on the ethnography of divorce in Belgium. He is a member of the Laboratory of Social and Cultural Anthropology (LASC) at the the Institute of Research in Social Sciences (IRSS).

Alice Sophie Sarcinelli ([profile](#)) is Associate Professor of Social Anthropology of Family, Kinship and Gender at University of Paris Cité, member of "Centre de recherche sur les liens sociaux" and of "Institut du Genre". Her PhD thesis – completed at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* under the supervision of Didier Fassin – was awarded the Richelieu Solennel Prize of the Chancellery of Paris in 2015 and published open access (*Des*

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Aboubakry Sow holds a PhD in Anthropology from the University of Liège, Belgium, and is the author of “Musique et Jeux. La lutte Sippiro au village mauritanien de Djéwol”, (L'Harmattan, 2021). Associate member of the PALOC team (IRD-MNHN) in Paris and of the Laboratory of Social and Cultural Anthropology (LASC) at the University of Liège, he is a member and research fellow at URICA/IFAN (Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar). From 2018 to 2022, he was a post-doctoral fellow in the “Eco-Sen pour une Analyse Écopoétique des Littératures de la Vallée du Fleuve Sénégal” project (INALCO/CNRS, LLACAN). A multi-instrumentalist, he is the author of the International album “Doktan Kotawa Mauritania” (Le Recours aux Sources) album (“Gong Records”, Belgium, 2012).

Yisak Tafere is a researcher at The Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and The African Worlds Institute. He has been the lead qualitative researcher for [Ethiopia Young Live](#) (Oxford University) since 2007 managing multiple studies. He has published over 35 articles, book chapters, and working papers. Yisak has a MA in Social Anthropology from Addis Ababa University and a PhD in *Interdisciplinary Child Research* from the Norwegian University of Sciences and Technology (NTNU). His research interests include qualitative methods, childhood poverty, intergenerational poverty, well-being and transitions; early marriage of girls, aspirations, education, child work, youth and social protection. Email: yisaktafere@gmail.com / Twitter: @yisaktaf

Edwige Tiam graduated from the University of Liège (Social and Cultural Anthropology Section) in June 2023. She focused on migration issues during her studies in anthropology. In particular, she has explored the migration of youths coming to Belgium from sub-Saharan Africa, studying their path as asylum seekers, their experiences in a reception center, the reception system itself, and their youths' agency. She analyzed the tension between the legal status of young sub-Saharan migrants as minors and their personal, collective and institutional realities.

Lorena Ulloa is an anthropologist, assistant and PhD candidate at the Laboratory of Social and Cultural Anthropology (LASC) at the Institute of Research in Social Sciences (IRSS), Faculty of Social Sciences (FASS, University of Liège, Belgium). Her doctoral research is dedicated to the relationship between Chilean political exile, generations and transmission. In Chile, her professional experience was related to heritage mediation in the museum sector. Her associative experience is linked to participation in heritage, artistic and historical memory projects aimed at children and young people (Chile, Guatemala, Belgium).

Carla Vaucher is a post-doctoral researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. Her PhD research in medical anthropology (University of Lausanne, 2023) focused on the experience of West African children suffering from congenital heart defects in the context of their medical travel to Switzerland as part of a NGO

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Élodie Willemsen graduated from the University of Liège (Social and Cultural Anthropology Section). Her final master thesis was an action-research within a project of support to parenthood of migrant families in Liège (Belgium). She analyzed this support and the care offered by professionals from the social sector (social workers, psychologists, psychomotor therapists). During her internship in the “Childhood, families and institutions” module, she developed an interest in the educational methods implemented in a kindergarten using alternative pedagogical methods and reflected on the feedback of her “child-friendly” research through the use of storytelling, singing and painting. She worked as a researcher in a project about the outdoors (<https://www.one.be/professionnel/recherches/recherches/investir-l-exterieur-avec-les-enfants/>) and is currently training coordinator for early childhood professionals at the “Recherche et Innovation Enfants-Parents-Professionnel·le·s” (RIEPP, Belgium).

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