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

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# 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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# ACYIG Advisory Board Update

**Ida Fadzillah Leggett, PhD (University of Illinois)**
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Dear *NEOS* Readers,

As we approach the final months of 2023, I want to acknowledge another ending and thank the outgoing *NEOS* editors Jennifer Shaw and Rebecca L. Sanford, and welcome the new editors Manya Kagan and Chelsea Cutright. I wish them all the best and look forward to working with Manya and Chelsea on future NEOS publications.

We had a lively and productive ACYIG Reception at the 2023 AAA Conference in Toronto. It was wonderful to meet childhood/youth scholars from all over the world as well as see people face-to-face after years of virtual meetings. From the Reception and the ACYIG Board and Business Meetings, we noticed some common issues I would like to address. The main observation was that—while there were several conference papers presented on this issue—there was a relative dearth of AAA panels organized around issues of childhood or youth. Based on this, I would like to encourage more ACYIG scholars to not just engage with the topic, but also share to their work and research interests with a wider audience. If you are a scholar of childhood or youth, please consider

- organizing a session or presenting a paper for the next AAA focusing on childhood and/or youth.
- organizing a session or presenting a paper for another conference, like the EASA (European Association of Social Anthropologists) Conference, to be held July 2024 in Barcelona.
- participating in graduate student-focused virtual workshops organized by our graduate student representatives. For more details please email Adriano de Francesco (adef988@aucklanduni.ac.nz) or Christopher Chapman (christopher.chapman@sant.ox.ac.uk).
- submitting your most recent article or book to be featured in the ACYIG Spotlight on Scholarship section of the ACYIG Webpage. For more information contact Julie Spray at julie.spray@universityofgalway.ie.
- entering your recently published book for the next ACYIG Book Prize in 2024.

Additionally, the ACYIG Board is beginning the process of organizing a Conference for Childhood and Youth Scholars. Are you interested in participating in the organization process? Please contact me at Ida.Leggett@mtsu.edu. Do you have any questions or comments about the ACYIG? Would you like to get more involved in any of our initiatives? Email me at Ida.Leggett@mtsu.edu.

Ida Fadzillah Leggett
Convener, ACYIG

# Call for Papers for Spring 2024 Issue: Building Blocks of Knowledge: Investigating Education, Learning, and Knowing in Children and Youth

Education, learning, and knowing are a large part of child development and socialization processes, but the ways in which education, learning, and knowing are framed, developed, and practiced vary across places, people, and cultures. Child development and education researchers have focused extensively on how children learn and come to know things about the world, but these issues are discussed and categorized in different ways across these and other disciplines. In this issue, *NEOS* invites anthropological inquiries of experiences and engagement with childhood and education, learning, and knowing. We welcome broad interpretations of education not only as a process in which formal knowledge is transferred from an adult to a child but also as a process that moves in other directions and includes social, cultural, and emotional ways of knowing that can be transferred between peers and the environment.

We invite submissions that focus on primary and original research around practices, policies, and performances of education as well as children's and youth's explorations of alternative ways of learning and knowing. Potential topics include:

- learning initiated by children and passed on to other adults and children, such as children teaching adults about social media, technology and contemporary culture;
- learning not directly outlined in curricula or child development programs and relating to areas of knowledge often ignored, such as pop culture, fashion, etc.;
- indigenous or non-Western perspectives and constructs of education and learning~~;~~
- informal knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation, including social knowledge of how to act, play, and talk;
- technological and social knowledge as well as digital activism;
- navigating school and academic spaces, invoking ideas stemming from "sociocultural capital" theory promoted by Bourdieu, Foucault's ideas of power relations and institutional architectures, as well as critical race theories that focus on the navigation of the 'hidden curriculum;'
- other forms and practices of learning and education (through the arts, embodied learning).
- informal education and leadership skills;
- 21st-century skills, developing critical knowledge and imagination;
- religious knowledges and faith;
- learning between peers or siblings;
- learning from and with nature vis a vis plants and animals, and navigating the environment, including skills like swimming, hiking, survival, and crafting;
- learning and knowing surrounding self-care, including skills such as cooking, financial literacy, hygiene, etc.;
- other forms of learning (through the arts, embodied learning).

We also invite authors to explore other topics that relate generally to education, learning, and knowing among children and youth, both within formal boundaries and outside of them.
We invite short-form original research articles (1,200 words max, excluding references) that address the issue's theme. *NEOS* also welcomes short pieces (1,200 words max, excluding references) on scholarship and applied research that uplifts racial, economic, and social justice and the dismantling of systemic oppression for a dedicated standing column on anti-racism and equity in child and youth studies.

*NEOS* is an open-access publication of the Anthropology of Children and Youth Interest Group (ACYIG) of the American Anthropological Association (AAA). We publish research on childhood and youth from scholars working across the four fields of anthropology, as well as from those interdisciplinary fields in conversation with anthropological theories and methods. Articles published in *NEOS* undergo a double-anonymous peer-review process.

The deadline for submissions is **February 14, 2024** (end of the day). Rolling submissions prior to February 14th are also welcome. While not required, authors are encouraged to submit a brief message about their intent to submit to the Co-Editors by January 31, 2024. The *NEOS* Editorial Team may be reached at acyig.editor@gmail.com. Visit our website for further information on *NEOS*, as well as submission guidelines and instructions. You may access the submission portal for the Spring 2024 issue here.

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

# Drawing Talks

**Julie Spray, PhD (University of Galway)**
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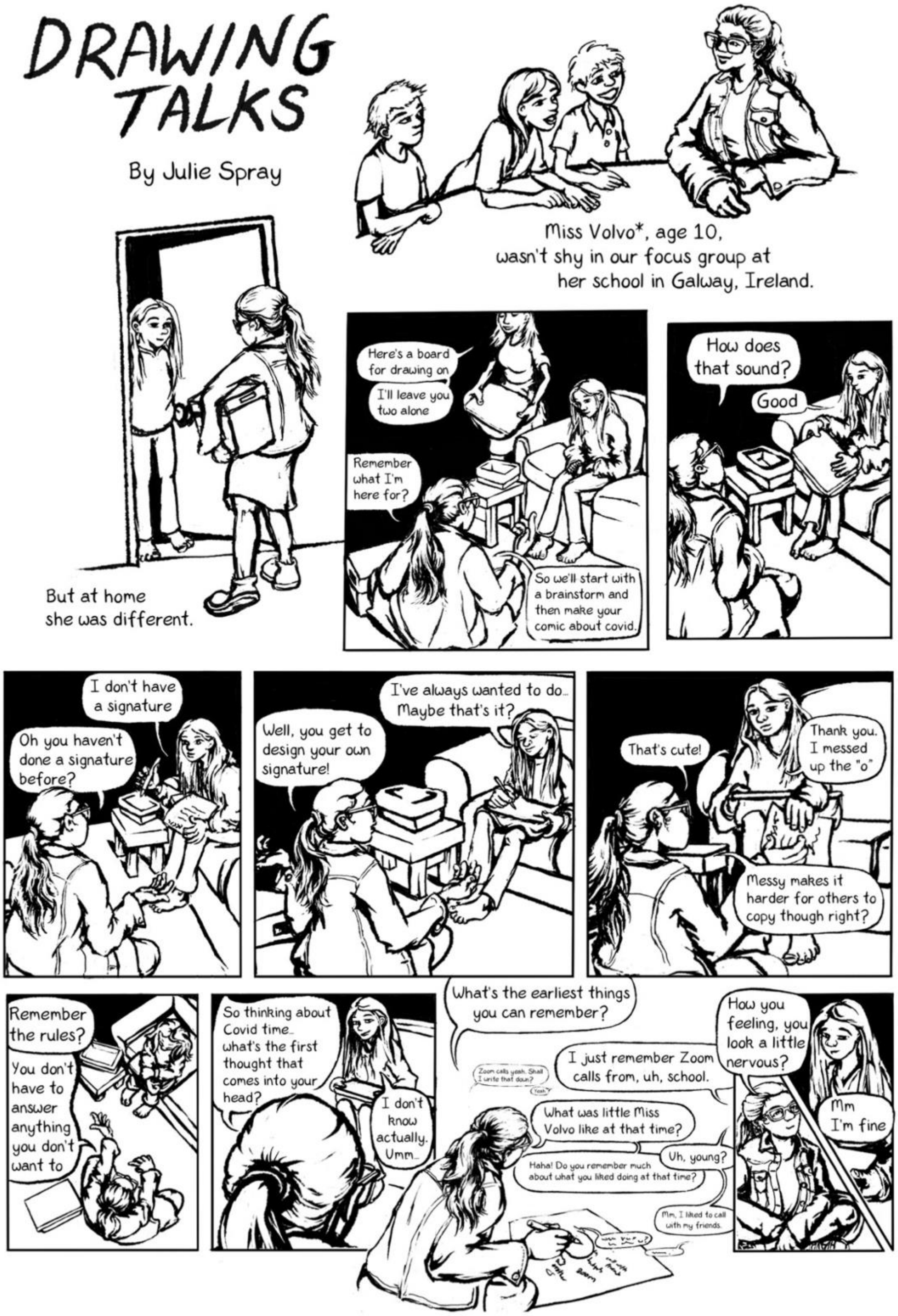
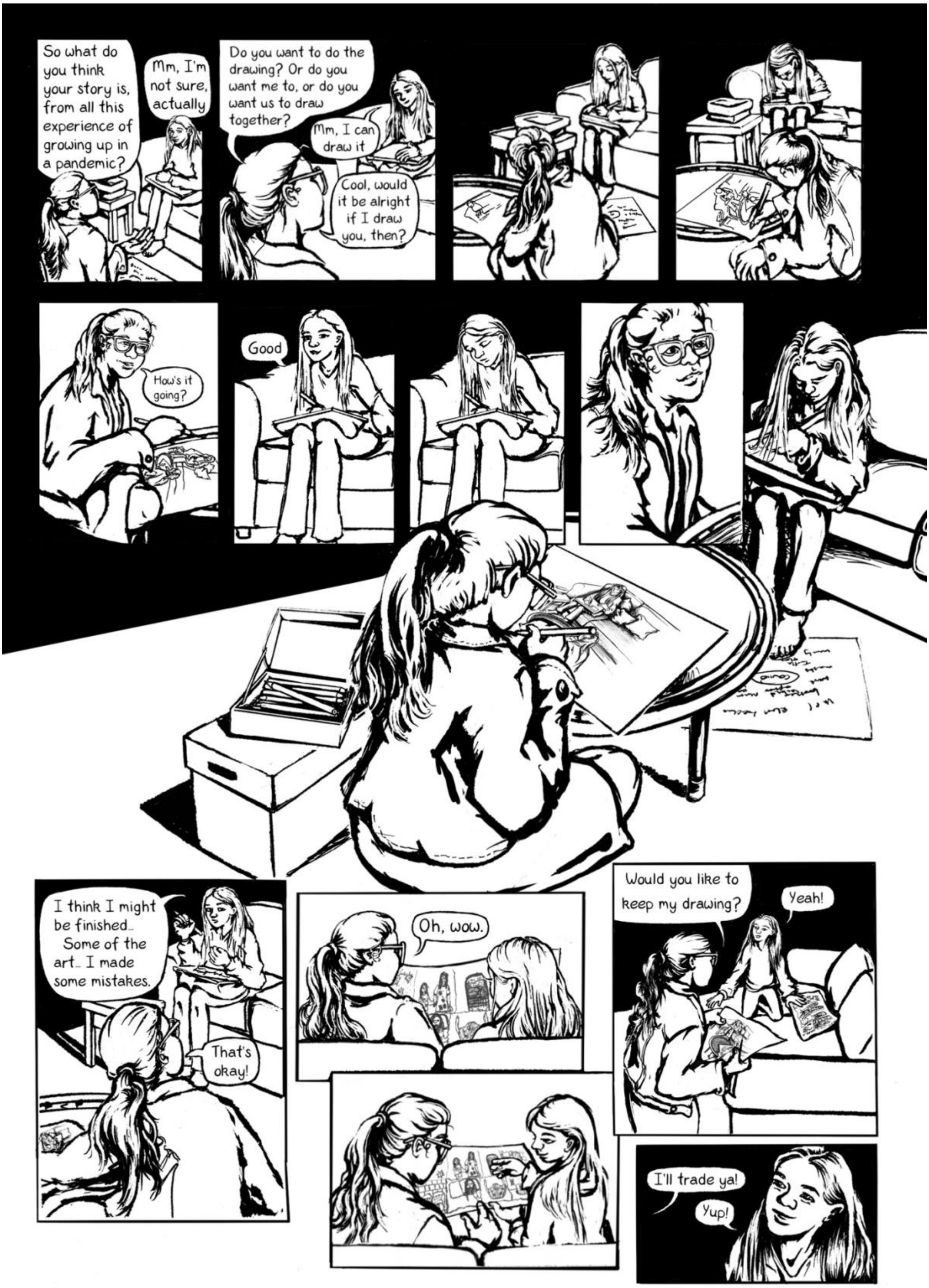
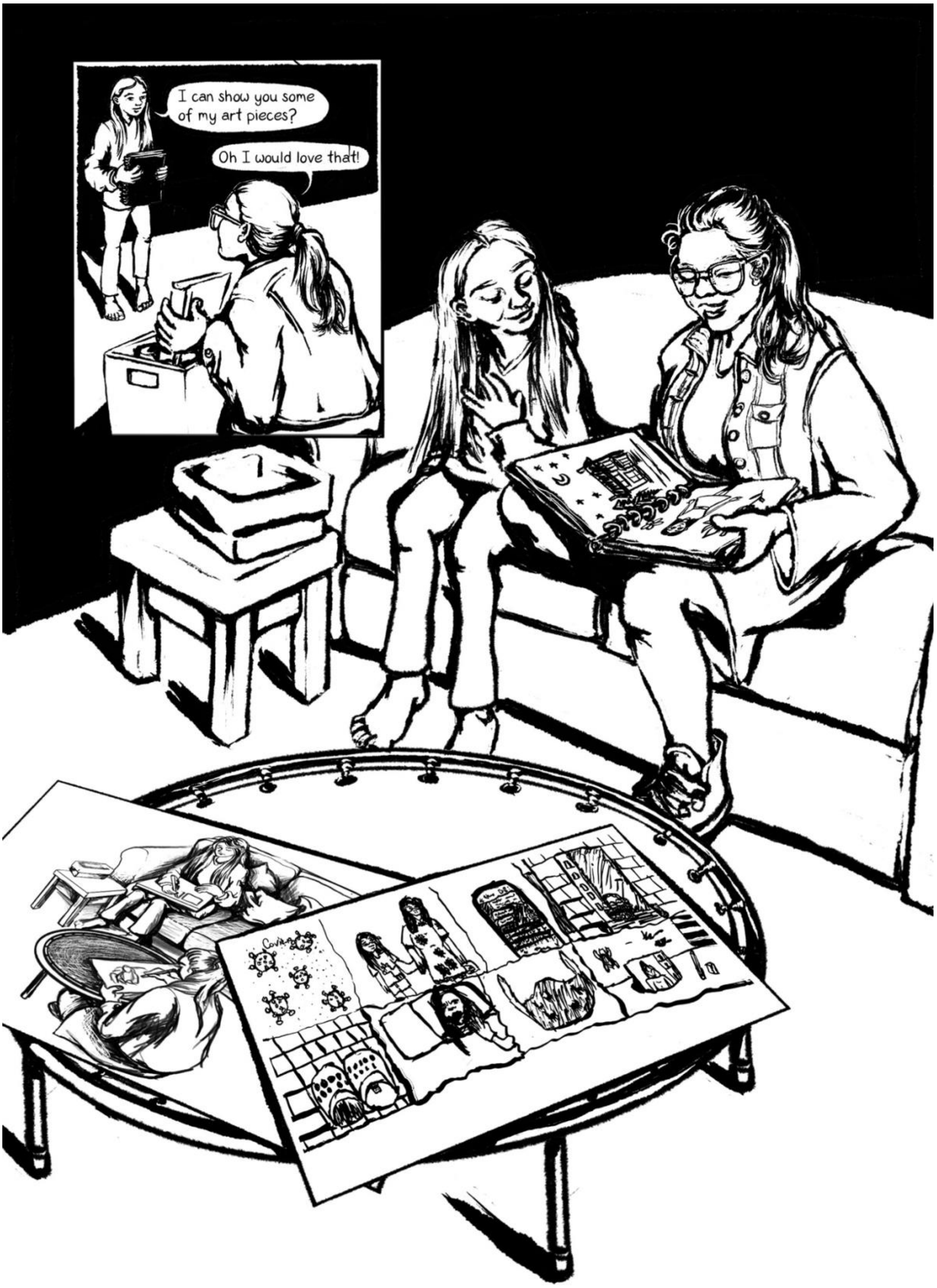

DRAWING TALKS
By Julie Spray
Miss Volvo*, age 10, wasn't shy in our focus group at her school in Galway, Ireland.
But at home she was different.
Here's a board for drawing on
I'll leave you two alone
Remember what I'm here for?
So we'll start with a brainstorm and then make your comic about covid.
How does that sound?
Good
I don't have a signature
Oh you haven't done a signature before?
Well, you get to design your own signature!
I've always wanted to do… Maybe that's it?
That's cute!
Thank you. I messed up the "o"
Messy makes it harder for others to copy though right?
Remember the rules?
You don't have to answer anything you don't want to
So thinking about Covid time… what's the first thought that comes into your head?
I don't know actually. Umm…
What's the earliest things you can remember?
I just remember Zoom calls from, uh, school.
Zoom calls yeah. Shall I write that down?
Yeah
What was little Miss Volvo like at that time?
Uh, young?
Haha! Do you remember much about what you liked doing at that time?
Mm, I liked to call with my friends.
How you feeling, you look a little nervous?
Mm I'm fine


So what do you think your story is, from all this experience of growing up in a pandemic?
Mm, I'm not sure, actually
Do you want to do the drawing? Or do you want me to, or do you want us to draw together?
Mm, I can draw it
Cool, would it be alright if I draw you, then?
How's it going?
Good
I think I might be finished... Some of the art... I made some mistakes.
That's okay!
Oh, wow.
Would you like to keep my drawing?
Yeah!
I'll trade ya!
Yup!


I can show you some of my art pieces?
Oh I would love that!
Covid

## Author Biography

**Dr. Julie Spray** is a medical and childhood anthropologist who researches children's perspectives on health using child-centred, ethnographic and arts-based methods. She is currently a lecturer in Children's Studies at the University of Galway, where she teaches an interdisciplinary course called "Comics, Childhood and the Alternative". As part of her "alternative" pedagogical approach for this class she also completes the assignments; this comic is her self-directed project for the 2023 class, and addresses her personal learning goal of conveying ethnographic narrative through comic form. She is author of The Children in Child Health: Negotiating Young Lives and Health in New Zealand (Rutgers Series in Childhood Studies, 2020).

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# Troubling Research: Participatory Arts-Based Research with Refugee-Background Young People

**Caitlin Nunn, PhD (Manchester Metropolitan University)**
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> *Every Saturday morning, we gathered in the university building, transforming sterile teaching spaces into a homely mess of drop sheets, snacks, clay, headphones, markers, coats, paint, phones, post-it notes... Researchers/artists/young people flowed in and out, charting paths through the chaos to land in quiet corners or noisy collectives of thinking and making and sharing.* (University researcher)[1]

Participatory arts-based research encompasses a wide range of practices in which community members collaborate in producing research through art making (Nunn 2022). In combining participatory and arts-based paradigms, such approaches hold the potential to be doubly transformative: troubling the borders of both ‘researcher’ and ‘research’. This re-imagining of who can produce knowledge and what forms this knowledge may take is particularly critical in research with refugee-background youth people, whose intersectional marginality as (racialized, gendered) young people and (forced) migrants means that their ideas and experiences are routinely authored by others – often within discourses constructed to discredit them (Anas et al. 2022).

> *there are certain questions that I never really took the time to ask. And that includes the way that our cultures are exploited, and people pick and choose what they love about us… [W]e are always recognised…as the brown people that took from this country, instead of adding to it.* (Youth researcher)

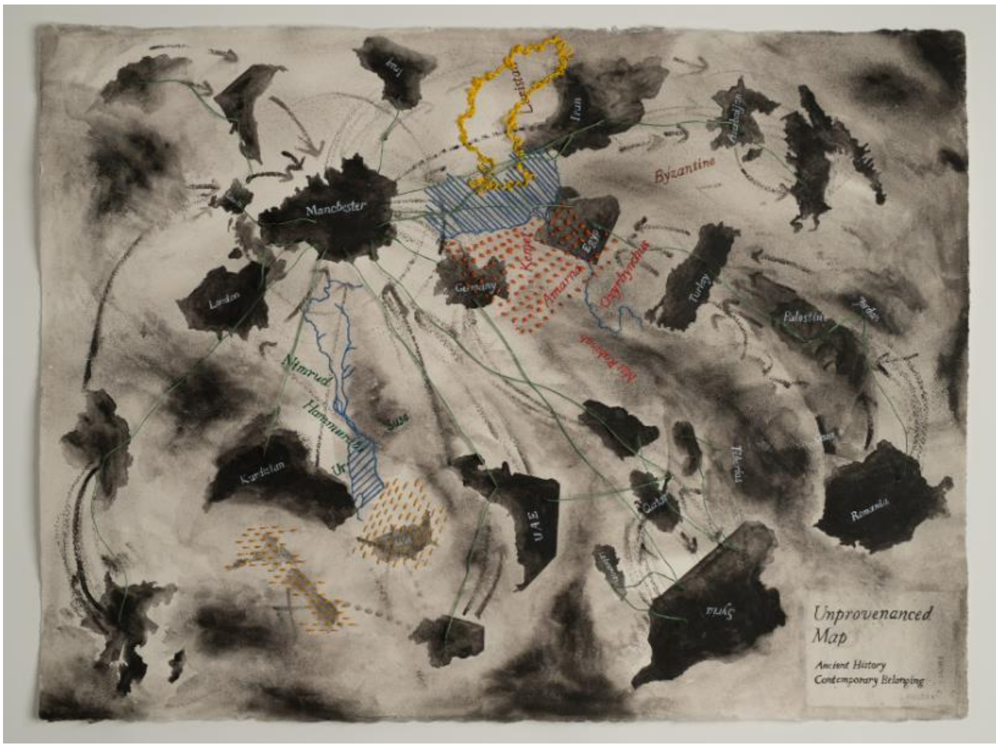
How do we ensure that young people’s knowledge, experience, and expression are taken seriously, and that research doesn’t become another site in which they are constructed by others? In seeking to name and transform the power relations that mediate academic knowledge production, participatory arts-based research can challenge the primacy of White Western epistemologies, recognizing the lived experiences of refugee-background young people not as a disadvantage to be researched, but as valid and valuable forms of knowledge that can open new modes of inquiry and action (Cammarota and Fine 2010).

> *Stories have been a huge part of my life. I grew up hearing my grandfather’s stories of Palestine and how the disastrous 1948 Nakba…impacted his and his family’s lives. My grandmother would sing my Syrian village’s tribal songs that told the stories of our ancestors… Through my artwork, I show the stories of two [ancient] lamps, valued but forgotten, wanted but unused… a metaphor for the shared experiences of migrants and displaced people.* (Senna Yousef)

Arts-based approaches draw upon affective, embodied, sensuous ways of knowing, transcending the limits of words to surface what cannot be easily said (Conquergood 2002).

Further, they encourage thinking and feeling between and beyond what is 'known', (re)making the world through imaginative interventions. The research artifacts emerging from such processes can take us beyond the borders of the academy to speak to and with different communities. It can be uncomfortable – even risky – work, and thus requires great care (Lenette 2019). But at a time when there is urgent need for new ways of seeing, listening, knowing, and feeling, attending to young people through participatory arts-based research offers a hopeful practice.

> *This map invites viewers to encounter the world from the unique perspectives of these people and objects, who have arrived in this place across shifting eras and borders, and in doing so, created new pathways to belonging.* (Jina Lee)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London
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Palestine
Jordan
Nimrud
Hammurabi
Susa
Ur
Kurdistan
UAE
Qatar
Romania
Syria
Unprovenanced Map
Ancient History
Contemporary Belonging

*Figure: "Unprovenanced Map". By Jina Lee and based on ideas and stories from the Ancient History, Contemporary Belonging youth research team. Graphite/charcoal, threading on paper (2023)*

## Notes

[1] Italicised excerpts are taken from the UKRI-funded Ancient History, Contemporary Belonging research project. Further information and an online version of the project's exhibition at Manchester Museum can be viewed here. Thank you to Dr Jennifer Cromwell, Dr Sarah Linn, Jina Lee, and the youth research team for allowing me to share our work.

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# Doin' it Together: Zine Making and Creative Collaboration with Kids and Youth

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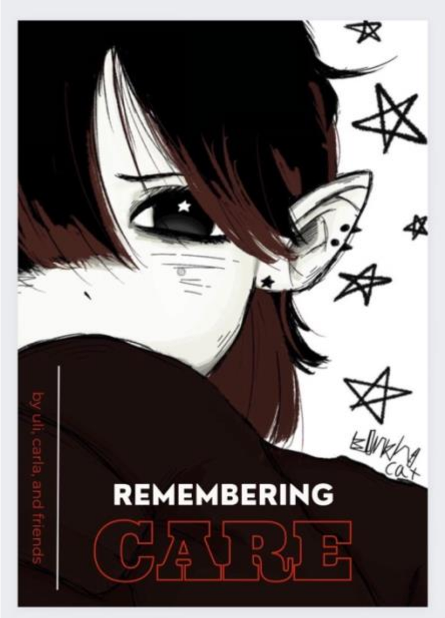
For over 20 years, I have been collaborating and creating with all ages, including kids. Together, we learned and created in community run spaces, public spaces, and in our homes. While I was often in the role of mentor, I too was a mentee in most situations. After all, mentorship (and learning) is always in motion and indeed moves in all directions. Kids can mentor each other as well as mentor an adult and vice versa. I genuinely believe that creating and learning together is the most accessible and joyful way to come together across differences.

I wasn't trained to be an educator or youth worker, and I don't identify as either. Instead, the impetus of this joyful path was that I wanted our family to be part of a thriving multigenerational community, which is often lacking.

I chose to focus on zine[1] making for this piece because zines are wonderful for collaborating across skill and ages and involve many tasks and skills, including editing, design, and putting them together. The content can take on all kinds of shapes and styles, meeting everyone where their skills and interests are. This includes interviewing folks, writing essays or poetry, taking photos, drawing comics. The ideas are endless!

To keep the work collaborative, it is important to have the meta topics or themes of the zine remain broad. For example, a topic like "Art and Activism" opens it up for all kinds of ideas to emerge from the group. Or you could use a more specific topic like "care" but then continue to be open to how care is framed, etc. Part of my praxis is to have folks read (or view) youth's works, so, depending on where we made it, we would always ensure it had a public launch of some kind. We would print enough to sell or share at events and bookstores or to give to our friends and family at a launch. The larger the project meant a larger audience. In some cases, we had launches that brought in over 100 people each time! Zines really bring folks together, and I am always amazed how every single youth participates in the process and has a really good time doing it, too. Over the years, the youth I collaborated with reflected that working on the zines gave them the confidence to identify as a writer, graphic designer, photographer, or at the very least (or most!) a zine maker!


by uli, carla, and friends
REMEMBERING
CARE

It's also important to mention that I don't collaborate with youth within the confines of a typical institution – like school or community centres. We're not bound to work within some of the limiting structures inherent to institutions. This freedom allows us to show up with a profound openness and curiosity for the folks in the room. In doing this, we work to undo social borders and the hierarchy that is baked into our societies. With every all-ages collaboration, we are undoing adult supremacy.

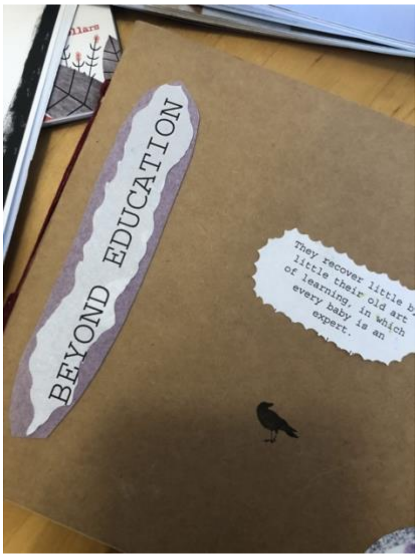
In addition to moving beyond institutions, there are other practices and values that are vital to ensuring that creating across ages and skill levels feels authentic and generative to all involved. Through collaborating, I've named some core values and practices: trust, thriving, listening, and not being attached to outcomes.

**Trust:** Arrive at these spaces with trust *in* and *with* the folks you're collaborating with. Trust is crucial for these creative engagements to go well. With age differences, power is always at play, and so for youth and children to feel completely part of the activities, there must be an abundance of trust flowing. Trust supports them to know that their ideas and interests are valid and welcomed. Trusting one another is essential for allowing these encounters to go well.

**Thriving:** To thrive is to be present with what *is* and what you are doing together. To ensure a thriving space does take some thoughtful planning – especially when you don't have pre-existing relationships. Part of evoking a playful engagement is to embrace and model experimentation and to make mistakes. Also, go outside, have fun, and share food! This all will support folks to know each other better, ensuring artmaking of any kind becomes accessible and fun for everyone.

**Listening:** Carving out ample time to brainstorm with the group is where the process begins. This all takes patience. A commitment to hear everyone's ideas will ensure that everyone participates, including deciding *together* what ends up being the project. This might seem counterintuitive, but don't aim to make sense, instead tune into and *sense* the subtleties flowing, especially from the very young and shy folks. Resolve to truly listen.

**Not-attached to outcomes:** As a mentor, I provide the scaffolding— materials and other resources— but leave the plan and ideas for everyone to come up with together, supporting me to show up with openness to what the group wants to create! Embrace the potential of being surprised by what emerges, letting go of any preconceived notions and hopes of what the zine becomes. Arrive armed with trust, and delight in the process of creating together.



Implementing all of these together will invigorate any kind of creative collaboration. And, we all need to do more things together: to co-learn some skills, to feel good about what we created together, to deepen a sense of belonging, and in the end discover new friendships, ones that will last well beyond the making of a Zine.

## Notes

[1] Zines as defined by Wikipedia are "a small-circulation self-published work of original or appropriated texts and images, usually reproduced via a copy machine."

## Author Biography

**carla joy bergman** is a writer and multidisciplinary artist. She is the co-author of *Joyful Militancy,* and editor of *Radiant Voices* and *Trust Kids!* carla aims to keep the embers burning with and for the youth and the coming generations. She currently lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, on the lands of the xwməθkwəym (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Sel̓íl̓witulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations with her kids and partner. www.joyfulcarla.com

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# Two Plus Two Does Not Equal Four: (Non-) Childist Calls for Sahrawi Statehood

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If properly engaged, children provide astute answers to complex political questions. In most conflict zones, children constitute the demographic majority. If scholars and pollsters only measure adults' opinions, they ignore majority opinion. This is the norm, however (e.g., Warshel 2019), and even the term ‘public opinion’ is a misnomer for so-called adult opinion (Livingstone, 2001).

Nevertheless, many excellent scholars of conflict and post-conflict and ethnographers of political violence do not sample or directly observe children, especially young children.[1] While also vital, at best they only interact with those above tween age or as old as eighteen and above (e.g., Shepler 2014; Hromadžić 2015). The younger the child, the more their opinions tend to be overlooked or interpreted with skepticism. Alternatively, scholars may fail to engage children effectively even when they are included; seemingly out of normative and “childist” practices (e.g., Pierce and Allen 1975; Young-Bruehl 2013), they stereotypically presume children are unable to participate in a research process cogently.[2]

In order to discuss Sahrawi children’s nationalist yearnings for independent statehood I adopt a childhood studies approach that takes children’s opinions seriously. Going further, I deploy an alternative childist approach (e.g., Wall 2019) by elevating their opinions and associated actions to explore potential impacts on wider societal relations and structures within the context of the conflict for control over Western Sahara. The conflict is fought between Morocco, who currently governs the majority of the territory, and the Sahrawi, under the POLISARIO Front leadership (the Sahrawi national liberation movement).

For many years, political science and international relations scholars of elite-level peace-making focused on adult inefficacy in signing peace accords, arguing that ‘no change’ occurred since a ceasefire between the parties was agreed upon in 1991. Correctly describing the peace process as “stymied” and “stalemated” (e.g. Zoubir 2007; Roussellier 2014), these scholars, however, wrongly concluded there was nothing to study about the conflict or by corollary, peace process, other than to offer an “anatomy” of it (Jensen 2005).

As a scholar of socialization and peacebuilding focused on mechanisms for engendering grassroots support for peace-making and post-conflict peace sustainment and trained instead in the study of communication and media and sampling children and youth, I argued that everything had changed (e.g. Warshel 2016). An entirely new generation existed, one who grew up in a wholly different context. In contrast to the prior generation who grew up amid the 1975-1991 war that ended in the ceasefire, including some among the Sahrawi who fled the territory under bombardment, the current Sahrawi generation grew up amid a period comprised of promises for change and an expectation for a referendum to determine the fate of the territory. However, after some 25 years, Morocco only offered an “Autonomy Plan,” providing sub-state autonomy subsumed under the Kingdom of Morocco but not sovereign rights separate from it.

To discuss children coming of age amid this latter phase, I zoom into a particularly apt example from Azzuz,[3] a five-year-old I interviewed in 2009. His story foregrounds the Western Sahara conflict’s unfolding stages: Youth repeatedly threatened a return to armed conflict in my conversations with them. They still sought and seek independence, including if it meant pursuing other routes to achieve said end (See also Mundy and Zunes 2014).

## Methodological Backdoor and Policy Backdoor Eliciting Methods

I explored nationalist sentiments of young people like Azzuz through methodologies and methods that effectively engage children and yield data from which internally valid conclusions about their political opinions and associated cultural practices can be drawn. As tools, these helped me to triangulate meaning from their responses to posed questions and behaviors I observed, moderating for shortcomings in their emerging communication skills. Effectively “disaggregat[ing] so-called ‘cognition’ from culture” (Warshel 2018, 10), I determined the meanings they made and how they perceived their present-day conflict contexts and envisioned a future peace.

Drawing, in particular, from participatory communication and participatory anthropology methodologies and methods, I employed artifacts like toys as interview elicitation methods. These artifacts' visual, auditory, and tactile nature organically served as conversation prompts, offering “methodological backdoors” to start, mediate, and maintain conversation (Warshel 2019, 2021).[5] Use of these artifacts, in combination with methods allowing children to respond through gesture, dance, and drawing, bridged responses and ensured that I interpreted the meaning of what each child intended correctly. The result was also the procurement of what I refer to as “policy backdoors” (Warshel 2019, 2021) or the making available of data that otherwise could not necessarily be collected and interpreted with which hopefully better decisions about the conflict over Western Sahara might be made.

## The Context of the Conflict Over Western Sahara

I have been conducting field research with young Sahrawis and Moroccans since 2009. By way of dominant ethnopolitical features of identity — on which their nations and associated national imaginings have been predicated — I characterize Sahrawis using “world system categories” (Warshel 2021a) as people contemporarily positioned into the category of a “stateless nation” seeking independence. They are Muslims and speak the Hassaniya dialect of Arabic, and typically also Spanish. I characterize Moroccans as contemporarily positioned into a “statebearing nation,” possessing the material equivalent of their nationalist imaginings: Morocco. They are also Muslim but speak the Darija dialect of Arabic and typically also French.

Following Moroccan efforts to "'reclaim'" the territory of Western Sahara in 1975, a war ensued between them and the POLISARIO, and at the start, also Mauritania. Each claimed all or part of the territory (Mundy and Zunes 2010). The result was the 'conquest'/'occupation'/ 'return' and annexation by Morocco of roughly four-fifths of the territory by 1977 (Mundy and Zunes 2010). Regarded as an indivisible part of the nation, the territory is seen by Morocco as an integral part of the state. POLISARIO, for its part, obtained control of the remaining one-fifth of the territory, which today they and Sahrawis more broadly, refer to as the "liberated territories" (in opposition to the territory under Moroccan control they regard as the "occupied territories"). Mauritania withdrew any claims to the territory early into the war.

The POLISARIO movement was founded in 1973. Since then, they continue to seek sovereign rule over the territory. Continuing that struggle, the Sahrawi seek materialization of their nation through an independent Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) located on the territory. Instead, under POLISARIO leadership, they operate the SADR non-state political institution out of refugee camps inside southern Algeria (Warshel 2021b).

From the Sahrawi perspective, Western Sahara constitutes an example of a failed decolonization process. As 'natives' of the territory Spain withdrew from (then located south of the French Protectorate in Morocco), they regard themselves as its rightful owners. On the eve of its departure, intending to hold a referendum to determine to whom to cede Spanish Sahara, Spain took a census of the population. That referendum was never held then or since.

## (Non-) Childist Calls for Sahrawi Statehood

In my research with young Sahrawis and Moroccans, I have been finding that nationalist sentiments are strong. This includes, among the former, Sahrawi citizens of Morocco, or Sahrawi-Moroccans, and Sahrawi citizens of the non-state SADR political institution, or those who form a majority of the Sahrawi refugee population. The centrality of a state, or rather, its absence, appears to figure deep in their consciousness. This is best symbolized by the regularly heard chant, "no alternative but self-determination" ("*la badeel la badeel, an taqrir al-masir*"[6]), accompanied by two fingers held up like a peace or victory sign.

In my efforts to understand such political opinions and associated constructions of Sahrawi ethnopolitical and civic identity, I discuss Azzuz's story below. I offer it to theorize what can be learned by adopting an alternative positive childist approach, using appropriate methodologies and, correspondingly, non-childist interpretations that take expressions like his seriously.

## Two Plus Two Equals Two "No Alternatives but Sahrawi Self-Determination"

Azzuz is a Sahrawi with Moroccan citizenship who lives in Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara/Morocco's Southern Provinces. In an interview with Azzuz, I asked him to count to five. Normally,[4] asking a child to perform such a mathematical exercise might seem meaningless, but not in Azzuz's case. Azzuz subverted mathematical norms in protest. Using his fingers, he recited out loud to me, "one" ("*wahed*"), and rather than following that up with "two," he stated "no-alternative" ("*la badeel*"). Then he proceeded from there to count "three" ("*thalathi*"), "four" ("*arba*"), and "five" ("*hamsa*").

Testing him further, I held up two fingers on both hands and asked Azzuz, "How many is this?" ("*kam hatha?*"). Rather than answering "four" ("*arba*"), code switching and using the Darija Arabic term for "two" he learned in his Moroccan school, he proclaimed "two no-alternatives" ("*jouj la badeel*")!

Buttressing this point, Azzuz's family recounted to me that in the framework of his formal education, earlier on, his Darija Arabic-speaking Muslim Moroccan teacher warned he would not learn math. He did not seem to "understand" that two fingers, *not three*, stand for the number two. As she explained it, in class, he would read off "one" (holding up one finger to her), "no-alternative" (holding up two), "two" (holding up three fingers), "three" (holding up four) and "four" (holding up five).

As I interpret it using communication methodologies, at five years old, Azzuz was already well familiar with the "sign" (Burke 1996) for the "no alternative but self-determination" slogan: two fingers held up like a peace or victory sign and its associated chant.

## Sahrawi Public Opinion

As I have written elsewhere, expressions such as these do not constitute a naïve understanding of the world (Warshel 2021a) or an under-developed cognitive mathematical capacity. Rather, Azzuz's seemingly childish or child-like constructions, as captured through child-adapted participatory research techniques, provided a view into the symbolic meaning-making system that takes just a few years for children who grow up within one specific world system categorical context to learn and co-construct.

Regardless of key Moroccan state socialization forces at play to the contrary, Azzuz countered. Owing to Moroccan state policies encouraging migration of Darija-speaking Moroccan Muslims to southern communities like the cities of Samra and Laayoune/El Aaiún, where significant Sahrawi populations reside, local communities and Moroccan-run schools have become/been made 'mixed'. Sahrawis are now presumed to be demographically minoritized, with intergroup contact with their Darija-speaking counterparts being a normative factor potentially influencing socialization. Where television is concerned, children like Azzuz are surrounded by pan-Arab global television, SADR TV, and Morocco's Laayoune TV. The latter, created by Morocco to target "Hassani" audiences as a reaction against SADR TV, per interviews I conducted with its Sahrawi staff, is circumscribed. Regardless of such potential agents of socialization, Azzuz's performance of his Sahrawi nationality nevertheless evoked its separateness from Morocco. Despite officially being '"hailed"' (Althusser 1971) by the state as an "Hassani" ethnopolitical subject-in-the-making, he dialogically countered with his "Sahrawi" national identity and worldview.

From a world-systems perspective, I also note that Azzuz's expressions were in keeping with that which I would hypothetically expect from a stateless nation-in-the-making, namely, a child growing up within his specific conflict context. By contrast, a Moroccan child of a different ethnopolitical identity, such as a Muslim Darija Arabic-speaking Moroccan child, would not chant the slogan accompanying the sign Azzuz gestured, let alone even likely express awareness of it, as my ongoing research so far finds.

Comparatively, as I have found in research I conducted with other children contemporarily positioned into the category of stateless nation like Palestinians, their performative practices are in keeping with community-level glocalization of the world system by people institutionally positioned into one world system category rather than another (Warshel 2021a). In Azzuz's case, he is positioned as a stateless nation, living in the city of Smara, inside "occupied territories" under Moroccan "occupation," from where he translates both the sign and the specifically Darija word for "two" into a protest term for independence.

Adult scholars, seemingly only seeing adults like themselves, discussed the "stalemate" but ignored the facts on the ground that children like Azzuz constituted. The Sahrawi normative stance that Western Sahara has yet to be decolonized, alongside an outcome goal of a referendum to enact independence, in accordance with the UN's address of what it characterizes as a non-self-governing territory and Africa's last colony, held discursive resonance. The 'proof' of that meaning was evidenced in Azzuz's selection of "no-alternatives" as the sign, expressing the meaning of two fingers and trumping math. I theorize that such political opinions, and in the case of Azzuz, cultural practices, provided illustrations of nascent Sahrawi public opinion.

To that end, even from age five, using what appears to be 'child's play,' Azzuz seems to have argued that there remains no alternative — but a referendum on self-determination — and the creation of an independent SADR in Western Sahara, for its children and its adults, alike. Had opinions of young Sahrawis like Azzuz been taken seriously, the negative reaction to Morocco's "Autonomy Plan" and ultimately, the resumption of the armed conflict might have been better understood and predicted.

## Notes

[1] Among the former, see Zunes and Mundy (2010). Among the latter, see Moran (2013) and Wilson (2016).

[2] cf. preschoolers sampled by Connolly and Healy 2004; and a handful of children below age 10 interviewed in Crivello and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010.

[3] Azzuz is a pseudonym

[4] I write 'normally' because Azzuz's response might be assumed meaningless if one eschews qualitative methods like negative case analysis. By comparison, I argue, an individual

behaving in the same manner as other members of their society/‘group’ demonstrates culture as practice.

[5] See Warshel 2019 and 2021a for information about my child-adapted methods and methodologies and their utility. See Warshel 2018 and 2022 for related discussions also derived through my research with young people across Sub-Saharan and North Africa and the Middle East.

[6] Italicized font indicates words originally spoken in Arabic.

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## Author Biography

**Yael Warshel** (https://ica-cam.org/in-the-spotlight/yael-warshel/) is an award-winning expert on young people and media in global conflict zones and peace communication. She is Founding Director of the Children, Media, and Conflict Zones Lab, Vice President of the American Institute for Maghrib Studies, Assistant Professor of Communications and African Studies, and Research Associate of the Rock Ethics Institute at Penn State. There, she co-leads the *Human Rights and Forced Migration* initiative, developed from her fieldwork about Western Sahara. She is working on her third book, *When Conflict is Real: Reimagining the Study of Children, Youth, and Media in International and Global Conflict Zones* (contracted with Stanford University Press), and is author of the three-time award-winning monograph, *Experiencing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Children, Peace Communication and Socialization* (Cambridge University Press).

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***NEOS* Volume 15, Issue 2 (Fall 2023)**

# Cultural Models at Play: What Miscommunication Reveals About Shared Social Norms

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In this article, I draw upon ethnographic fieldwork with children aged 7-13 years in Helsinki, Finland, to illustrate how points of tension observed during children's play were a fruitful entry point for anthropological inquiry. My fieldwork in Helsinki consisted of 6 months of participant observation with families, 2 months on summer camps, and 4 months at an after-school club, during which I aimed to identify the social norms and values that underpinned children's everyday lives. In other words, I was interested in how an "ordinary" or "culturally adequate" (Skjær Ulvik 2018) child behaved and interacted with others in this specific context and in the childrearing practices and norms that shaped these behaviours.

Such normative knowledge is the bread and butter of anthropological research but can be difficult to uncover because of its inherently invisible nature (Antweiler 2019). For example, the norms and assumptions that underlie childrearing practices tend to be implicit, unspoken, and shaped by deeply embedded cultural models (D'Andrade and Strauss 1992). They may seem so obvious as to be considered 'natural' and therefore taken for granted by those raised within them (Rogoff 2003; Tudge 2008), which can make such knowledge difficult for both interlocutors to articulate and for anthropologists to identify. During fieldwork, I found that moments of tension between children and miscommunications in the sense of "talking past each other" (Kinloch and Metge 2014) served to make the otherwise invisible cultural norms that underlie children's interactions more explicit. In this article, I illustrate this through an account and interpretation of children playing dodgeball, during which numerous moments of tension unfolded around one child, Leo.[1]

## Miscommunication During Play

It was the third day of camp, and three 8-year-old girls (Lili, Minttu and Isla) asked to play dodgeball. A camp leader took out balls and two 9-year-old boys, two 7-year-old girls, and I joined in.[2] They had played dodgeball the previous day and excitedly started a competitive but friendly game. There was a buzz of excited squeals and chatter as they reminded each other of the rules, "*It's ok, you're not out — it bounced before it hit you.*" The mood was relaxed.

Ten-year-old Leo soon joined in. Dodging around the court skilfully, his ball hit Lili's back hard, bringing tears to her eyes. The leader checked on her and asked Leo to play more carefully, saying with a pointed look, "*They are all younger than you.*" Minttu and Isla comforted Lili, loudly suggesting that it was an accident. They started to play again, and Leo soon threw the ball at one of the boys, hitting him on the nose. Leading him to get an ice pack, the leader said in a firmer tone, "*Play nicely [nätisti], the idea is to have fun, not to hurt each other*!" Soon after this, the two youngest girls left the game, shooting looks at Leo.

Leo's eventual win was greeted by silence from the other children, and he left immediately after, saying that the game was boring. The relaxed atmosphere soon returned as the players cheered for each other, reminded others to get back into the game after a time out, and warned them of incoming balls. When Lili won, everyone clapped and cheered good-naturedly.

## Points of Tension and Miscommunication

Rather than interpreting the (mis)communication events themselves (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 2007), my interest primarily lies in what these tensions reveal about the underlying assumptions and models of behaviour of the majority group. Leo was a recent migrant to Finland and while his Finnish — the primary language used on camp — was at a basic communicative level, he spoke English well, as did the camp leaders and many children. In the above game, the camp leader spoke in both Finnish and English, and Leo appeared to understand her words; the miscommunication lay rather in how these words were interpreted. For example, the camp leader's disapproval was expressed when she *reminded* Leo of behavioural norms — playing more carefully with children who are younger than him — and attempted to *guide* his behaviour in the right direction by calling on him to "*play nicely.*" Likewise, the children consistently showed their dislike of Leo's play; their silence at his win implied disapproval and was especially clear when contrasted with the support following Lili's win. Leo, however, did not register the signals of disapproval communicated by leaders and his peers as such, and carried on with behaviour his peers later described to me as "*aggressive [aggressiivinen]*" and "*too rough [liian kovaa].*"

Tensions therefore arose when Leo acted in ways that were widely considered to be non-normative, and these moments served to make the (invisible) normative knowledge that was shared by the majority more explicit. In focusing on these tensions, culturally specific strategies for conflict management also became clearer; although no one directly punished him or retaliated, Leo quickly became unpopular with peers and leaders, regardless of factors such as their age or gender, and over the course of the week, many of the children began to avoid him.

## Miscommunication as an Entry Point for Inquiry

While the social norms that children were drawing upon in everyday play and peer interactions were otherwise somewhat difficult to identify (Antweiler 2019), the tensions surrounding Leo served to make them more explicit. These moments of miscommunication thus became entry points through which I was able to identify the cultural norms that shaped the behaviour of the group of interest in this study: the "ordinary" Helsinki-based child. In doing so, I recognize that there is always diversity both within and across peer groups (Corsaro and Eder 1990), and the children in this study were no exception. Nevertheless, clear patterns emerged in terms of how the vast majority of children interacted with and reacted to Leo's non-normative behavior. These patterns directed my attention towards, for example, children's strategies of conflict resolution, conflict avoidance, and the preference to disengage from rather than punish disagreeable partners (Sequeira 2023). They also drew my attention to the sparsity of physicality and aggression amongst children in Helsinki, including playful aggression and rough-and-tumble play, which are widely considered universal features of children's play (Fry 2005).

In summary, I have demonstrated how paying attention to tensions and miscommunications during play can be a fruitful technique in ethnographic research on/with children. In doing so, I suggest that through studying their encounters with and reactions to non-normativity it is possible to generate better understandings of the shared normative assumptions and practices that children are drawing upon in their everyday lives.

## Notes

[1] All given names are pseudonyms. Composite persons are not used, but children's backgrounds are not given in detail to maintain anonymity.

[2] During summer camps I played, ate, and spent time alongside the children, aiming to take on the role of the "honorary child" (Atkinson 2019) whereby I acknowledged my undeniable adultness while ensuring that children could grant or deny me access to their social worlds.

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# “Who Would Like to Go to the Movies With Me?” Negotiating Social Participation Through Word Play

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## Introduction

In his studies of two-to-five-year-olds, sociologist William Corsaro identified two main themes in children’s peer cultures. The first is social participation, since children want to be involved, participate in, and be part of a group. The second is sharing because “children want to gain control of their lives and they want to share that sense of control with each other” (Corsaro 2003, 37). Furthermore, a peer group provides an important context in which children learn language and culture (see for example Harness Goodwin 2006).

In this article, I draw attention to the ways in which preschool children navigate their social interactions within peer groups through word play. I provide a comprehensive definition of word play in the proceedings. My particular focus is on exploring how children engage in social interactions through the lenses of intersubjective meaning making and shared intentionality (Tomasello and Carpenter 2007). In this context, intersubjectivity is conceptualized as “a process that makes it possible for subjects to detect and change each other’s minds and behaviour, by purposeful, narrative expressions of emotion, intention, and interest” (Trevarthen and Aitken 2001, 18). I propose that examining how children initiate, maintain, and occasionally decline social participation in their day-to-day interactions with peers through word play offers a valuable perspective for gaining insights into the complexity of children´s social lives. By doing so, I underscore the significance of ethnographic research in comprehending the lives of children, which has broader implications for the field of childhood studies.

## Methodology

The data presented in this text were gathered through a combination of participant observation and video ethnography conducted at two preschools in Slovenia during the period spanning from 2010 to 2013. These data collection methods were integral components of the ethnographic fieldwork I conducted as part of my doctoral dissertation, in which I also employed other methods, such as participatory photography, to examine how work, play, and learning are interrelated in early childhood. For this short article, I analysed field notes from participant observation and transcripts of video footage of social interactions in which children used word play.[1]

## Word Play in Action

Like William Corsaro (2003, 69), I noticed that four-to-six-year-old children form friendships based on what they have in common, by sharing and participating in joint activities, including word play. In the definition of word play, I follow Catherine Garvey who distinguished three types of social play with language: "spontaneous rhyming and word play; play with fantasy and nonsense; and play with speech acts and discourse conventions" (1990, 67). She noted that spontaneous word play arises from states of mutual attending and desultory conversation with one child leading by starting the word play and other children repeating the leader's words and rhythm (Garvey 1990, 67). In the word play I observed, it was common for a child to state a sentence which incurred a response from other children, who countered with a variation of that same sentence. For example, at snack time one child said: *"I will eat mud," and others followed: "I will eat the flute [pretending that the hot-dog was a flute]," "I will eat the dinosaur," "I will eat the poison from the snake."* Such word play initiated and maintained social interactions among children. In this case the repetitive mode of the word play was also complemented with a play on the realistic and the unrealistic. To participate successfully in this social interaction, children had to adhere to an unspoken rule, which was to include an object in their statement that could not be eaten. Examples included mud, a flute, a dinosaur, and poison from a snake. However, children were also highly selective and occasionally declined to engage in social interactions initiated by other children. In such cases, they responded to their peers' calls for this type of playful interaction by employing tactics such as silencing, ignoring, and direct refusal (Schwartzman 1978, 238). On one occasion during lunch, Nejc and Simon (both 4 years old) sat at the same table. Nejc was persistently trying to initiate conversation with Simon, who simply ignored him. On another occasion Jakob (6 years old) said to Ivan (5 years old): *"I will eat a snake,"* to which Ivan replied: *"Stop playing with food, this isn't a snake, this is bread!"*

A similar type of word play involved questions. This, too, often occurred among children who were sitting together at mealtime. Jernej (4 years old) began interaction with a question, "*Who wants to go to the tractor with me?"* After the other boys sitting at the table raised their hands and shouted, "*Me!*" the word play continued in the same way, asking questions. On another occasion, Jernej, Aleš, Oto, and Sven (all four years old) were playing in a corner of the playground, leafing through a book. At first, all the boys browsed the book together, but then Jernej, Aleš, and Sven hid under the table which left no room for Oto. Oto, visibly angry, walked away, sat for a moment, then came back and said, "*I won't invite any of you to my birthday party and you won't even get an invitation!*" The boys came out from under the table, and Oto immediately suggested another play corner: "*Let's go, there's more space here*." But instead, the boys left the book with Oto and went to play with Legos. Clearly, Oto did not achieve his desired goal; the book was not what he was after. Visibly unhappy, he tried to at least persuade Jernej to continue browsing the book with him: "*Jernej, you can look too*." He was unsuccessful. The boys ignored him, but he did not give up. A little later, Sven and Jernej started playing with a tennis ball, Oto looked at them and told them: "*This isn't a marble. Hey, do you want me not to give you an invitation to my birthday party? So, you won't come then.*"

Jernej replied: "*Yes, we want to come,*" but Sven said: "*I'm not going to invite you to my birthday party either*." Similar to the initial stage of Oto's exclusion, he once again employed the strategy of negotiating social participation through a birthday party invitation. However, this time, this negotiation evolved spontaneously into a word play of questions, started by

Jernej: "*Who would like to go to the tractor with me?*" Other boys exclaimed "*Me!*" and similarly continued with questions about who would like to go to the swimming pool, the movies, the birthday party, the playground, etc. Oto joined in the word play and got several turns to ask his questions. This engagement enabled him to re-connect with other boys, and when Sven interrupted the word play by saying "*Let's go play hide and seek!*" Oto was again part of the group. Thus, word play in this situation entailed negotiating inclusion and exclusion from the peer group, and ultimately had a positive outcome for Oto, who had been successfully integrated into the peer play.

## Conclusion

This article delved into how preschool children employ word play to navigate their social world. For social participation to be successful, children have to recognize each other's intentions and synchronize with each other in a shared activity (Tomasello and Carpenter 2007, 121−122). Helen Schwartzman similarly noted that, in order to be able to participate in shared play, children constantly communicate their intentions to each other and recognize each other's intentions (Schwartzman 1978, 238). As I have shown, some of the negotiation within the peer group is conducted through word play. Without setting the rules of the game, children synchronized their conversations in word play and participated in intersubjective meaning-making. Imitative responses in word play functioned as "affirmation, acceptances, or commentaries with respect to accentuated displays of the other person" (Trevarthen and Aitken 2001, 7). Thus, initiating, maintaining and negotiating social participation within the peer group through intersubjective meaning making was at the very root of their word play exchange.

## Notes

[1] All research participants have been pseudonymized. The study was approved by the Ethics Commission of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

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# A Story of Ideological Becoming: Navigating Self Amidst Competing Ideals

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*What do you like about [school]?*
…Talking with friends, we think about things together. ...
*What do you not like about school?*
That there are teachers. (laughs)
*Really? You don't like the teachers?*
Yes. In other words, I hate them. (giggles)

Emiko's comment surprises me. A good student overall, she appeared to adhere to the main values of the school (Eckert 1990). I press her to expand.

We think differently.
*For example?*
It's like, when teachers want us to do something quickly, I think that it would be best to do it slowly… It's the complete opposite. We don't match.
*So, you're saying that what you think is important and what teachers think is important are different?*
Exactly.

Through discourse analysis, this article explores the way in which Emiko, at the junction of imagining a future self, connects with national ideologies at odds with local ways. In defining the problem as an issue of perspectives, Emiko highlights the friction between two cultural systems with competing sets of practices and ideologies for self and community. Oppositions between local/Island and mainland/national ideals characterize daily life at Ogasawara Middle, the only Middle School on Chichijima Island, Japan.[1] To some extent, the school defines what it means to be Japanese and supplies one force in students' process of "ideological becoming" (Bakhtin 1981). Perceiving the need to index this "Japaneseness" through linguistic markers, such as honorifics and gendered self-referent terms, Emiko critiques the teachers for not mandating mainland practices at school. The teachers, themselves mainland transplants, enter a locale with different practices which they variously adopt or accommodate upon moving to Chichijima (Moskowitz 2015). Yet, while "being Japanese" is a measure Emiko invokes, she also recognizes proper language use as a level of maturity that she should be able to assume as a middle schooler.

Six-hundred miles from mainland Japan, Chichijima occupies a peripheral location within the nation, spatially and culturally. Originally a British colony annexed by Japan in 1876 and later administered by the American Navy (1945-1968), some distinct cultural forms characterize school and Island life. These include prioritizing family over work, a more informal interactional style expressed through casual dress (no school uniforms) and fewer honorifics, and the practice of *yobisute* (dropping the honorific title Mr./Ms. from names) in address. Following local norms, teachers address students by first name with no honorific title, unlike mainland standard address patterns of last name + honorific title (Moskowitz 2015). From a mainland perspective, local address practices erase some of the institutionalized hierarchies or formality more common on the mainland, including those characterizing teacher-student relationships. As such, they resist the centripetal forces of “unitary language,” which tend toward “ideological unification and centralization” (Bakhtin 1981, 271).

As I will discuss, Emiko’s dislike of the teachers does not equal a disparaging of mainland norms and practices. She reproduces mainland ideologies for gender and honorific language and critiques herself for not adhering to some of those expectations. A ninth grader about to leave home to attend a mainland high school, she is actively navigating competing ideologies for self and other as she begins to imagine herself as a mainlander. Entering mainland society entails speaking like a mainlander, perhaps because *kotobazukai* (‘language use’) was a recurrent theme at school.

*Teachers often talk about kotobazukai.*
Yes, but, well, now people speak poorly.
*…Is it a problem?*
We use language so poorly, so... as a Japanese person, we may be told we’re strange.

Here, Emiko affirms the teachers’ belief that students’ language use needs to be corrected. She can imagine that she will be thought of as strange if, “as a Japanese person,” she cannot speak properly. She criticizes her own language use. “I can't use honorifics, not really. That’s not good.” “Becoming adult,” Emiko explains, entails becoming aware of hierarchical differences asserted through honorific and polite language use. She upholds the ideal, national narrative found elsewhere which Ogasawara Middle School teachers likewise articulated (Befu 2010; Gottlieb 2011; Kondo 1992; Okamoto 2004). Japanese schools teach hierarchy in the form of nonreciprocal relations (student-teacher, older-younger student), which are (re)produced through language and other behaviors (Rosenberger 1992; Wang 2020).

And similar to recognizing the necessity of adopting nonreciprocal patterns of address, she likewise imposes on herself the need to adopt a particular gendered sense of self which felt “too grown up” (see Moskowitz 2014). Japanese is known for its range of self-referent terms (e.g., (*w*)*atakushi*, (*w*)*atashi*, *uchi*, *boku*, *ore*), which index a variety of social meanings such as gender, age, regional affiliation, politeness, etc. (see e.g., Abe 2004; Ide 1991; Kondo 1990; Martin 1975). While society asserts ideologies about “appropriate” contexts and speakers for particular terms, and pressure to adhere to these norms may be strong, individuals play with self-referent meanings and their boundaries (Inoue 2006; Miyazaki 2004; SturtzSreethahan 2006). Thus, while (*w)atashi* may be the expected, standard term for middle school girls, Ogasawara females use a range of terms for self-reference (see also Miyazaki 2002, 2004). As I explain elsewhere (Moskowitz 2014), Emiko is uncomfortable by the gendered connotations for self that she perceives *watashi* to assert and uses *uchi* for self-reference instead. *Uchi* has the connotation of being less feminine and more casual than *watashi* (Yee and Wong 2021).

Nevertheless, Emiko imagines she will need to use *watashi* on the mainland. For Emiko, this reimagining of self extends beyond adopting honorific speech patterns and includes changing the term she uses for "I."

Yet, Emiko will also claim that the hierarchy asserted through nonreciprocal forms is not needed between younger and older students. In mainland schools, older students drop the honorific title (Mr./Ms.) in addressing younger students (*yobisute*) and expect the honorific title be given in return, creating a sense of hierarchy through nonreciprocal address forms. I did not perceive that Emiko recognized the contradiction between wanting to maintain nonreciprocal relations with teachers at school and telling junior students that they do not need to use polite forms to address the older students.

Emiko is caught between two systems, mainland and Island, and her oscillating perspective reflects not a dilemma but contradictory assertions about the place of honorific forms. While the school's "voice" assumes an authoritative quality by virtue of the power and respect it retains in Japanese society, Emiko, raised on the Island, has internalized a competing set of values as valid.

Yet, as Emiko contemplates the self she believes she will need to become on the mainland, she must acknowledge some teacher admonishments as true. This "ideological becoming," as Bakhtin (1981, 341) explains, "is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others."

> In everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words… it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. (Bakhtin 1981, 345-6)

Emiko's words reiterate the same message located in the teachers' own dialogue, but the context is new, and the phrasing is her own: it is half-hers and half-someone else's. She evaluates herself in terms of appropriate language and therefore critiques herself for not using honorifics properly. In doing so, she uses the teachers' critique to critique herself.

In short, Emiko's process of ideologically becoming a "mainlander" involves both adopting a new sense of hierarchy or distance between people as well as a new gendered self. In this process, Emiko perceives a disjuncture between herself, as enacted through current practices, and the self that she should be as a middle school student and certainly as a mainlander. Emiko does not seem to be overtly debating which system is "right"—she seems to accept, at least in theory, that the mainland system constitutes the "correct" set of practices. Her struggle lies in a concern in how to integrate self and nation while reaffirming a desire to be local. If she does not speak properly—use honorifics properly and adopt *watashi* for self-reference—she will be thought of as "strange" as a Japanese person. For Emiko, this means adopting an "I"—literally and metaphorically—that she may not be fully ready for but which she perceives the nation to require.

## Notes

[1] An unmarried, white American female with no prior ties to the community, I conducted 15 months of fieldwork on Chichijima Island. My research examined the range of voices—teacher-student-curricular, among others—which locate Ogasawara Middle School as multi-discursive site. I attended the school from 8 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. daily and observed classroom activities from the back of the room. I spent one month in each the 7th, 8th, and 9th grade classes before focusing on the 8th grade class, which became the 9th grade class in April when the new Japanese schoolyear begins. In addition to observing all school activities, I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, and some parents and community members. Emiko's interview, conducted over the summer of her ninth-grade year, was selected for this analysis because its length (over 2 hours) offered the most insight based on her own telling of events.  Emiko is a pseudonym. Precise dates are not given to assist with anonymity.

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# Sociality of the Story: Harnessing the Transformative Power of Storytelling through Creative Exchange Among Refugee Youth

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Humans tell stories. The narrative process of storytelling is central to humanity and has evolved with a myriad of other traits that help define our social worlds and ensure our survival as a species (Gottschall 2012; Gotsch and Palmberger 2022). For young people, acutely attuned to the project of asserting agency and attributing meaning to their developing lives and emerging social worlds, the act of storytelling is central to self-expression. For children and youth living in circumstances of precarity, the intersubjective project of sharing perceptions and narrating experience through story can be a lifeline. Providing opportunities for young people living in refugee camps, and those living outside of such circumstances, to share stories together, as artists and writers, is a core premise of the Stone Soup Refugee Project, which I direct.

Formally launched in 2018, this ongoing project is designed to provide a creative platform to amplify the voices of displaced youth through publication, creative writing workshops, and a number of key initiatives that facilitate the exchange of creative writing and artwork between young people living in refugee camps around the world and those in the Global North. The specific initiatives completed at the time of writing, and which I broadly refer to throughout the article as “creative exchanges,” include a pen pal letter writing program and a collaborative art program called the Half-Baked Art Exchange.

The pen pal program began in early 2023 and facilitated fourteen participants from the United States and one participant from South Korea to exchange letters with twenty-five participants in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. The Half-Baked Art Exchange was launched in 2022 and facilitated three young people in Kakuma Camp to create a piece of art work in a workshop hosted by a Refugee Project collaborating organization. The original artwork was then built upon by three young people in the United States, following their participation in a workshop in which they learned about life in Kakuma Camp. The goal of this initiative was to facilitate a collaborative effort between both parties that represented solidarity, empathy, and partnership. Participants in both the pen pal program and the Half-Baked Art Exchange ranged in age from eleven to fifteen years old.

In the initial pen pal exchange between Jack, writing from his UK school, and Jamila, a Sudanese girl living in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya, Jack begins his letter with a familiar, upbeat rally cry.[1] “Things will get better,” he promises. As he continues, he commiserates, telling his prospective pen pal how brave they must be, how difficult their circumstances, how, on the contrary, he lives in a “solid house” and has a passport. His pen pal, Jamila responds with a picture of her coffee grinder looming large beside an image of her house. She writes, “We’re Ethiopian, we like coffee,” and explains the way houses look where she lives. She says she loves biology and football. Jamila’s letter, full of rich, vivid detail about her daily experiences living in Kakuma, reflects a different story to the one Jack anticipated. But her emphasis is affected through this exchange. In an apparent echo of Jack's offer of comfort, the words, "I will not give up," are perceptible in small faded print beside the image of her house. Amid cheerful depictions and descriptions of the objects and activities that comprise her daily life, these words feel empty, like an afterthought.

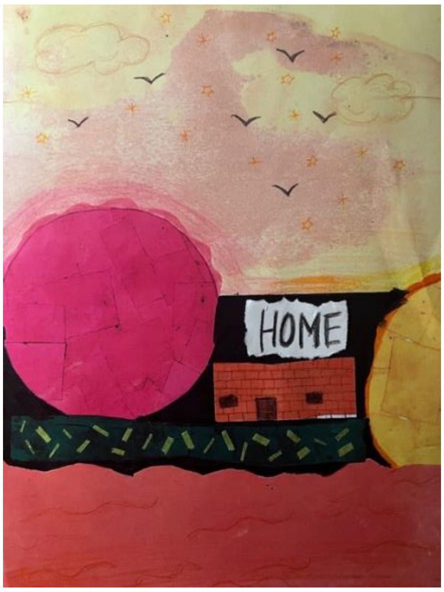

*Image title: Full Pink Sun Half a Yellow Sun*

Through his participation in the Half-Baked Art Exchange, Lobola, a Sudanese boy also living in Kakuma Camp, shared part of his story through a piece of artwork. He said of the piece, titled, "Full Pink Sun Half a Yellow Sun," "here in Kakuma it is like being in another world from the rest of the world and the sun is in the middle because it is so, so hot here."[2] He shared his work with Anika, in the United States, who, after learning about the cultural practices and lived environment that influenced Lobola's work through a shared video by he and other young people living in Kakuma Camp, was invited to add to the piece in a creative collaboration. To the original piece, in addition to some added detail and color, Anika attached a piece of paper with the singular word, "Home." A nod to the fact, as she learned through the shared stories of Lobola and his peers, that Kakuma Camp, instead of a place of abstract suffering and longing, is a home, and for Lobola, the only one he's ever known.

These collaborative projects are, in essence, storytelling acts. While they are not stories as such—there is no beginning, middle and end, they do not confine experience, messy, wild, and disordered into a narrative arc—I consider these exchanges storytelling acts as defined by a key element of the process through which they emerge. Like stories, which, at the most fundamental level, are crafted and shared for an audience, so too are these interactive creative exchanges among refugee youth. In both of the examples provided above, we see young people's perspectives shift and their stories altered in intersubjective exchange with one another.

In her pivotal work, *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt argues that through storytelling, individuals engage in the work of transforming and selectively reworking individual experiences for public consumption. For Arendt, the politics at play through which our individual experience is translated to the public domain, engaging our conflicting roles as individuals and community members, represents what she refers to as the "subjective in between" (Arendt 1958, 1973). In her conceptualization, the relevance of storytelling lies not in its contribution to projects of individual empowerment, but rather in how it reflects our sociality by allowing us to cultivate meaning through the dynamic act of crafting stories with and for an audience. Taking up Arendt's argument, anthropologist Michael Jackson (2013) argues that just as fundamental an existential goal is to rework public knowledge to carry private meaning through individual imaginaries. Both of these acts, Jackson argues, demonstrate the human need and capacity to exercise a sense of agency over our lives through reworking events in narrative frameworks (Jackson 2013; Klinkmann 2015).

As these conceptualizations demonstrate, storytelling plays a central role in mediating our relationship with the outside world (Bloom 2016; Wulff 2016). This premise comes into sharp relief when we consider storytelling practices of youth living in circumstances of precarity where social upheaval, environmental disasters and displacement have dismantled the power dynamics between peoples' immediate worlds and their broader social context (Jackson 2013, 52; Stickley et al. 2019). When stripped of the ability to narratively frame and share experiences, one's subjectivity is diminished. Without a storytelling outlet in circumstances of violence, as Jackson (2013, 69) argues, one loses the ability to translate private experience into the social currency that comes with public validation. Circumstances of violence and trauma hinder one's ability and opportunities to tell stories by disrupting the social context and ubiquitous measures of existence (e.g., space, time) necessary for their telling and comprehension (Jackson 2013, 102).

Maintaining narrative ability, on the other hand, is essential to one's sense of humanity and enables a sense of control over our lives in circumstances where there is little. The very act of telling stories offers social actors a means through which to critique events and circumstances in ways that lead to deeper understanding, as well as allow for confirmation of one's experience and emotional perspective by sharing it with others (Arendt 1958, 50).

Narratives then, are employed for making sense of and assigning meaning to a life (Berger 1984; Serpell 2019). The ability to tell stories provides the sense of agency and control necessary to see ourselves as people. The ability to hear and receive stories provides the nuanced understanding necessary to see one another as more than a narrative; to see one another as people. This is particularly true for young people, arguably on the frontlines of grappling with diversity and multicultural inclusion in their daily lives both in circumstances of violence and rupture, and those outside of such circumstances. Storytelling, as a form of self-expression among youth, is a restorative process that enables young people to make sense of, assign meaning, and assert control over their own lives and to allow others to do the same, in intersubjective engagement with one another.

The nuanced yet transformative effect of storytelling emerging from the analysis of storytelling acts among a contained group of youth provided here can be made generalizable to the experiences of youth in circumstances of precarity provided with opportunities for intersubjective exchange. The broad themes emerging from the exchanges detailed between Jack and Jamila, and Anika and Lobola, demonstrate how storytelling enables subtle shifts in perspective that have the power to imbue the teller with a sense of agency and control, and the listener with increased understanding.

As demonstrated here, through the acts of writing letters and creating collaborative artwork, preconceptions fade as richer understandings surface (*see also* Berland 2004; Blook 2016; Hollan and Throop 2011). Jack, for example, came to see how his perception of a refugee camp as dull and devoid of hope failed to capture the joy and life depicted by the young people who lived there through the stories they shared. Anika, through the drawing she created with Lobola, added depth, perspective and nuance to her understanding of what a home could be. And Jamila, despite Jack’s references to the difficulties of her life, despite his insistence that he couldn’t live in such a way, with an “alien identity” and little stability, harnesses the power of storytelling to describe her experience instead in unmistakable terms of contentment. She writes of walking up a hilltop, “silent as a grave,” on her school compound. How she sees her peers in the distance playing, and hanging up the wash, and hears the echo of people singing in a neighboring community as the sun sets, “glorious,” as it was that Sunday evening, “all rosy and salmon-pink.”

## Notes

[1] The names of some of the young people in this piece have been changed.

[2] Photos courtesy of the author.

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*NEOS* Volume 15, Issue 2 (Fall 2023)

# Narrative Storywork: A Visual and Material Approach to Ethnographic Portraiture with Children in Care

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## Introduction

Child welfare is a space where children do not generally choose to be. Some may not know why they are in care, while others may not leave until they age out. Some have experienced abuse, illness, and/or disability. Consequently, how should ethnographers listen to and portray their stories, if even at all? In this paper, I explore the methodological question of how to do ethnographic research with children in care. I suggest a combination of visual/material tools, demonstrated by an approach I call narrative storywork. I begin by outlining how I conducted this approach. I then explore an ethnographic encounter which illustrates the ways in which people shared stories about their everyday lives. My aim is to encourage experimentality with ethnographic portraiture; this paper is a resource for ethnographers to build on.

## Methods: Multimodal Approaches to Care

Narrative storywork seeks to evoke everyday life narratives through a variety of modular, collaborative methods. I derive the name from a social work tool called Life Story Work, in which a facilitator helps a child understand their life trajectory through the collaborative creation of representations of their life before entering care (see Goldfarb Forthcoming, 107-111).[1] By labeling my approach similarly, I extend an olive branch to practice-based researchers who may find insight in anthropological scholarship. I designed narrative storywork in response to my encounters with children in care, which I then used across twelve months of research on everyday caregiving in the child welfare system in Japan. Jean Hunleth (2017) and Julie Spray's (2020) work are notable influences because of their portrayal and celebration of children's voices through methods like drawing and collaborative storytelling. Small groups of elementary school-aged children at a foster home and children/teenagers at a residential care institution participated in narrative storywork over approximately four months.[2] Outside of the workshops I interacted with people through my daily trips to the institution and regular visits to the foster home. Several caregivers participated as well.

We interacted through a series of weekly/twice-weekly workshops where we discussed short, everyday life stories facilitated through intermediary objects. The discussions were not fixed to a particular place, and I participated too.[3] Importantly, people maintained creative control over what they chose to share. I did not tell participants what to do but encouraged them to think about objects that had *meaning* and objects that they often *used*. Discussions involved everyone asking questions and offering comments. Later, I asked participants to think about portraying *emotions* through their stories. My interlocutors' stories were unplanned, emergent, and sometimes subversive; I found reassurance in Armstrong and Agulnik's (2020, 29-32) encouraging use of "happenstance" to understand the links between structure and agency. Yet, my aim leverages Allison James' (2007) position that working with children is not solely about giving them a voice—they already have one—it is the ways in which researchers include, listen to, and retell these stories that matter.

I offered a variety of means to promote inclusive participation, such as digital cameras, drawing supplies, walking tours, show-and-tell, and one-on-one or group discussion; modularity was vital as an accessible way to resituate the researcher-interlocutor relationship and co-creation of ethnographic data (Campos and Anderson 2021).[4] Cameras were popular and I found photography to be a poignant counter to reductive interests among clinical professionals in the developmental processes of children in care (see also Vaughan and Khaw 2021, 754-8). My purpose with narrative storywork, however, was not to collect people's things and curate them as data. While people gave me permission to use their work, I do not have a large repository of visual/material data. Instead, I listened to and kept notes on people's stories.[5] Lastly, I want to stress that I did not evaluate people's stories in terms of quality—it was the doing that mattered.

## A Story of Laughter

*A String of 1000 Origami Cranes. Picture courtesy of Kenji*

Narrative storywork provided interactive spaces that, aside from the content of the workshops, demonstrated how children and their caregivers got along. On a late summer afternoon, I sat around a small wooden table with three young foster children, Nanako, Kenji, Emi, and their foster mother, Misae. The children were eager to share their pictures with Misae, who pretended to act appalled when they tried to show her sneak-peeks of their photos, “Ahh! Don’t show me yet! Wait your turn… This is special.” Kenji went first. “This is a picture of my string of origami cranes,” he said confidently.[6] “Since I couldn’t go outside due to the state of emergency, I made this hoping COVID would go away.” I noted that the state of emergency, Japan’s lockdown-like measure, was recently lifted. “It must have worked,” I said. “What?” said Emi, who was not paying attention, “The emergency is gone? Everything is normal now?” Misae looked at Emi and said, “Yes, because of Kenji, the state of emergency was lifted. You can see your friends again.” Emi perked up and replied, “Wow that is great! All of Japan? America too?” “No, just Japan,” Misae chuckled. She quickly added, “But you should thank Kenji—it was because of him.” “Really?” Emi asked suspiciously. Misae smirked slyly and said, “Yes, it was *specifically* because of him, so you owe him thanks.” Emi, not convinced, asked “But I didn’t see anything on the news this morning!” Misae, being melodramatic, frowned with regret and replied, “Aw, but I saw the news on my phone this morning.” Emi, thinking she found an answer, said, “Well then give me your phone.” Misae, keeping up the joke, said “Oh no… it is too late, I already closed the app—it’s gone.” Unable to contain himself, Kenji let out a chuckle, as did Nanako. Misae and I joined in. Emi, looking unconvinced, exclaimed, “I knew it!”

Our workshops were spaces where my interlocutors could share their stories, yet our engagements often transcended or subverted a simple focus on things and places. This story of laughter, brought forth through a picture, exemplifies the everyday life of the Hasegawa home and how people crafted close relationships. The narratives invoked in this vignette—as an icon of others in my research—situate narrative vis-à-vis social (inter)action and the senses. This aligns with Cheryl Mattingly’s (2010, 41-45) narrative phenomenology, a framework that is less about narrative as a textual production but more about everyday life as dramaturgical performativity (see also Howes and Classen 2014, 4-13). Drawing this point further, I realized how narrative storywork could facilitate new ethnographic encounters: I travelled with youths into the city in search of collectibles, witnessed children reliving old memories, and learned people’s stances on what constitutes quality care. Multimodal approaches in marginalized spaces take multiple forms. To deconstruct assumptions about the practice of ethnography, I encourage proactivity and creativity in offering people opportunities to choose *how* they engage.

## Conclusion

Being open to novel methods of interaction offers an engaging way to invite people in care into ethnography. The story in this paper leaned towards photography; other possibilities include but are not limited to film, video diaries, music, digital spaces, poetry, and games. These avenues can be solitary or collaborative endeavors, and the resulting creations do not need to be made into consumable media for others. The point is to connect with people in an equitable, inclusive, and responsible manner that helps them articulate their stories; multimodal approaches like narrative storywork offer worthwhile means of deconstructing barriers in age, ability, health, and identity.

## Notes

[1] For clarification, I am not using narrative storywork as a therapeutic intervention, and it should not be interpreted as such. The inspiration from LSW extends insofar as using material intermediaries to engage people. My research design is also motived by training in Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR).

[2] Due to the short form style of this paper, I center my methods overview on practical information and takeaways for researchers. Please see Chapman Forthcoming for more details on the multi-sited focus of the research project this paper draws on.

[3] See Chapman 2023 for a discussion of positionality, an important topic that deserves its own space for discussion.

[4] For more information about the variety multimodal research approaches in anthropology, see Westmoreland 2022.

[5] This point coincides with a broader question of my research: who defines, or who should get to define, the circulation and consumption of people's stories? My position here is that visual and material content should not be un-critically construed or classified as presentable and digestible data for an audience.

[6] In Japanese this is called *senbazuru*. They are made by hand to celebrate a special event or wish someone good health.

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# Mapping Multilingual Sociality in Rural India: Children and Youths’ Perceptions of Self and Language in Space

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“I am only drawing the places where Marathi is spoken,” Rekha[1] told her friends as they drew maps in their school dormitory on a leisurely weekend in July 2022. Marathi is the official language of the western Indian state of Maharashtra. Rekha and the majority of her peers belong to a Denotified Tribe community across India whose name and language are both called Banjara. Multilingual Banjara students in rural Maharashtra navigate a setting that includes schools where the language of instruction is not the language spoken in their socially and linguistically segregated hamlets, known as tandas (Ramaswamy and Bhukya 2002; Shah and Bara 2020). We asked the girls and young women between the ages of 11 and 17, to draw a freehand map that showed their understanding of places surrounding them and languages that they use or know to be used in those locations. As researchers, we are non-Banjara women from Marathi and English-speaking urban backgrounds and while the young women freely spoke in Banjara amongst themselves, we spoke Marathi with them. Our gender made it possible to spend time with the girls and young women who drew the maps in their female-only dormitory. Out of 23 maps, we explore four which most clearly help us to understand how Banjara youth make sense of their identities within a multilingual landscape and its spatial organization through language. Not only do we consider how Banjara children and youth understand places that they navigate on a regular basis, such as their home tanda, other villages, and school, but also how language negotiations are a part of that process.

Mapping is both a method and frame to analyze connections between space, emotions, and processes that shape children’s identities and how they make sense of everyday life (Gillespe 2010; Lowes 2008; Lynch 1960). As a qualitative method, individuals with insider knowledge of a location are asked to externalize a mental spatial schema by drawing a particular area and significant places from memory to create an intimate view of a location (Graham 1976; Veronese et al. 2022). Children and adolescents’ maps reveal their perceptions of cultural boundaries and sensitivities which may be difficult for adults to perceive (Gillespe 2010). Bringing mapping practices into our linguistic anthropological research makes visible the young women and girls’ relative relationships and community membership organized around languages as cultural categories (Catling 1979; Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Feld and Basso 1996). Making sense of a multilingual environment for these young women includes 1) orienting and organizing knowledge of places through varying degrees of familiarity, and 2) determining sociality and social distance through spatial (dis)connections from linguistic communities. Our interlocutors were non-English speakers and wrote on their maps in Devanagari, a script adopted for some Indian languages.

### Sense of Self, Belonging, and Familiarity

While researching geographic literacy, Lowes (2008) found that when American 3rd and 4th graders drew world maps, the places they had emotional connections to become larger, more central, or more detailed than other places. This shows what Lowes (2008) calls "ego-centric place knowledge" (10) where aspects of the landscape are drawn with greater detail according to the authors' relationships with them.

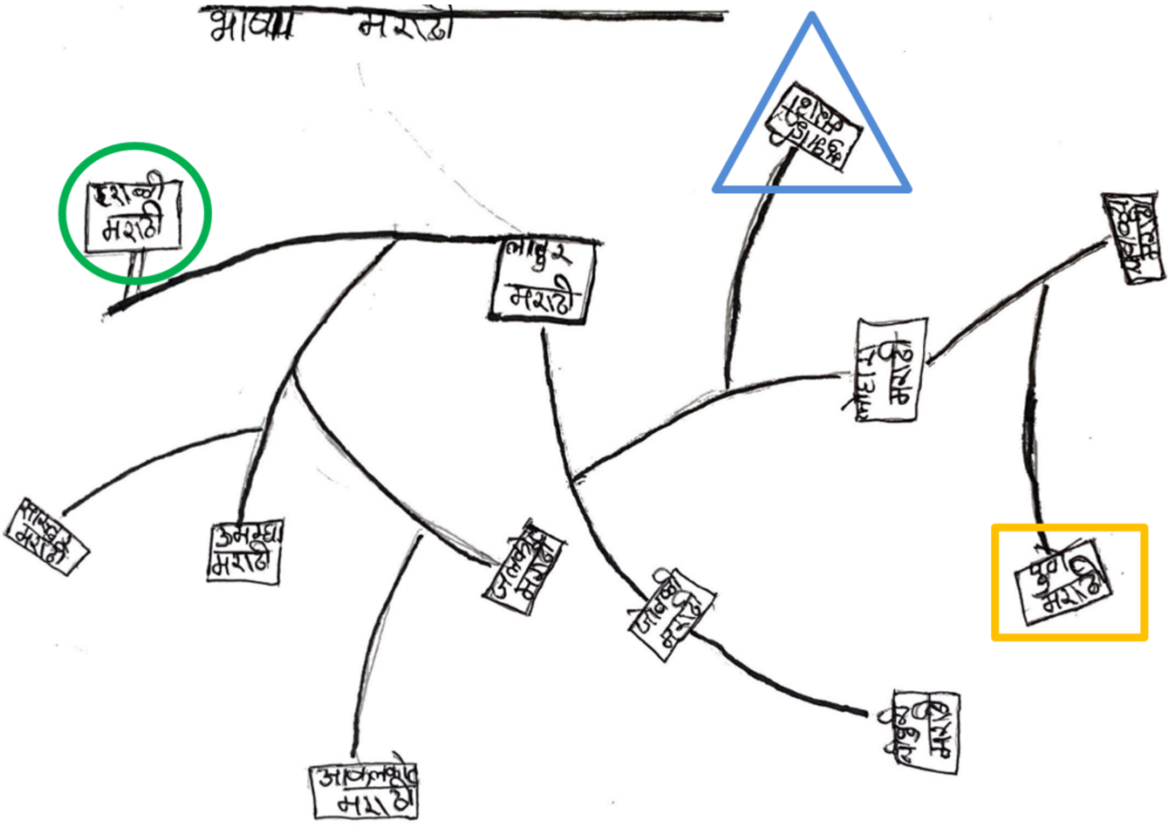


*Figure 1: Map 1*

Rehka's insistence on only drawing locations where Marathi is spoken meant that she left her home tanda off the map. At 13, she may have been demonstrating her geographic knowledge for us, but nevertheless, we do not see details delineating multilingualism in the landscape of Rekha's daily life. Rekha began her Marathi map by drawing Harali, a familiar location where her school is located (in the green circle). She then drew lines like branches spanning towards the right through areas of gradual size and importance, such as market towns, district centers, and finally, the large cities of Mumbai and Pune (highlighted with a blue triangle and orange rectangle, respectively). The first branch after Harali is also more detailed than the others.

Lowes (2008) explains the degrees of varying detail in children's maps show familiarity with a location and Catling (1979) describes how authors indicate their relationships with locations through varying sizes and distances between features. Rekha had most likely visited the more detailed locations recently or more frequently than the ones she drew further from Harali. Rekha demonstrates an understanding that Marathi, as the regional language, is connected to large places of importance. Smaller villages, including her tanda, are not part of a lingua franca network, and when visiting these locations, she expects to use Marathi.

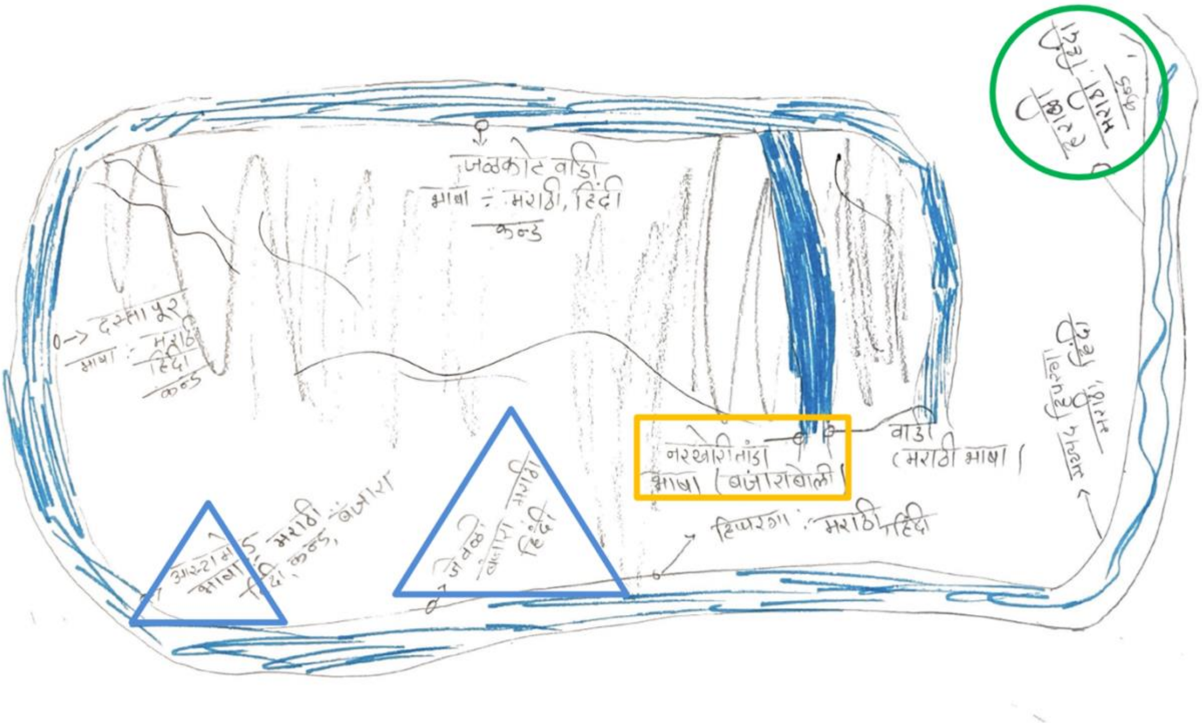


Figure 2: Map 2

Chitra also began drawing from her present location at school in Harali (in the green circle). She does not list Banjara in Harali but instead includes Marathi, Hindi (a lingua franca in much of North India), and Kannada. Kannada is the official regional language of the neighboring state of Karnataka, and the home language of a small community of a different caste in this region. Chitra, at 17-years-old, would also be familiar with Kannada because Banjara communities and their tandas are predominantly found around the neighboring borders of Maharashtra, Telangana, and Karnataka, and many Banjara individuals travel across these state lines without the linguistic barriers non-Banjara speakers face. A snaking road wraps around the page taking the reader through places Chitra encounters on her journey to school. Importantly, she has written Banjara with her home tanda, Narkhori (in the orange rectangle). She drew her tanda at the end of the darkest and thickest line and placed it in the center but off the main road, as tanda settlements are located away from large thoroughfares. She also listed Banjara in the major towns near tandas, Jewali and Asthamod (in the blue triangles). She did not specify their tandas by name like her own, showing a different degree of familiarity with these locations (Lowes 2008).

## Space, Linguistic Communities, and Social Distance

The following maps feature what Gillespie (2010) explores as children's understanding of community spatial boundaries to highlight social distance. Physical features in the following maps show authors' subjective associations of linguistic communities with specific places. Physical features that authors include indicate degrees of familiarity or social distance with locations and the communities who live there as defined by their dominant language.

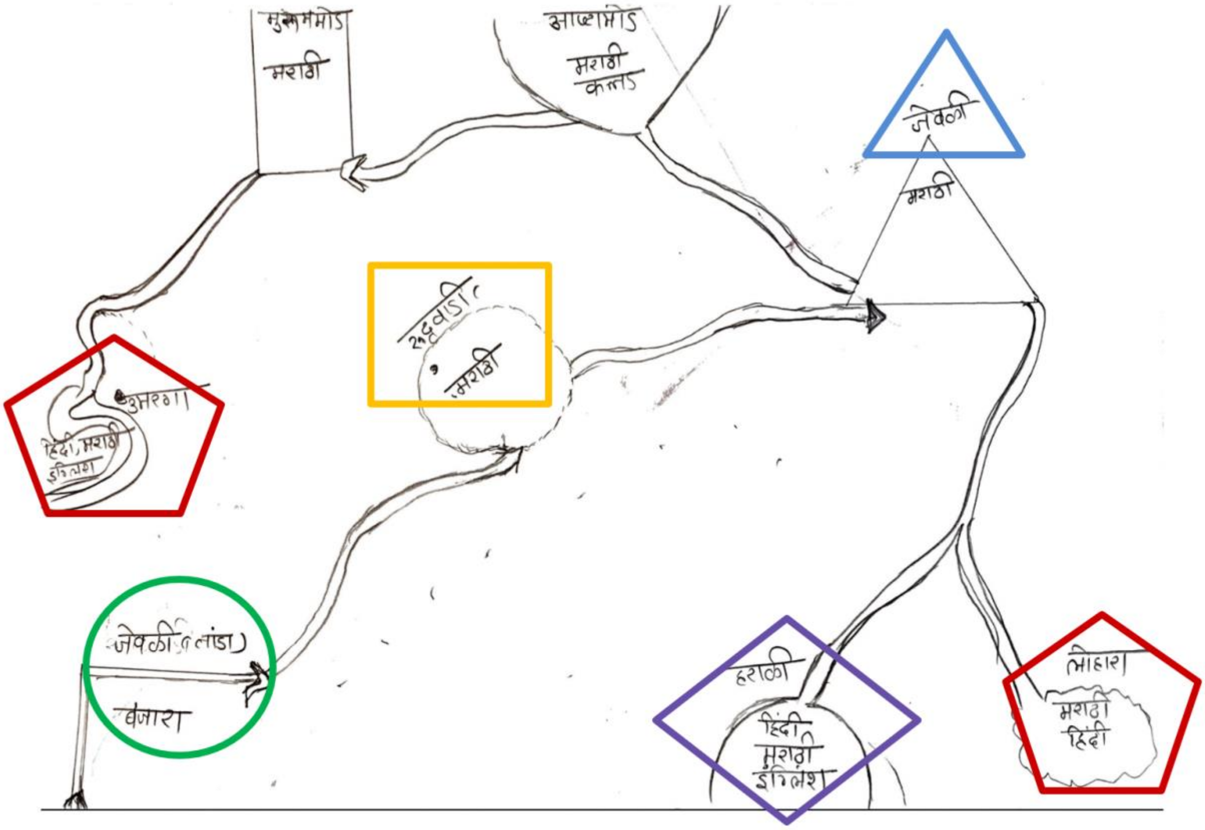
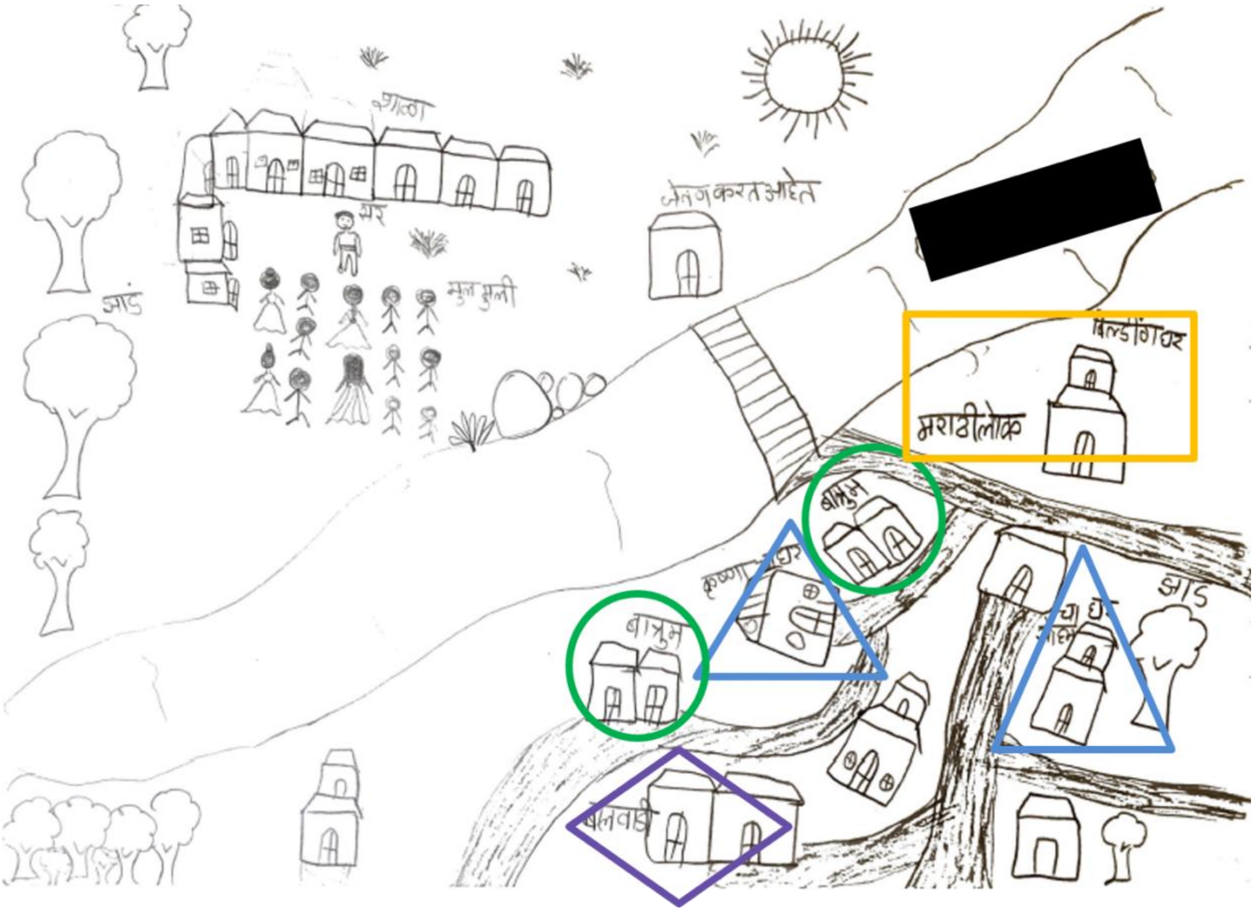


*Figure 3: Map 3*

Sixteen-year-old Sushila began her map with her home tanda, Jewali Tanda (in the green circle), and labeled it only with Banjara. It is also the only location on the map where she listed Banjara. Her tanda is connected to the neighboring village, Rudrawadi (in the orange rectangle) by a long road, which she has labeled only with Marathi. Most tandas are identified with a neighboring village or town. While Sushila just calls it Jewali tanda, her tanda is alternatively called Jewali East Tanda. Although both are physically close, Sushila has placed the market town of Jewali further beyond Rudrawadi village and labeled it with Marathi. The road she takes to school makes the village of Rudrawadi seem closer than the town associated with her tanda. She has drawn roads connecting the rest of the map together and included English in the label for Harali (in the purple diamond), most likely due to us and other English speakers who frequently visit. Hindi in two locations (the red pentagon) delineates towns that Sushila understands to have a sizable Muslim community, who are often defined by their religiolinguistic use of Hindi/Urdu. Sushila categorizes the towns and tandas in different shapes corresponding with her relative familiarity with them. Veronese et al. (2022) asked children in refugee camps to categorize locations in their surroundings by color based on perceptions of their relative safety. Rather than color code, Sushila has indicated social distance by shape. The places she visits for school are drawn as circles, where she goes for a weekly market is a triangle, and larger towns where she has less familiarity, spends less time, and would use Marathi, are in a square, a cloud, and shapeless form at the end of the road in the top left corner. Such a map shows Sushila's varied experiences of her surroundings through intricate layers of subjective meanings.



[redacted]

*Figure 4: Map 4*

In the final map, 11-year-old Priti has drawn important features of her social environment. She mapped out her school in the top left-hand corner, including the teacher addressing a group of students. She includes a detailed map of her tanda in the lower right-hand corner and labels physical features of significance to her, such as the detached bathrooms (in green circles), her friends' homes (in blue triangles), and a preschool (in the purple diamond). Lynch (1960) explains that commonly featured aspects across multiple maps can indicate a communal importance. On the other hand, children's interpretations and navigation of their settings can leave out what may be expected features. While other authors drew and labeled tandas, Priti drew a close look into her tanda but did not label the tanda or her home within it. A major road separates the two halves of the map, showing physical and social distance between her school and her home. A second road separates her home from a two-story building (in the orange rectangle) that she has labeled "Building" in English written in Devanagari, demonstrating her knowledge for her English-speaking audience. Additionally, she included the label "Marathi people" on the same building. Her separation and explicit label of "Marathi people" further points to a social distance with a community defined by their dominant language. Rather than showing what Lowes (2008) calls "ego-centric place knowledge" by highlighting mundane details of her daily life, such as her own language, tanda, and home, Priti instead only includes aspects that stand out to her as exceptionally important or unique.

## Conclusion

The maps explored here demonstrate subjective relationships between self, social distance, and linguistic communities in ways that highlight elements of space as cultural categories for youth (Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Feld and Basso 1996). This article's four maps show that Banjara multilingual youth in rural India make sense of their surroundings through associations with linguistic communities and degrees of familiarity with these communities and where they are located. Learning how young people perceive multilingual landscapes brings to light daily experiences and negotiations that may go unseen by adults. Authors of these maps speak a different language at home than they must in school and broader society, demonstrating both their awareness of linguistic expectations in their surroundings and the multilingual mental schemas they use to navigate familiar and unfamiliar places (Graham 1976). 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.

## Notes

[1] Names have been changed. While we have permission to use these maps for research purposes, including publication, we have maintained the authors' anonymity.

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**Dr. Devayani Tirthali** is an educational researcher and research design consultant working with early-career researchers, social-sector professionals, and NGOs. An ethnographer at heart, she focuses on the process of ‘educating in everyday living’. Her 15 years of research spans diverse spaces online and offline: schools and afterschool programs; social media, virtual worlds, and gaming; MOOCs and online learning; and the current work with the Laman Banjara community. Over the years she has worked with a variety of research methodologies, innovatively bringing in methods from different disciplines to bear on the research project at hand.

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# Children's Perspective on Place and Belonging: Study of Pavement- and Slum-living Children of Kalighat area, Kolkata, India

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The pavement- and slum-living children of India have received enormous attention from academic researchers, government bodies, non-government organizations (NGOs), and media. Studies on poor children have often focused primarily on their problems, but to understand the lived experiences of children beyond their problems, it is important to encourage children's participation in the research process. This study explored how pavement- and slum-living children expressed their views on what they consider their home using rights-based participatory techniques such as drawings, which facilitate children to share their views and experiences with adults and each other.

The rights-based participatory framework helps to access children's perspectives based on their personal experiences and the circumstances in their lives. Children are encouraged to choose the methods which are suitable to them. This helps provide relevant evidence about their present conditions, facilitating more impactful research (Pain 2004). Findings from such studies are likely to challenge policies that see children solely as future citizens (Morrow 2001; Bessell 2006; Cahill and Hart 2006).

After the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), there has been a paradigm shift leading to a greater recognition of children's rights. This has resulted in children's increased participation in research, which has shown to be more advantageous rather than being restrictive to the research process (Lansdown 2005). Drawing on the framework of the UNCRC, informed by the idea of children as social actors (James et al. 1998), and valuing the children's lived experience, this study was conducted among the pavement- and slum-living children in Kalighat, Kolkata, India, using rights-based participatory methodology.

Rights-based research with children applies the theoretical framework that constructs them as subjects with rights and as active social agents with the ability to understand their own lives and associate meaning to it. According to Beazley et al., the approach to rights-based research with children has five key characteristics:

> First, it is genuinely respectful of children's partnership and participation in research which must be meaningful on their own terms rather than being dictated by adult researchers or strictures of funding arrangement. Children's perspectives and opinions must be integral to the research. Second, the approach places ethics at the heart of research and children must engage in research voluntarily and not be harmed or exploited through their participation. Third, the research conducted should be

> scientifically valid and conform to high scientific standards. Fourth, analysis must be robust, where possible combining both statistical and descriptive techniques. Finally, the research prioritises local knowledge and expertise to produce insightful information on children's own experiences and opinions. (2011, 161)

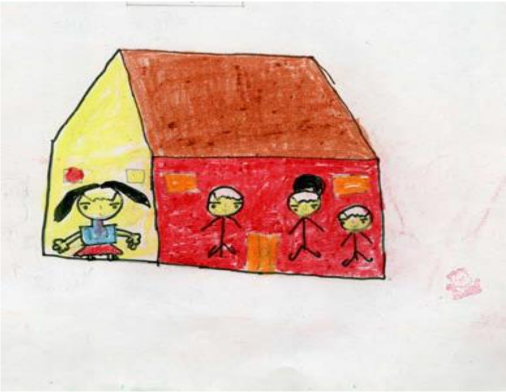
I conducted this study as part of my PhD field research with an NGO providing primary education and other care services to pavement and slum-living children in Kolkata. I worked as a volunteer teacher, allowing me access to the children and the community. I tried to balance the power relationship and positioned myself as a friendly, native researcher who could speak their language and did not offer any false hopes to the children. A total of 70 participants, ages seven to seventeen, participated in the research. The majority of children lived with their parents or grandparents. This study used a multi-method approach, including participant observation, written methods, such as diaries and essays by older children, visual methods, such as drawings and photos taken by the children, and group discussions. Using various methods enriched the data and allowed cross-checking between methods.

Drawing was popular among children of all ages. Children were asked to draw their home and future aspirations. Some children who would talk less and did not actively participate in discussion could express their feelings through their drawings. Children came up with interesting insights about their drawings, which were also recorded. These qualitative comments were categorized into themes to understand the drawings better and provided stimulus for group discussion. Listening to what children say about their drawings is a significant aspect of this method, without which adults are liable to misinterpret what the child has represented.

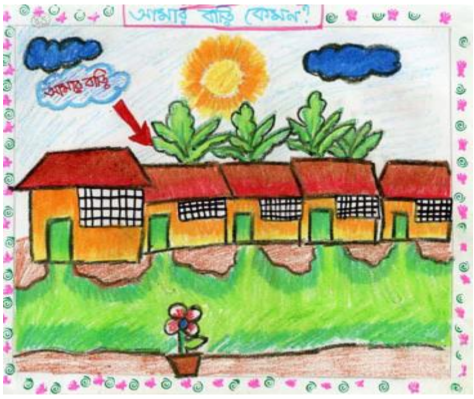
Kalighat is home to many poor people. It is a place famous for the Kali temple, and pilgrims from different parts of the country visit this area. There are poor people living all around the area, either on the street pavements or just outside the temple. Many of them are living on the pavement with their children, having once inhabited a slum that the government demolished. Most people living on the pavement or in nearby slums have migrated from villages in search of job opportunities. In the life of pavement – and slum-living children of Kalighat, everyday spaces such as the 'pavement,' 'slum,' and 'NGO centers' are significant in both positive and negative ways. These spaces in the children's lives invoke powerful feelings associated with belonging, exclusion, safety, and danger. The street also offers children the possibility of demonstrating agency and building cultural capital through understanding and interaction with their local social environment (Skelton 2000).

The children living on the pavements and in the slum considered the pavement to be their 'home' and preferred to spend most of their time there. Children would often point to fixed places in the street when asked about their house/home – such as outside a particular shop or behind a lamppost. They preferred working and living in the Kalighat area as compared to the other parts of the city and their village. The most common reason cited by them for their satisfaction within this area was the potential sources of income; its status as a pilgrimage center provided the children and their families with more ready opportunities for work.

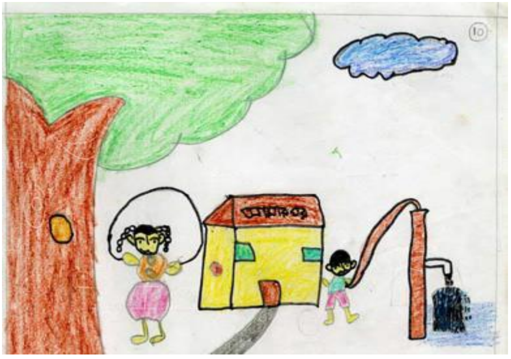
When the children were asked to draw their homes, most drew proper sheltered houses with overhead roofs and surrounding gardens. On being probed, most responded that they drew their future house, which they aspire to build for their parents and for themselves to stay comfortable. Some children drew their village house. This is similar to Beazley's (2000) findings, where the street children of Yogyakarta were asked to draw the maps of their hometowns or villages, which showed that children identified more with their village or hometown than the city where they lived. Some drawings below clearly show the children's desire to live in a sheltered house. The drawings also reveal their strong attachment to their village house.



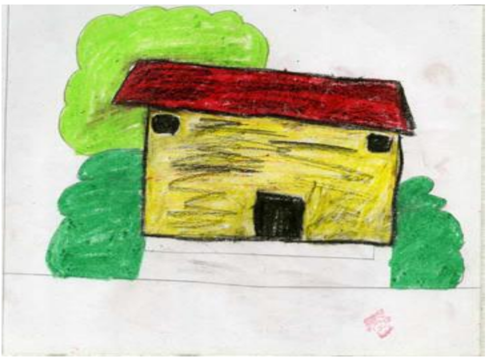
*Drawing 1 : My house*



*Drawing 2: My village house*



*Drawing 3: My beautiful house*



*Drawing 4: My future house*

These drawings and their interpretation showed that children who lived on the street or in the slum had a desire to stay in a sheltered house away from the public glare. They also maintained close ties with their village. The children would visit their village once in two or more years. Drawing of the village houses showed their nostalgia as they remembered how they lived in the village. Children often highlighted the greenery and spacious surroundings of their village. They had more space to play in the village as compared to the city. Although children share a strong affinity with the Kalighat area because of the social and support network they have developed, they still have an attachment to their village and consider it an integral aspect of their life when describing what they consider home.

This study shows that children have a sense of belonging to their village home and the future idea of a sheltered house and prefer the security and safety of living in a house compared to the transient life they have on the street or slum. While the children understand their surroundings, their perception about "home" is different as when they are asked to draw where they live, they are not drawing their "home" as being on the pavement or in the slums. We need more research to explore pavement- and slum-living children's lived reality by increasing their active participation.

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## Author Biography

**Minushree Sharma** received her doctorate in Sociology from the National University of Singapore (NUS). For her PhD, she conducted rights-based participatory research with children living on the pavement and slums of Kolkata, India. She explored how these children constructed their childhoods by examining their perspectives, experiences, and actions. She has contributed to conferences, international refereed journals, and a book chapter in a series on issues in childhood.

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# Using Embodied Tableaux as a Drama-Based Research Method with Children and Youth

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This article explores how embodied tableaux (a dramatic technique) can be used as a method in participatory research with children and youth. Methods discussed in this article were derived as part of the first phase of an ongoing, multi-year research program aimed at developing and adapting drama-based techniques as tools for participatory, child-centered research. Through this project, child and youth participants actively engaged with a range of drama-based approaches in order to explore and discuss topics that they found interesting and important to them. Child and youth participants then shared feedback on these methods to help identify best practices for using drama-based methods in child-centered research. The goal of the initiative is to take a child-centered approach to research methodology development, drawing on children's perspectives, experiences, and opinions to help support the growth of best practices for the field.

This article focuses on methods adapted from a series of drama-based initiatives undertaken as part of this larger research program. These initiatives took place in Toronto, Canada, and involved a total of 54 child and youth participants between the ages of 4-17 years. Participants were recruited through digital posters and word-of-mouth and could voluntarily register to participate. All interested children and youth were able to participate, as long as the research team obtained assent (from minors) and consent (from parents/guardians, or from participants legally able to consent). Children and youth involved in these initiatives participated in either one-week or two-week programs (depending on age and availability) where they learned and engaged with a variety of drama-based methods and provided feedback on the methods through open-ended focus groups. As visual and embodied components are central to drama-based research, the team received consent and assent to video-record the programs, and to use photographs of participants in research articles and public dissemination.

## Drama-Based Research and Tableaux

Drama-based research involves the use of theatrical activities and techniques to examine, explore, and disseminate research participants' perspectives, thoughts, and experiences. Drama-based research approaches are qualitative methods, typically used to demonstrate participants' unique ways of being and knowing and to provide researchers with a better understanding of participants' experiences (Given 2008). There are a range of drama-based methods that can be used by researchers such as dramatic scene creation (Shabtay 2021a), verbatim theatre (Baer, Salisbury, and Goldstien 2019; Gallagher, Wessels, and Ntelioglou 2012), and playbuilding (Norris 2009; Shabtay 2021b), among others. As a professor and research methodologist in child and youth studies, one of my goals (and a key purpose for this article) is to expand researchers' knowledge of drama-based methods, as the use of these approaches in social research (including anthropological research) with children is still gaining popularity.

One drama-based research approach, explored in this article, is the creation of embodied tableaux (often described as simply "tableaux"). In theatre and performance, the term 'tableaux' refers to the practice of performers creating still images using their faces and bodies. When using the tableaux method, embodied images are presented as frozen scenes in order to represent narratives, themes, emotions, experiences, and/or relationships (Branscombe and Schneider 2013; Mayor 2020). Tableaux may be created by individuals or in groups, and typically do not involve movement or dialogue, which makes this dramatic approach adaptable and accessible for a variety of child and youth participants (including those who are new to performance, those who face mobility challenges, or those who experience difficulty with verbal expression). Tableaux methods are also used in 'image theatre' practices developed by Boal (1995), as a form of interactive activist theatre with adults. While the tableaux method is widely used in theatrical productions, educational settings, and activist contexts, the use of these methods in child-centered research is still limited.

## Using Embodied Tableaux in Research

Through explorations and conversations with child and youth participants, I have found that tableaux can be used as a child-centered research tool in a variety of ways. Some of the ways this method can be used include rapport-building, promoting child-led discussion, communicating feelings and experiences, and building comfort with other drama-based research methods.

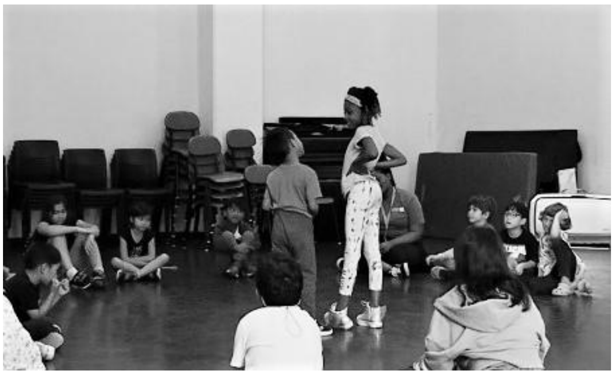

*Figure 1: Children playing the game 'Come, all of my friends'*

One tableaux-based activity that can be adapted and used in child-centered research is a participatory game called 'Come, all of my friends'. In this game, children (and researchers) sit or stand together in a circle, all facing the middle of the circle. Children then take turns entering the middle of the circle and stating, 'Come, all of my friends who…' and share something about themselves to complete the statement (such as: 'come, all of my friends who have siblings' or 'come, all of my friends who like playing video games'). Once a child has shared something, any other members of the circle who identify with the statement are invited to join the child in the centre of the circle (see Figure 1), and together they create a silent dramatic image representing the statement. As the children take turns sharing statements and creating tableaux images together, members of the group learn new things about each other. This activity can be useful in building rapport with child participants, as researchers are able to actively participate in the game by joining the circle and creating dramatic tableaux images, as Green (2012) notes "children respond positively to researchers who are … not afraid to sing songs and be silly" (283). This type of activity is also a unique way to engage children and youth in the research process, in that they exercise agency about what they would like to share with the group and learn about each other. This style of rapport-building activity is adapted from dramatic arts exercises used outside of the research space, such as in theatrical and educational settings, and can be further adapted for different settings (such as online video-based research) and to support participants with a variety of needs (Magni 2020).

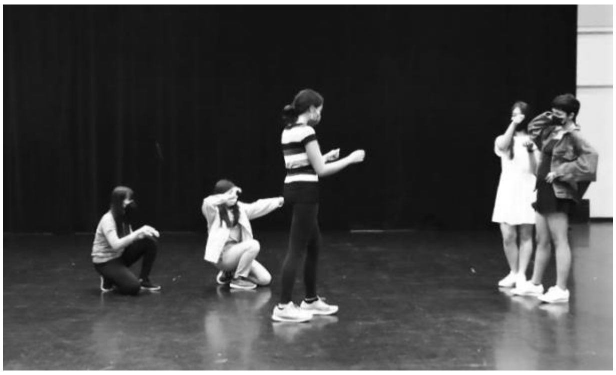

*Figure 2: Youth sharing their tableaux piece, titled 'Beauty Standards'*

In addition to helping build rapport with research participants, embodied tableaux can be used as a participatory research method where participants can explore, consolidate, and communicate their views, emotions, and experiences. This can be an entry point into a larger discussion of the themes showcased in their tableaux and the meanings behind the embodied images. For example, researchers can provide participants with open-ended prompts, such as 'create an image about a social issue that is important to you' and give participants time to reflect in groups and create a representational embodied image or series of images (see Figure 2). Participants can then present their tableaux and discuss the meanings behind their creations, and researchers can draw on these tableaux images to provoke further discussion about the topics and issues that participants presented. One 14-year-old participant shared, "The tableaux helped me better express my feelings because sometimes it's harder for me to put things into words… like, it's better if I can show what I feel, and then I'm able to explain and tell my story."

Tableaux can be used to generate research data, both through what is displayed in the images themselves, and through participants' explanations and follow-up discussions. The performances created by youth can also be presented to audiences as an 'authentic' form of dissemination where youth participants decide what they would like to showcase, as James (2007) notes, "We need to consider the ways in which children's interests are represented [and] by whom their voices are represented" (262). These methods can be adapted for use in research projects on a range of topics, in a variety of contexts, and can be used in combination with other methods.

In addition to using tableaux as the only dramatic method in a project, tableaux activities can also be used as an entry point into more complex drama-based research methods such as dramatic scene creation (Shabtay, 2021a) or ethnodrama and playbuilding (Shabtay, 2021b). For research participants who are new to drama, tableaux can be less daunting than other techniques, since this method does not typically require speaking or movement. In my work, I often begin with tableaux-based warm-up activities to help participants build confidence

using drama to communicate their views, before approaching other drama-based research methods. As one 11-year-old participant shared, “For me, tableaux games were so good because I used to be a bit shy about drama, but now after doing tableaux I realized actually it’s easy and fun and I’m not scared of doing other drama stuff”.

## Concluding Thoughts

It is important that researchers continue to build on, adapt, and expand research methods to support the diverse range of interests and needs children and youth possess. Embodied tableaux methods, whether used on their own or in combination with other methods, offer excellent opportunities to build rapport with child and youth research participants and to learn about their ideas, views, feelings, and understandings. Incorporating participatory, arts-based, and child-centered techniques (such as drama-based research methods) can help strengthen communication with participants and contribute to a more well-rounded understanding of children and young people’s lived experiences.

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# 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 enfantique").

## 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).

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**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 Fundation & 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 gamins roms hors-de-l'enfance. Entre protection and exclusion*, DOI). She carries out research on the politicization of childhood and familyhood in Europe and Latin America.

**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 program. Her broader research interests include experiences of chronicity, children's participation in their own care, hospital ethnography, and communication in health settings.

**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-lexterieur-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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# Navigating Ethical Dilemmas in Participatory Research with Young People

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Participatory research projects with young people[1] often seek to empower them through knowledge and skills development to become independent actors who can advocate for themselves. However, they usually come with ethical complexities and potential risks that require careful navigation by lead investigators. This research article delves into the perils linked to young researchers exercising their discovered 'power' or rather 'agency' against ethical principles on a sensitive topic. Against this backdrop, the article advocates for (1) the necessity of providing ethical training to young participants, (2) maintaining ongoing follow-ups to recall the key issues, and (3) ensuring that the voices of young participants are actively integrated into the exploration of research ethics alongside adult researchers.

There is a growing body of literature on participatory research with children and young people concerning ethical considerations working with them (e.g. Abebe 2009; Hadfield-Hill et al. 2023; Loveridge et al. 2023). In spite of that, there persists a knowledge gap concerning the tensions arising from elevated levels of agency stemming from self-confidence gained through knowledge and skills training workshops (also referred to as 'empowerment' in this note), potentially leading to ethical dilemmas and breaches. Although it is not news that dilemmas and breaches may surface during dynamic research projects (Groundwater-Smith et al. 2014), there is a need to exchange experiences on how to address — or better prevent — those issues within the academic world (Loveridge et al. 2023).

Based on her experiences, the author emphasizes the challenges of balancing the interests of the universities (i.e. the ethical committees), the project team, the co-investigator, and finally the young participants. This delicate act demands ongoing reflection, or rather the ability to critically and reflexively navigate situational ethics within research environments influenced by various factors, such as social, cultural, and political dynamics (Ahsan 2009). This includes the author's relationship with the young participants (Canosa, Graham, and Wilson 2018).

This article, authored by a co-investigator of the international participatory art-based research project Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP),[2] led by universities in the UK and Indonesia, offers insights into the author's experiences in guiding young participants to conduct ethical, art-based research on their pressing issues of concern. The situation under discussion arose from the young participants' proposal of addressing sexual abuse among adolescent girls in their community by creating a film to raise awareness among key stakeholders. To gather information for this mini-project, the young participants suggested conducting surveys on perceptions of community members concerning sexual abuse of adolescent girls and conducting interviews with young survivors with the assistance of a local project partner — a civil society organization that employs experienced care workers to support survivors of sexual abuse. This proposal underwent careful consideration and discussion within the international and national project teams, while also checking with the approval of ethics committees. Ultimately, the young participants could proceed with developing both survey and interview questions but had to avoid highly sensitive questions. Young survivors were also given the ability to drop out at any time without providing a reason and the assurance of aftercare support for the interviewees (if needed and desired). This approach was selected to ensure ethical and safeguarding measures for both parties, the young researchers and the interviewees, while allowing the project activities to progress (Bradbury-Jones 2014; Gordon 2020).

The author's role was to facilitate the transformation of young people from participants to co-researchers (alongside other project team members). At the very beginning of the film project, the author[3] helped participants with brainstorming about a topic of their choice and supported the proposal writing while constantly engaging the young researchers in discussions about the purpose of the project and the steps of filmmaking. Over time, the young researchers started to lead the discussions and co-created survey and interview questions. To ensure ethical research and the delivery of the project outputs, the young researchers attended workshops to develop their research skills (e.g. interviewing) alongside training on safeguarding and ethics. The workshops were led by different academic project team members. In these workshops, the young researchers were given time to discuss their ideas and concerns. However, the young researchers were most talkative when they debriefed the workshop only with the author (and not with the larger research team). As such, the author engaged the young researchers in a reflective discussion session after each workshop to learn more about their experiences.

As soon as interviews started, the author collaborated closely with the young researchers to ensure that data collection and storage adhered to the project's overarching data management plan. The recorded interviews and notes remained accessible only to the young participants, the author, and the CSO worker. Throughout this phase, the author repeatedly reminded everyone of the ethical principles and the corresponding safeguarding measures they had to follow.

Up until this point, the project had been progressing smoothly. However, the situation took a turn once the film script was drafted using the data collected from surveys and interviews. Following initial discussions and consultations with a filmmaker, the young researchers identified a gap in their data that needed addressing to improve the script and strengthen the film's overall message. Consequently, they decided to

proceed with an additional interview of one of the survivors without prior consultation with the author and/or the CSO worker. The author only became aware of the interview after it had taken place, and she had to promptly take steps to address the situation.

As a result, the author sought guidance from another member of the academic project team and a collaborating psychologist. They agreed that the primary objectives were to minimize any potential harm to the survivor who was interviewed and to the young researchers while also proactively preventing any further ethical issues from arising.

Thus, they implemented four key actions. Firstly, they conducted an online debriefing session with the young researchers to gain a better sense of the interview conducted with the young survivor. Moreover, the author inquired about the interview process, the specific questions asked, and the reactions of the survivor, and also assessed the emotional well-being of the young researchers who were able to vent about the traumatic information received. For example, the young researchers felt uneasy when listening to the survivor's story. They did not anticipate the feeling because, they said, they had heard the story before.

This open approach helped the group deal with the experience that arose a range of challenging emotions (Jenn 2006; Bradbury-Jones 2014). They were provided with an outlet to express their emotions and share their perceptions about the interview process. This presented an opportunity for the author to offer support, including techniques such as breathing exercises, to help the researchers manage their emotional well-being. In addition, it allowed the team to reflect on the interview process itself, explore alternative approaches, and determine what kind of support should be extended to the survivors.

For the young researchers, the meeting provided an opportunity for self-reflection, starting from their initial decision-making process that culminated in interviewing the female survivor. Their motivation for undertaking the interview emerged from their pre-existing relationship with the survivor and their desire to convey her personal story through the film. However, they admitted that they had not fully comprehended the emotional impact of the traumatic narrative on themselves. This awareness prompted them to recognize their responsibility in making ethical decisions and contending with the emotional distress for all parties involved including accessing counselling supports to manage the emotional toll.

Secondly, the survivor received psychological support via an online counseling session, and the interviewee in question was granted the opportunity to review the film to ensure it accurately portrayed her desired narrative. The survivor expressed comfort and satisfaction with the result.

Thirdly, the author diligently maintained communication with the young researchers for a week after the interview to monitor any potential emotional distress. This effort was appreciated by the individuals as expressed through their quick responses to the author's calls and texts.

Overall, this ethical dilemma highlights the tension between empowered young individuals taking action and the ethical principles within a participatory project designed to foster power from within (Abebe 2009; Houghton 2015). It also points to the fact that these ethical principles are not part of the daily lives of young people. While the author acknowledged and valued the personal transformation of participants to take action, she was equally aware of the ethical risks and consequences. The situations underpinned the necessity to (1) ensure the safety and well-being of both the survivor and the young researchers (McLaughlin 2005), and (2) prevent any further measures that might potentially result in dilemmas or breaches. As a side effect, the author's relationship intensified with the group as the young people felt respected and well cared for (Bradbury-Jones 2014).

In terms of lessons learned, the author would like to suggest four issues: Firstly, investigators should allocate time for individual introspection, both on their part and that of the young participants. Secondly, to enhance the understanding of safeguarding issues and measures within the group, research teams should engage in recurrent activities such as ‘what if’ scenarios. Thirdly, research teams could develop and distribute FAQ sheets among the group to address common questions and concerns. Fourthly, 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.

## Acknowledgments

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## Notes

[1] The young people (researchers) were between 15 and 20 years old.

[2] Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) is a participatory, arts-based, practice-as-research focused on peacebuilding in Indonesia, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, and Rwanda. This collaborative effort unites universities, cultural artists, civil society organizations, and, most notably, children and youth.

[3] Alongside other project team members.

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## Author Biography

**Harla Sara Octarra** holds a PhD in Social Policy from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. She currently works as a lecturer and research associate at Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia in Jakarta. Octarra also serves as a co-investigator of the international project Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) financed by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council, and consultant on child rights and policy to the Indonesian Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection and the Ministry of National Development Planning. Octarra is passionate about children’s and youth’s participation in policy and has spearheaded related research projects, including two commissioned by UNICEF Indonesia since 2021.

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# Constellations: Connections Across Childhoods

*NEOS* Volume 15, Issue 2 (Fall 2023)

# An Argument for Communal Approaches to Discipline for Racial Equity in US Elementary Schools

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## Introduction

In a racially diverse public US elementary school, Laura and Michael's calm, quiet son Bryan was being sent repeatedly to the principal's office.[1] "We were concerned that he already had a disciplinary record before turning seven," Laura, who is white, recalled. "Those labels stick with you," added Michael, who is Black. "He's... already being labeled as a problem."

When I heard Laura and Michael's story, it interested me on both a personal and professional level. Like Laura, I'm a white American raising a child with a Black American. As an anthropologist who has conducted fieldwork in an elementary school, it struck me that the situation they described was so unlike what I'd seen at the school where I'd worked.

I followed up to collect in-depth narratives, which I analyze together with publicly available parent handbooks and statistics about Bryan's school. Inspired by my previous fieldwork, I present an analytical framework that emphasizes how social dynamics and communication impact behavioral incidents and their resolutions.

I argue that within the US context, individual and decontextualized approaches to school discipline are prone to perpetuating racial biases and exacerbating systemic inequities. In contrast, communal approaches are well positioned to promote equity and inclusion. This qualitative analysis adds to a growing body of multidisciplinary research on race and alternative approaches to discipline in US schools (e.g. Gregory and Fergus 2017; Joseph et al. 2021; Payne and Welch 2010, 2015).

## Individual Approaches

I use the terms *individual* and *communal* to emphasize the impact of disciplinary practices on children's relationships with their school communities. In an individual-focused disciplinary system, a school responds to behavioral incidents by identifying, removing, and punishing a culprit. I call this *individual* because it erases the social dynamics at play when the incident occurred. It renders invisible broader patterns of socialization that contribute to peer conflicts (Pascoe 2013).

Individual approaches teach children that when they draw adults' attention to a classmate's misbehavior, that classmate will likely be blamed and punished. Children learn implicitly that problems are resolved by removing the person at fault. Such approaches have long been a locus of critique for racial inequity in school discipline (Ferguson 2001; Fronius et al. 2016; Gregory and Fergus 2017; Joseph et al. 2021; Simmons 2017).

## Communal Approaches

In contrast, communal approaches teach that one student's problem is everyone's problem. When an incident occurs, the entire class is responsible for resolving it to repair their community. This is the approach I observed in classrooms in Andean Peru (Grim-Feinberg 2013).[2] Children often drew adults' attention to peers' misbehavior. Their facial expressions, verbal tones, and follow-up actions demonstrated genuine concern for misbehaving peers. Rather than pushing individuals away, they reached out and sought help to pull them back.

Some US schools have implemented restorative justice practices rooted in similar notions of community-building, and many have met with success (Fronius et al. 2016; González et al. 2019; Pavelka 2013). Such approaches provide safe spaces where children can make mistakes and repair them without losing valuable members of their community.

## What's at Stake for Children of Color

Michael and Laura repeatedly expressed frustration that no one seemed to understand why this was a big deal for them. They saw their son being labeled and categorized in ways that did not line up with their understanding of him, but did line up with school-wide and broader trends of what happens to Black boys in US schools (CDE 2022; Ferguson 2001; Goodman et al. 2012).

They could see clearly that the stakes were high. When a child is singled out, dropped off at the principal's office by his class, and "parents are called," then classmates and their parents get the message that this child threatens the learning environment and safety of others. When the child fits societal images of who needs to be policed (Ferguson 2001; Gregory 2003; Maynard 2017; Sojoyner 2016), they can quickly be labeled and ostracized by the school community.

Michael and Laura also saw opportunities closing. Every visit to the principal's office was a mark on Bryan's permanent record that would follow him for the next twelve years. While they had initially been pleased with the diversity they saw at Bryan's school, they now understood that "a good school" on paper meant little for students of color who were under-represented in the school's high test scores and over-represented in suspensions (CDE 2022).

Such patterns of inequity are consistent with a long history of US schools directing Black and brown students into disciplinary systems and away from academically rigorous programs (e.g. Ferguson 2001; Fronius et al. 2015; Goodman et al. 2012; Gregory and Fergus 2017; Joseph et al. 2021; Moody 2016; Nance 2016). While this tracking may be unintentional, the biases that fuel it could be removed or minimized by de-individualizing and recontextualizing schools' approaches to behavioral incidents.

## Bias Toward Adult-Like Communication

Ethnographers of childhood have shown that eliciting accurate information from children requires deep understanding of nonverbal and verbal communication in context (Clark 2011; Corsaro 2003; Epstein 1998; James 2007; Mandell 1988). One result of individualizing and decontextualizing incidents is that staff rely on children's verbal communication with adult authorities to determine what happened. I argue that this favors children who are more comfortable and skilled with normative adult-like communication. Such children are likely to be neurotypical, white, middle-class, monolingual English speakers, gender-normative, and outgoing. Children who come to school already comfortable with communicating in normative ways are more likely to be listened to. Those who don't feel comfortable with adult-like verbal communication are more likely to remain unheard and to learn that they will not be listened to when they try to express themselves.

The bias toward adult-like communication embedded in individualized discipline reinforces societal images of how a trustworthy person looks and acts. This exacerbates racial and other inequities by positioning as more credible white middle-class children whose socialization at home aligns closely with institutional expectations at school.

## Policy and Implementation

The parent handbooks for Bryan's district and school outline both a "no-tolerance" and a "restorative" approach. They state that physical violence against another student is a suspendable offense. Before suspending a student, a school must accurately identify the behavior and its cause and make a good faith effort to correct it.

The handbooks mention "restorative" practices as corrective measures for individuals "who do not meet behavior expectations." While restorative discipline is rooted in the principle of inclusive community-building (Ferlazzo 2016; GES 2014; WAT Staff 2023), schools sometimes implement it in ways that reinforce individual blame and exclusion (Joseph et al. 2021; Schiff 2018; Sojoyner 2016).

When Laura met with the administrator who had disciplined her son, she was handed a card with "restorative questions." One side had questions "to respond to challenging behavior" and the other "to help those harmed by others' actions." Laura expressed to me frustration that her son had been identified as the only person with "challenging behavior," and another child as the only one "harmed by others' actions."

The administrator explained that she had asked the appropriate "restorative questions" to each corresponding child in one-on-one meetings, and that neither had responded. She'd interpreted Bryan's lack of response as an inability to reflect on his behavior. She'd referred him to "disciplinary counseling," which would remove him from the classroom to work on social and emotional skills. When Laura asked whether Bryan could instead work on these skills in the classroom with other students who were involved, the administrator told her that the student who was harmed was too traumatized to discuss it. While the administrator drew on restorative questions in framing her conversations with students, she appeared unwilling to consider the incident as a collective problem with a collective solution.

## Conclusion

For communal approaches like restorative justice to work, a school needs to create and reinforce a strong sense of communal responsibility. Children must learn that if a classmate is hurt, it’s everyone’s responsibility to make sure they’re okay before moving on. If a classmate is out of line, it’s everybody’s top priority to bring them back. They must learn to see each individual as essential to the functioning of their community. Individualized discipline directly undermines this by sending the message that the classroom will function better when the “problem child” is removed.

Ultimately, teachers and administrators need policy-level support and training to address interpersonal incidents as communal problems for the class as a whole. Policies that support communal approaches are more equitable and less prone to reproducing societal inequities. In the absence of such policy change, school staff can improve equity by building awareness of the biases inherent in individualized approaches. Even within individual-focused policies, communal approaches to investigating behavioral incidents in context can go a long way toward equity. By holding all students accountable for helping to identify and solve problems as a group, teachers and administrators can encourage inclusion rather than exclusion. Instead of teaching children that problems are resolved by identifying and punishing an individual culprit, children can learn to resolve problems together.

## Notes

[1] All names are pseudonyms. Some details have been altered to protect the identity of the family interviewed.

[2] The research in Peru was based on 14 months of participant observation in a primary school and surrounding community.

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*NEOS* is the flagship publication of the Anthropology of Children and Youth Interest Group (ACYIG), American Anthropological Association. The bi-annual publication consists of peer-reviewed original short-form research articles as well as editor-reviewed commentaries and feature pieces. *NEOS* relies on the work of many volunteers, including the full editorial board, peer reviewers, the ACYIG communications team, and a multitude of advisory board members for both *NEOS* and ACYIG. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact acyig.editor@gmail.com.

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Rebecca is an Associate Teaching Professor in the School of Social Work and Human Service at Thompson Rivers University, situated on the unceded territory of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc within Secwépemc'ulucw. Rebecca has over 18 years of experience as a clinical social worker, researcher, administrator, and educator, with specialization in the areas of child and youth mental health, working with children and their families in community-based settings, program development and evaluation, clinical supervision and workforce development, suicide prevention, and intervention, and trauma and traumatic bereavement. Rebecca's research interests include the impact of exposure to suicide, the suicide bereavement trajectory, disenfranchised grief, and ambiguous loss, and the development and dissemination of interventions for people who are bereaved or otherwise impacted by suicide.

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Jenny is an Assistant Teaching Professor in the Faculty of Arts at Thompson Rivers University, within Secwépemc'ulucw. She has a PhD in Anthropology from Simon Fraser University and an MA in Anthropology from the University of Victoria. Jenny's research explores the intergenerational implications of immigration and labor policies in Canada, focusing on Filipinx youths' experiences of long-term family separation and reunification. Her research also concerns migrant domestic labor and gendered forms of work across borders. As a multimodal ethnographer, she employs photography, drawing, song, and poetry in her research as avenues for youth-centered expressions. Her work has been published in peer-reviewed journals including Children & Society, Anthropology of Work Review, and Global Studies of Childhood.

### *Developmental Editor* - Anne-Marie Bedard

My name is Anne Marie Bedard and I'm very happy to be a new developmental editor with the NEOS team. I recently graduated with a Master of Arts in Psychology from Pepperdine University. I'm currently completing an internship in clinical therapy, with the goal of obtaining my license to practice as a professional clinician. I'm also working as an adjunct instructor of Psychology at the community college level. I am a lifelong resident of the state of Michigan, where I'm a very active member of my church's music program, singing and playing the piano. I can also be found interacting with several wonderful cats when it pleases them to allow me to do so.

### *Digital Scholarship Intern* - Chloe Bozak

Chloe recently graduated with her Bachelor of Social Work from Thompson Rivers University located on the unceded and ancestral territory of the Secwepemc peoples. She is interested in many areas of social work, but she is especially interested in law and policy. Specifically, she is interested in how people who are affected by specific laws and policies can inform said laws and policies as the experts of their own experience. Chloe will be starting law school at Thompson Rivers University in September 2024.

### *Assistant Editor and Developmental Editor* - Chelsea Cutright, PhD

Chelsea Cutright (she/her) is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor of International Studies and Anthropology at Centre College. She has a PhD in cultural anthropology from the University of Kentucky. Her teaching and research interests include gender, sports for development, youth studies, and contemporary Africa.

### *Assistant Editor and Peer-Review Coordinator* - Alexea Howard, MA

Alexea Howard, MA is a recent graduate from California State University, Long Beach whose focus is in Medical Anthropology. She graduated at the top of her class with awards such as Distinguished Graduate Student, Academic Excellence, and Best Thesis. Alexea earned her BA (Honors) in Anthropology with a focus in Medical and Psychological Anthropology from the University of California, Los Angeles, and received post-baccalaureate training in Psychology and Addiction Studies. Her research explores the way that concepts of health and illness are impacted by a sense of community and a gained sense of agency. Her most recent work focuses on reasons for continued use among those who participate and frequent pro-anorexia websites and how the use of these sites has impacted the community's conceptions of health and illness as it relates to anorexia.

### *Assistant Editor and Developmental Editor* - Manya Kagan, PhD Candidate

Manya Oriel Kagan is a sociologist of education studying migration and education, specifically in urban contexts. Her research mainly relates to refugee children's rights employing ethnography, participatory visual methods and mapping techniques but also interested in alternative education and development projects in different contexts. She finished her Ph.D. in the Department of Education at Tamar Golan Center at BEN GURION University in the Negev, on the integration experiences of refugee children in Kampala, Uganda. She will soon take up her position as a postdoctoral researcher at Perry World House at the University of Pennsylvania. She has co-authored a number of articles in journals including *Race, Ethnicity and Education* and *Critique of Anthropology* and has co-edited (2019) a book entitled *International Development in Africa: Between Practice and Theory* [in Hebrew], published by Pardes Publishing House.

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