Building Blocks of Knowledge: Investigating Education, Learning and Knowing in Children and Youth

Table of Contents

Editor's Corner

Editorial: Building Blocks of Knowledge: Investigating Education, Learning, and Knowing in Children and Youth

Manya Oriel Kagan, PhD (University of Pennsylvania)
manyaor@upenn.edu
Chelsea Cutright, PhD (Centre College)
chelsea.cutright@centre.edu

We are delighted to present this issue of *NEOS,* entitled "Building Blocks of Knowledge: Investigating Education, Learning, and Knowing in Children and Youth," as our first issue serving as Co-Editors. This topic is especially important to us both, with Manya's work focusing on children's rights to education and Chelsea's interest in equitable pedagogical practices.

In this issue, we present interdisciplinary perspectives on youth and education, including scholars of anthropology, education, childhood studies, and international studies. With these diverse perspectives, we aim to bridge some of the apparent disciplinary divides involving education and the anthropology of children and youth. Education research often centers on the processes of pedagogy and learning, emphasizing the roles of teachers and learners within designated educational spaces, like schools, while anthropology and childhood studies have focused extensively on how children behave and engage with culture and community, often exploring the experiences of children within educational environments. While the issues at the center of these disciplines are often similar, they are engaged in unique ways, making it hard to create dialogue between them. In the last few decades, there has been a growing movement towards bridging disciplinary boundaries and adopting more active, engaged, and equitable research approaches. This has included expanding research beyond formal settings to encompass informal learning, employing diverse methodologies, and drawing from a range of disciplines (Henze 2020).

This issue strives to participate in this shift and transcend the conventional confines of what education means. Central to this is a departure from traditional notions of education, particularly the hierarchical "banking" model famously critiqued by Freire (1970), which positions adults as active subjects and sole purveyors of knowledge and children as passive, listening recipients. We invited anthropologists and scholars of other disciplines to interpret 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 is transferred between children and their environments.

The articles featured in this issue prompt us to reconsider where learning occurs, going beyond the confines of formal schooling, and critically examines the roles of educators and learners in various contexts. Many of the contributions challenge us to think about what education, learning, and knowing even really mean. What valuable insights can educators glean from the

anthropology of childhood, and conversely, what can anthropologists learn from studying how children engage, resist, and transform learning in different settings? The following articles and commentaries take us outside the formal classroom, into the built world, the natural world, and our communities, shedding light on the diverse ways learning manifests and thrives outside traditional educational frameworks.

The first three research articles and one invited commentary in this collection explore learning in unconventional spaces, defying our preconceptions of formal and informal educational environments. Deepika Ganesh, with Etienne Basson and Michelle Bellino, Diane Hoffman, Joshua Semerjian, and Drew Kahn transport us to new learning environments in South Africa and Haiti, to community rallies and the theatre, respectively.

Ganesh, Basson, and Bellino introduce us to a place-based education (PBE) program, Envirolove, in Lavender Hill, South Africa, which employs outdoor learning for youth in a place deeply impacted by historical and present violence. The authors describe this PBE program as a "third space," inviting alternative ways of knowing, and connect the idea of "third space" to "safe space." They argue that PBE allows youth exposed to violence new ways of knowing and (re)shaping their connections to their environments, their communities, and their pasts.

In Haiti, where many children lack access to formal schooling, Hoffman shows how disadvantaged children engage with their environments as a form of self-education. Hoffman challenges us to think about how different traditions of learning are often obscured by traditional (read: Western) definitions, arguing that Haitian childhoods thrive in the collective, spiritual, and natural world that surrounds them, engaging in sensorial and embodied learning with a unique teacher - the environment. Like Ganesh et al., this environment includes knowledge of the natural world, through identifying plants, for example, but for these Haitian children, it also includes the built environment, recognizing the importance of the cultural value of *fomasyon,* with children learning in the household and through informal engagements on the street, such as learning how to repair a bicycle.

Semerjian suggests that participating that educational community-engagement activities help youth to support their youth aspiration and community transformation and helps them fit into social structures while improving relationships across differences. Based on two examples of enacted public actions in which youth participated: one rally on stricter gun control laws and the other on trans and intersex rights, allowed youth to share their opinions and openly support causes they believed in. Semerjian concludes that we should all strive to enact learning through action by "reaching" by engaging youth in activities that focus on improving local conditions. "Reaching" will have the desired outcome of increasing social interdependence and helping youth to move toward a more cooperative personal orientation.

Finally, Kahn's commentary takes us to the theatre, drawing our attention to the power of Story-Based Learning (SBL) to go beyond a single meaningful educational moment and into active

identity exploration, community engagement, and conflict management through the Anne Frank Project (AFP). For 18 years, the AFP has served as a social justice program, reaching to places like Rwanda, and utilizing SBL to build community through story-building.

Our last three research articles by Aakanksha D'Cruz, Christopher Chapman, and Natalie Gologorsky point to the embodied, subtextual, and sometimes unintentional learning that children undergo in formal educational spaces and how this relates to issues of power relations between adults and children, control over children's minds and bodies, and the sometimes arbitrary and confusing delineation between childhood and adulthood in knowledge production and sharing. Children and youth often live under various forms of policing, but we also see them utilizing their agency to challenge relationships and frameworks that control their time, bodies, and activities. These articles encourage us to think of education not only as learning of the mind but how bodies accumulate and perform knowledge as well.

D'Cruz analyzes the experiences of how school uniforms for female students in India teach girls social control of the female body. By focusing on the school uniforms and listening to testimonies of female students, we see how children learn through their bodies, and how clothing socializes children not only on their gender roles, but also on issues of class and religion and their specific place within society. D'Cruz focuses particularly on the replacement of skirts with Salwar-Kameez in the 1990s and argues that recent negotiations and enforcement of modesty regulations relate to struggles between socioeconomic classes, religions, and ethnicities in India and correlate with the shifting terrain of socio-political discourse and morality in the era of Hindutva-neoliberalism.

Chapman takes us to an after-school study hall at a residential care facility for elementary school children in Japan, exploring the relationships between adult care workers and the children in care, and how together they create a subversive educational space. Typically understood as a place for formal education, Chapman shares how the study hall becomes a place where power relations are subverted, the knowledge of discipline and abuse are challenged, and the children in care demonstrate how they can use their power to change the care workers' approach to controlling the educational environment.

Based on interviews with adult non-binary and female autistic adults, Gologorsky investigates childhood memories of informal learning to learn how children relate to processes of intellectual inquiry. Gologorsky argues that the particular conscious attention that people with autism tend to pay to their own experiences can provide rich reflective insights into how intellectual inquiries transform from childhood to adulthood. Focusing on "everyday intellectualism," or informal learning that takes place outside of school based on personal initiative that serves no practical or immediate purpose, Gologorsky suggests that looking at these memories allows to analyze the fluid boundary between childhood and adulthood. Her research might imply that the boundaries between childhood and adulthood may seem so stark because studies often focus on schools and

other social frameworks which often change abruptly in this transition and not because of the inherent discontinuity between childhood and adulthood.

The final two commentaries in this issue introduce us to some particularly unique elements involved in broader ideas of education, learning, and knowing. Bertrand Réau's commentary asks us to think about the varying ways children engage with learning and time, drawing us to another aspect of control that educational systems and policy decisions exhibit towards children by creating defined restrictions around formal learning and vacation time. Réau discusses how vacations are not only time for leisure but of specialized, secondary, and ordinary learning (Lahire 2019), providing children with essential socialization skills. Yet, children's vacation time receives much less attention and recognition than formal learning, contributing to social hierarchies and class inequalities.

Finally, Katherine Bruna leaves us with a tool to conceptualize connections between broader concepts and concrete practices that we know (or think we know) about education and learning. Encouraging us to think about education practices with the themes of intention, interaction, receptiveness, and responsiveness, Bruna created the "Grounded Knowing Culture Catcher" as a way to see "culture as interlocking interactive processes" and help us to imagine our own unique experiences with education and knowing as "having liberatory potential." Bruna invites us all "to consider how the authors [in this issue] and the young people with whom they work, in school spaces and beyond, collectively construe the intention, interaction, reception, and responsiveness of their efforts," and poses the question "how are those efforts guided by a sense of culture in, as, and for learning not bound to static identity but fueled by catalytic contribution?" (Bruna has also supplied a printable "Grounded Knowing Culture Catcher"!)

In addition to these fascinating articles and commentaries, we are excited to share that ACYIG had, for the first time, a book prize competition for books published in 2023 focused on the anthropology of childhood. Having received numerous wonderful submissions, the inaugural book prize winner is Camilla Morelli, for the inspiring scholarly work, *Children of the Rainforest: Shaping the Future in Amazonia.* This remarkable ethnography following indigenous Matses children raises critical questions about children's agentive roles in modern times and the role of anthropology in unpacking them. We encourage you to look at Julie Spray's book review, which shares impressions from Spray's students and experience incorporating the book into teaching a course titled Global Childhoods.

Another submission, *An Ordinary Future: Margaret Mead, the Problem of Disability, and a Child Born Different,* by Thomas W. Pearson, received an honorable mention in the inaugural book prize for its compelling insights on childhood, disability, and anthropology. In their review, Lee O'Donnell and Manya Kagan share some of their own impressions from reading this book, which simultaneously weaves together a deeply personal narrative and rigorous, in-depth academic engagement.

We end this issue with a tribute to Mexican Anthropologist Valentina Glockner Fagetti, who passed away in December 2023, written by her friend and colleague, Gabrielle Oliveira. Valentina worked on the topics of migration and childhood, and was a founding member of Colectiva Infancias, a collective of women specializing in social studies on childhoods in the Global South. Her engaging and incredibly beautiful work on the project *Childhoods in Motion: An Ethnographic Mosaic of the Americas* can be viewed here.

Valenita Glockner Fagetti

References

Freire, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.

Henze, Rosemary. 2020. "Anthropology of Education." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedias: Anthropology*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.013.10.

Author contact: Manya Oriel Kagan, PhD (University of Pennsylvania) manyaor@upenn.edu
Chelsea Cutright, PhD (Centre College)chelsea.cutright@centre.edu

To cite this article: Kagan, Manya Oriel and Chelsea Cutright. 2024. "Editorial: Building Blocks of Knowledge: Investigating Education, Learning and Knowing in Children and Youth." *NEOS* (16) 1.

To link this article: https://acyig.americananthro.org/neosvol16iss1spring24/kagan-cutright/

ACYIG Advisory Board Update

Ida Fadzillah Leggett, PhD (Middle Tennessee State University)
Ida.Leggett@mtsu.edu

Dear *NEOS* Readers,

I hope everyone has had a good 2024 so far. My spring semester is almost over, and I am looking forward to getting some research done during the summer months. In the meantime, I want to draw your attention to some projects the Anthropology of Children and Youth Interest Group (ACYIG) Board are working on:

We are planning a Childhood and Youth Conference, and if you would like to be part of the planning committee you can contact Jenny Shaw at jeshaw@tru.ca for more information.

If you have recently published research on children or youth, I strongly recommend you submit it for consideration for the Spotlight on Scholarship feature on the ACYIG website created by Julie Spray. Please take a look at this feature, and if you would like to showcase your research please visit the Spotlight on Scholarship author guidelines page to submit your work today. For more info please contact Julie at julie.spray@universityofgalway.ie.

The ACYIG Board is also considering the option of changing our AAA status from "Interest Group" to "Section." I am interested to know what our members think about this, so I encourage you to email me at Ida.Leggett@mtsu.edu with your thoughts on this possible change.

And some sad news: The ACYIG Board has decided not to hold a Reception and Book Display at this year's AAA Conference but will probably resume this event in the future. In the meantime, we will continue to hold our ACYIG Zoom Business Meeting during the AAA Conference, and this year we hope to have our Book Prize winners attend and discuss their research with our members!

One final question for NEOS readers: are you part of a 2024 AAA Conference panel, workshop, or roundtable on childhood or youth? Please let me know if your session has been accepted for presentation at the Conference, and ACYIG will publicize it to our community.

Ida Fadzillah Leggett
Convener, ACYIG

NEOS Spring 2025 Call for Papers (CFP) Teaser

PLAYING THE GAME: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF YOUTH, SPORT, AND PLAY

The *NEOS* Editorial Team has decided to try out a once-a-year publication model in order to increase article length and provide authors more space for robust theoretical engagement and inclusion of methodological rigor.

The Spring 2025 *NEOS* issue, Playing the Game: An Anthropological Exploration of Youth, Sport, and Play, will seek submissions of anthropological and interdisciplinary research focused on children's and youths' experiences with sport, play, recreation, and physical activity. Sport has been described as a microcosm of what life is about, and it is understood to both shape and be shaped by social, cultural, global, political, and historical practices (Besnier, Brownell, and Cater 2018). We imagine this issue to draw connections to the power and agency of children and youth to impact and be impacted by their larger worlds through sport and play, mirroring the many influences of sport mentioned above. We encourage a broad interpretation of how sport and play are defined, inviting scholars whose work includes topics of embodied learning, institutional or structural components of sport and play, imagination, action and acting, adventure, competition, leisure and recreation, and other forms of physical activity. We especially encourage contributions that develop ideas regarding diversity within sport and play, including but not limited to gender, race, and ability.

We will release a full CFP for this Spring 2025 issue later this summer, but we encourage you to consider this theme for a November 2025 manuscript submission deadline. Manuscripts must be original research and no more than 4000 words in length. Please contact the NEOS Co-Editors if you have questions about this CFP or your manuscript's fit for this theme: ACYIG.editor@gmail.com.

References
Besnier, Niko, Susan Brownell, and Thomas F. Carter. 2018. *The Anthropology of Sport: Bodies, Borders, Biopolitics.* Oakland: University of California Press.

Research Articles: Learning in Unconventional Spaces

"There is more beyond this place": Creating Safe Spaces Within Place-Based Education in Lavender Hill, South Africa

Deepika Ganesh (University of Michigan)
deepikag@umich.edu

Etienne Basson (Stellenbosch University)
etiennebasson1@gmail.com

Michelle J. Bellino, PhD (University of Michigan)
bellino@umich.edu

Introduction

What people know about the physical world they inhabit enables them to better engage with, understand, and change it (Slater 1995, Erickson 1982). Place-based education (PBE) roots spatial understandings for young people by situating their local community and surrounding environments as opportunities for contextual learning about their history, their place in the world, and actions for transformation (Gruenewald 2003; Slavkin, Braysmith, and Faust 2010; McClain and Vandermaas-Peeler 2016). It also creates spaces for developing new skills and relationships to one another and the environment, which are valuable pedagogical openings that anthropologists and environmental educators explore (Kopnina 2013, Moll 2010). But what about when those spaces are marked by violence?

In this article, we draw on an ongoing study of a PBE program for young people living in Lavender Hill in the Cape Flats, a region in Cape Town, South Africa affected by histories of apartheid, displacement, racial segregation, and ongoing gang violence.

Etienne Basson runs Envirolove, a nonprofit outdoor learning program for youth aged 14-21 in the Lavender Hill community. Youth participants hike in the Cape Town wilderness and tend to an indigenous fynbos garden at a local school once a month. The program has multiple goals: it focuses on creating a "safe space" for participants living in a community impacted by violence, teaches environmental literacy, and has expanded over time to contextualize multiple local histories. This paper draws from fieldwork and interviews with 22 program participants in the time frame of September 2023 to February 2024. We collectively analyzed these data, along with written reflections, to understand how youth participants experienced the program and their relationship to community.

Drawing from youth voices, we describe the program and the impact of its experiential and critical pedagogies. We identify how the program fosters a "third space" of learning in which young people are able to understand their complex connections to the natural environment (Lefebvre 1974) and explore selfhood as linked to political geography (Bhabha 1994). We argue that place-based approaches in contexts impacted by past and present violence are important in (re)shaping young people's experiences of history, place, and belonging in their community. In order to do that, they

need to disrupt the idealized notion of place as stable, bounded, and self-sufficient, revealing their constructed and contested nature.

History of District Six: Displacement and Resettlement

District Six in South Africa has a tumultuous history, in which race, forced movement, and dispossession are intimately tied. In 1966, it was declared a white neighborhood under the apartheid-era Group Areas Act, relocating 60,000 inhabitants to townships around the Cape Flats. Lavender Hill, our site of study, is a community created as a result of this displacement. Richard Rive writes about this period of displacement in *Buckingham Palace*, a required text in the national school curriculum for high-school students in South Africa:

Many were forced to move to small matchbox houses in large matchbox townships which with brutal and tactless irony were given names by the authorities such as Hanover Park and Lavender Hill to remind us of the past they had taken away from us…District Six had a soul. Its centre held together till it was torn apart (126, 127).

Following democratic elections in 1994, the Restitution of Land Rights Act allowed for displaced residents to return to District Six (Trotter 2009). Those who returned encountered poor housing infrastructure, inaccessible and dispersed resources, and manicured greenery that lacked visual diversity (Burgess 2022). Both forced displacement and return ruptured residents' sense of place, and these legacies continue to shape young people's relationships to their community (Burgess 2022).

Goals and Modalities of the Program

Today, Lavender Hill is notorious for drug-related gang violence (Kinnes 2014, Brittijn 2013). The violence restricts the mobility of residents, especially young people, making outdoor recreational sites difficult to access (Kinnes 2014). In response to these conditions, the Envirolove program invites youth to participate in monthly group activities, which include hikes up nearby mountains. The hikes are one-day excursions, and programming combines technical skills related to navigating outdoor spaces, ecological knowledge, and museum visits to learn about historical dimensions of Lavender Hill. The program also integrates affective dimensions of learning, recognizing that emotional geographies of education are dynamic spaces where emotions such as hope, fear, love, and anxiety intersect with physical and social environments in which young people learn (Kenway and Youdell, 2011).

Activities are oriented towards personal development, enjoying and completing the hike, with group and individual opportunities for reflection. One of the hiking trips included a visit to the District Six Museum and the Slave Lodge to explore their community's shared history. Participants were accompanied by Aunty Susan, a community member who shared her experiences with forced removal, and how later she needed documentation to prove that she lived there in order to return. Participants commented that these (affective, place-based) approaches to history were distinct

from what they learned in school, where an official narrative of apartheid emphasizes resolution of racial inequities, overlooking legacies of the past and how they manifest locally in ongoing ways (Dryden-Peterson and Robinson 2023, Wassermann 2018).

Experiences of Place and Safety in a "Third Space"

The concept of "third space" emphasizes the hybridity and fluidity that creates different negotiated meanings through changing politics and culture (Bhabha 1994, Lefebvre 1974, Oldenburg 1989). Specifically in educational contexts, it allows learners to draw on competing and alternative ways of knowing (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda 1999; Gutiérrez 2008) and ask meaningful questions that drive authentic learning, recognizing hybrid and varied identities as important cultural resources in children's development (Cole 1996). We conceive of the PBE program as a "third space," leveraging the physical space of the outdoors to mediate the sharing of learner identities, as well as knowledge and experiences as shaped by their shared histories of place. Using the concept of "third space" within the framework of PBE, we are able to document learner experiences that go beyond traditional educational outcomes, providing insights into how learners navigate politics, emotions, and their relationships to and within the community.

Our conversations with youth in Lavender Hill support previous studies' insights on the critical role of outdoor education in addressing environmental and social issues in localized contexts, while supporting a sense of perspective, being immersed in the moment, and mental and emotional sanctuary (Strife and Downey 2009; Taylor and Kuo 2006; Brymer, Crabtree, and King 2021). Participants reflected on the opportunities to broaden their physical environment and build deeper commitments to nature.

Mia (age 17, female) explained that the program "helps children my age… by seeing that there is more beyond this place. We can get out and experience and have fun at the same time. We don't have to be stuck up in this place that is cruel." Sadie (age 16, female) affirmed this in her post-hike journal reflection: "As I was walking, I saw how clean and clear everything was, so we need to keep our environment the way we keep our house clean."

The educational program is fundamentally focused on creating safety, mutuality, and belonging through "third space" pedagogy. We link the concept of "third space" to the idea of "safe space" as described by Djohari, Pyndia, and Arnone (2018), who argue that physical, material, and imagined places matter in children's lives and relationships. Building on prior work, they conceptualize "safe spaces" as spanning psychological freedom, a freedom from physical harm, and freedom to counter dominant ideologies, while attending to young people's relational and spatial understandings of safety. In the context of Lavender Hill, as youth actively navigate gang violence, freedom from harm is critical in the construction of safety, as is the freedom of expression to engage with and critique and legacies of colonialism and apartheid. The program contends with this tension: learners need to better develop a sense of belonging in their community, and yet this coexists with a need for physical respite from violence that is part of the lives of youth growing

up in Lavender Hill. In this sense, fostering a "safe space" necessitates an educational "third space" that removes young people from oppressive spaces, while building their connections to their surroundings.

During and after the program, participants emphasized the importance of security as a spatialized element of their environment, though the program informed their critical understanding of their community's history of violence. Dylan (age 18 male), completing his final year of secondary school, explained that the organization "takes us from the streets and puts us in a nice safe place. Like we can learn stuff we never thought we could learn before, learn about the nature. Stuff that we don't see everyday because [of] where we come from."

Alice (age 18, female) echoed the theme of safety. She recalled, "There is so much going on in our environment outside and this is really a safe space for us to get out and not be bothered about whatever is going on in the community like the shooting, the gangsterism, the pregnancies, the… everything going on. It's just a safe space for us...."

These ideas reflect how geography influences understandings of violence as spanning private and public spaces, and unfolding within a wider historical context (Springer and Le Billon 2016). Violence also takes on less visible forms and intersects with multiple identities and positionalities, such as gendered exclusion and challenges to institutional participation for girls. In her written reflections after a hike, Daliah (age 15, female) embraced the experience of enjoying the outdoors without an intrusive or threatening male gaze, noting, "I got to be outside and take a run without being stared at."

The program undertakes specific safety measures to escort participants from their homes to the hiking site. Even so, spaces designated "safe" can easily shift. On one occasion, participants and leaders learned that they left for a hike from what later became an active crime scene [Video Link]. Safety assurances are a major concern for guardians, and legitimate worries about young people's safety can hinder adults' permission for youth to participate.

Much anthropological work has documented how young people living in contexts of insecurity adapt to the routinization of violence, at times participating in violent acts and structures, or restricting their spatial mobility as a measure of protection (Auyero and Berti 2015; Bellino 2017; Swartz, Harding, and De Lannoy 2012). Youth in Lavender Hill describe similar experiences, such as spending prolonged time indoors and engaging in limited interactions even with family due to a lack of trust in order to mitigate daily risks pertaining to physical and emotional safety. Others have had direct, contentious experiences with the criminal justice system.

Harper (age 16, male) reflected on his position in the world and felt newly prepared to take on challenges, while drawing on the language of natural growth and resilience: "As we walked higher and higher up I realized how big the world is and how I am above it all. It made me realize that I am a conqueror and just like the *fynbos* [local plant] that needs fire to spread and blossom and

grow, after facing my hardships, I too will blossom and grow." Alex (age 15, male) left the program reflecting in his writing, "after weeks of feeling hopeless I am filled with hope and feel ready."

Conclusion

In spaces marked by violent conflict, having access to a physical, relational, and interpretive space becomes important for youth to engage with their complex identities and history. PBE fosters safety, hope, and new ways of knowing about themselves and their community, as youth participants emphasize. Our ongoing study reveals the potential for PBE to engage youth exposed to routine violence, which works against forming strong feelings of connectedness to place. We explore how time in protected natural spaces can make small moves towards transforming these relationships. Understanding PBE as a "third space" allows for a deep engagement with a participant's socio-historical context to understand their current experience of gang-related violence, and supports them in (re)shaping community relationships.

Educational "third spaces" in the outdoors move young people of Lavender Hill from their home and school settings to wider spaces in nature, contrasting their limited physical movements in densely inhabited homes and schools. Young people face the same risks to safety upon returning to their homes and residences after the hikes, though new knowledge of their community can renew commitments to a place, arguably reducing violence in the future.

References

Auyero, Javier, and María Fernanda Berti. 2015. *In Harm's Way: The Dynamics of Urban Violence.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bellino, Michelle J. 2017. *Youth in Postwar Guatemala: Education and Civic Identity in Transition.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture.* Routledge.

Brittijn, Marianne. 2013. ""We're Not Boys Anymore, We Need to Be Courageous": Towards an Understanding of What It Means to Be a Man in Lavender Hill." *Agenda* (University of Chicago Press) 27 (1): 49-60.

Brymer, Eric, Jedda Crabtree, and Robert King. 2021. "Exploring Perceptions of How Nature Recreation Benefits Mental Wellbeing: A Qualitative Enquiry." *Annals of Leisure Research* 24 (3): 394-413.

Burgess, Ashleigh Georgia. 2022. "Assessing Sense of Place amongst Returnees of District Six." University of Western Cape.

Cole, Michael. 1996. *Cultural psychology: A once and future discipline.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Djohari, Natalie, Gitanjali Pyndiah, and Anna Arnone. 2018. "Rethinking 'Safe Spaces' in Children's Geographies." *Children's Geographies* 16 (4): 351-355.

Dryden-Peterson, Sarah, and Natasha Robinson. 2023. "Time, source, and responsibility: understanding changing uses of the past in 'post-conflict' South African history teaching, 1998 and 2019." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 1-19.

Erickson, Frederick. 1982. "Taught Cognitive Learning in Its Immediate Environments: A Neglected Topic in the Anthropology of Education." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 13 (2): 149-180.

Gruenewald, D. A. 2003. "The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place." *Educational Researcher* 32 (4): 3-12.

Gutiérrez, Kris D. 2008. *Reading Research Quarterly 43 (2): 148-164.* 43 (2): 148-164.

Gutiérrez, Kris D., Patricia Baquedano-López, and Carlos. Tejeda. 1999. "Rethinking Diversity: Hybridity and Hybrid Language Practices in the Third Space." *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 6 (4): 286-303.

Kenway, J., and Youdell, D. 2011. "The emotional geographies of education: Beginning a conversation." Emotion, Space and Society, 4(3), 131-136.

Kinnes, Irvin. 2014. "Gangs, Drugs and Policing the Cape Flats." *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology* Special Edition (2): 14-26.

Kopnina, Helen. 2013. "Future Directions of Environmental Anthropology: Incorporating the Ethnography of Environmental Education." In *Environmental Anthropology: Future Directions*, by Helen Kopnina and Eleanor Shoreman-Ouimet, 77-96. New York: Routledge.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1974. *The Production of Space.* Paris: Éditions Anthropos.

McClain, Cara, and Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler. 2016. "Outdoor Explorations with Preschoolers: An Observational Study of Young Children's Developing Relationship with the Natural World." *International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education* 4 (1).

Moll, L. C. 2010. "Mobilizing Culture, Language, and Educational Practices: Fulfilling the Promises of Mendez and Brown." *Educational Researcher* 39 (6): 433-441.

Oldenburg, Ray. 1989. *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts At the Heart of a Community.* Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

Rive, Richard M. 1987. *Buckingham Palace: District Six.* Cape Town: David Philip Publishers.

Slater, Don. 1995. "The Spectacle of 'Natural Magic'." In *Visual Culture*, 218-238. London: Routledge.

Slavkin, Michael, Hilary Braysmith, and Norma Faust. 2010. "The Process of Engagement: Developing Civic Literacy Via School-University Partnerships." *School-University Partnerships* 4 (1): 65-77.

Springer, Simon, and Philippe Le Billon. 2016. "Violence and Space: An Introduction to the Geographies of Violence." *Political Geography* 52: 1-3.

Strife, S., and L. Downey. 2009. "Childhood Development and Access to Nature: A New Direction for Environmental Inequality Research." *Organization & Environment 22 (1): 99-122.* 22 (1): 99-122.

Swartz, Sharlene, James Hamilton Harding, and Ariane De Lannoy. 2012. "Ikasi Style and the Quiet Violence of Dreams: A Critique of Youth Belonging in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Comparative Education* 48 (1): 27-40.

Taylor, Andrea Faber, and Frances E. Kuo. 2006. "Is Contact with Nature Important for Healthy Child Development? State of the Evidence." In *In Children and Their Environments: Learning, Using and Designing Space*, by C. Spencer and M. Blades, 124–158. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Trotter, Henry. 2009. "Trauma and Memory: The Impact of Apartheid-Era Forced Removals on Coloured Identity in Cape Town." In *Burdened by Race: Coloured Identities in Southern Africa*, by Mohamed Adhikari, 120-140. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Wassermann, J. 2018. "The State and the Evolving of Teaching About Apartheid in School History in South Africa, Circa 1994–2016." In *Teaching and Learning Difficult Histories in International Contexts: A Critical Sociocultural Approach*, by T. Epstein and C. L. Peck, 59-70.

Positionality Statement

The authors acknowledge that our multiple identities, experiences, and positionalities shape the work that we do and shape our relationships to one another. I, Deepika Ganesh, acknowledge my standpoint as an Indian woman, currently a doctoral student at the University of Michigan. I have not experienced any form of formal education in South Africa, where my research is based. I, Etienne Basson, am a South African entrepreneur and graduate student at Stellenbosch University. I run the educational program we document and analyze in this paper and play the role of a mentor and confidant to participants. Etienne's intimate relationship to the program and region have allowed us to access data where participants express their thoughts and feelings openly. I, Michelle Bellino, am a faculty member at the University of Michigan, and I draw on my experiences in settings affected by armed conflict, forced displacement, and legacies of historical injustice to understand the unique impact of this program in comparative perspective.

Author Biographies

Deepika Ganesh: Deepika is a second year Ph.D. student at the University of Michigan, School for the Environment and Sustainability. She specializes in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and is curious about learning in informal education spaces, especially outdoor and digital spaces. She enjoys creating meaningful learning experiences for people to engage with their histories, environments and sustainability challenges.

Etienne Basson: Etienne Basson is a Master's student at Stellenbosch University, Centre for Sustainability Transitions. He is the founder of numerous award-winning youth-focused NGOs in South Africa. His interest lies in the facilitation of transitions to sustainable futures with a focus on the empowerment of youth in violent under-resourced communities through outdoor learning and nature connection.

Michelle Bellino: Michelle Bellino is an Associate Professor at the University of Michigan Marsal Family School of Education. Her research centers on the intersections between education and youth civic development in contexts impacted by armed conflict and forced displacement. Across diverse settings, she explores how experiences with violence, asylum, and peace and justice processes influence young people's participation in schools and society, future aspirations, as well as educational access and inclusion. She has taught outdoor education and wilderness survival skills.

Author contact: Deepika Ganesh (University of Michigan), deepikag@umich.edu; Etienne Basson (Stellenbosch University), etiennebasson1@gmail.com; Michelle J. Bellino (University of Michigan), bellino@umich.edu

Learning (in) the Environment: Self-Education Among Haiti's Marginalized Children

Diane M. Hoffman, PhD (University of Virginia)
hoffman@virginia.edu

In many postcolonial societies, such as Haiti, access to quality schooling remains difficult, especially for the thousands of disadvantaged children and youth who are living fully or partially on the streets or as domestic servants. I have been engaged in ethnographic work with these children in an effort to understand their experiences and perspectives in the context of the aid-based Haitian state, where childhood is a key arena for foreign intervention, representation, and narration. This research has involved multiple site visits over a period of 15 years to four different regions in Southern Haiti. Working alone or on occasion with both Haitian and US student research assistants, I have conducted individual and group formal and informal interviews with approximately 80 disadvantaged children and youths, ranging in age from 6 to 21, who were engaged in domestic service and/or street work. I have done ethnographic observations in diverse settings, such as NGO- and faith-based outreach programs, schools serving children in domestic service, as well as in places in the community frequented by children as they collected water, worked at beach bars (collecting money or food from customers), or spent time observing adults in various activities. My research has also been informed by about a year living among families who hosted children in domestic service, as well as by interviews and discussions with parents/caretakers and teachers who worked with disadvantaged children or who grew up themselves under conditions of disadvantage.[i]

There is a large body of research that critiques the role of thousands of Northern churches, faith-based organizations, and NGOs in making Haiti into a "Republic of NGOs" – one of the most foreign-aid-dependent countries in the world (Johnston 2024, Kristoff and Panarelli 2010, Maguire and Freeman 2017, Schuller 2016). Efforts to "save" children and families and reform childhood experience according to global/Northern standards of child protection and well-being have been predicated on a longstanding discourse not only of political and economic insufficiency but of Haitian cultural deficiency as well (Hoffman 2024). In this optic, discussions of education have almost always been reduced to discussions of *schooling,* with the result that strong traditions of informal learning and spirituality that are central to Haitian cultural practice, history, and identity, and to the experience of childhood have either been denigrated as anti-progressive or effectively erased from view, for both Haitians and foreigners.

Yet, as I spent time with children, I saw the contrary: that Haitian childhood is centrally focused on a kind of self-education that exists and perhaps even thrives under conditions of fugitivity, outside of formal institutional arrangements, where it draws from wellsprings of collective cultural identity and spirituality that go largely unrecognized in a society shaped by the legacies of colonialism. This self-education draws from notions of selfhood as co-extensive with collective

social relational worlds and with the spiritual, natural and built world.[ii] Based in an ecological framework characterized by a profound sense of connection, enmeshment, or entangling of the person and the material, natural, and spiritual environment, children's learning was rooted in forms of sensory engagement with their surroundings in ways that went far beyond a classic view of "learning as cognition" to learning as a form of somatic and sensory engagement with the world. This sensory order, as Geurts (2003) observes, deeply shapes children's learning in distinctive ways related to indigenous understandings of self and person. In the Haitian case, it draws on children's "relational epistemologies" (Bang, et al. 2015, 304) with their environments to enable learning under conditions that largely exclude them from institutional spaces of learning, such as schools.

Coming to this view of learning was challenging, but I had excellent teachers – the children themselves, who patiently instructed me about their lives and led me through their neighborhoods. Over time, I myself began to experience powerful synergies between the physical, emotional, and mental dimensions of being in Haiti: as unspoken desires and thoughts became reality, mind and material seemed to merge, and the senses became avenues for powerful forms of perception and understanding. In children's peer groups, as they moved around their neighborhoods, or in situations where children were working alongside adults, such as street-side car repair, I could observe how attention itself took a different form from normative expectations in the US: it was distributed, sequential, and attuned widely to the environment rather than narrowly to a specific object or task, reflecting the idea of "open attention" described by researchers among indigenous Mayan communities (Gaskins and Paradise 2010). Children mediated meaning from their environment through their bodies, as when touching a word in a text and then one's forehead could transfer meaning from the text to the mind. On walks through their neighborhoods, children displayed rich knowledge of the interconnected material and spiritual dimensions of their environments, showing me a variety of plants that could be used for healing as well as those that had dangerous power to cause physical or spiritual harm. A young girl, for example, taught me that pigeons could "give" their blood for you if you were sick. By not saying "we use their blood" or "we take their blood" she also taught me about the agency of the natural world in relation to their own: pigeons *give* their blood to heal us.

In their households, children experienced a rich array of occasions for acquiring skills and competencies that could support their identities in spite of their social marginalization. Children (sometimes as young as two or three) are commonly sent to and raised in non-natal households in the hope that the receiving household will take care of the child and provide schooling in exchange for the child's help at home. Even when schooling is not provided (as can be the case), the expectation is that the child will experience *fomasyon* (training)[iii], a culturally widespread notion that captures both the learning of skills as well as the acquisition of valued qualities of personhood such as endurance, self-sacrifice, and ability to care for others, all of which children are thought to develop as they adapt to and learn the ways of their new households. Children were proud of their expertise in being excellent caretakers and cooks, for example. As a young girl told me, "I know how to do laundry very well."

Beyond households, everyday life was rich with occasions for learning. Vehicle mechanics working in a street-side space, for example, had an audience of children who would come by and observe, often for long periods and with great fascination. A broken bicycle in the street drew a crowd of children who intently observed the repair process. Groups of children would closely observe traditional religious ceremonies, standing outside the action taking place within the ceremonial area. Every community had church groups, clubs, and informal groups where community service and learning were intertwined and in which "auto-education," as one youth told me, was a key element.

In these fugitive spaces of self-education, learning had a number of characteristics. First (and in contrast to schooling), it occurred in mixed-age peer groups outside the direction or supervision of adults. Second, it was grounded in social interactions where children who were more skilled or knowledgeable interacted with those who were less skilled or knowledgeable, serving as models. Children appeared to be self-motivated, taking initiative on their own to participate. On occasions where a learner did not yet have the skills to perform an activity, a coach – preferably someone of similar age but with marginally more knowledge or experience – offered the learner encouragement and support. There was almost never any didactic instruction on the part of either models or coaches. Third, observation was a key modality of learning, and there was nearly always a dialogical relationship between observation and performance. As one child performed, the others observed, and the performance role was distributed or passed to different individuals in succession. Finally, children's learning was highly embodied and multimodal. It was mediated through physical movement, utilization of materials, gesture, and the senses, including sight, sound, taste, and touch (see Hoffman 2023, for further discussion).

This approach to learning reflects the indigenous spiritual traditions of Haitian Vodou, in which the body is considered the primary locus of learning and knowledge (Michel 1996, Landry 2008), reflecting the idea that people in different cultures have entirely different sensory modalities of knowing the world (Geurts 2003, Howes and Classen 2014, Stoller 2010). I saw that, from the children's perspective, their environment was a dynamic space in which the physical and spiritual, corporeal and moral, social and individual, human and not-human were all experienced through the senses as interconnected domains for learning.

As Leigh Patel (2019) observes, even when it has been forbidden, foreclosed, and seemingly withered through colonialism, learning is always protected and maintained in spaces of fugitivity. Though excluded from schooling and from familial support, disadvantaged Haitian children can be said to be engaged in fugitive learning, where their personhood can be developed and maintained in spite of the social and institutional forces bent on erasing it.

Certainly, my argument should not be construed as anti-schooling or as a denial of the often harsh conditions that many children suffer that pose threats to their well-being. At the same time, it is critically important to recognize the ways Northern and global visions of childhood and learning often function to obscure or misrepresent indigenous traditions that sustain learning under

conditions of fugitivity and that could, if properly recognized, serve as important resources for the reform of classroom-based learning. As the Haitian case shows, even in the absence of schooling, neither the learning nor the aspirations for becoming persons disappeared, and children built on their experiences in alternative spaces to learn and educate themselves toward personhood and hoped-for futures.

References

Bang, M., A. Marin, D. Medin, and K. Washinawatok. 2015. *Learning by Observing, Pitching in, and Being in Relations in the Natural World.* Vol. 35, in *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*, by M. Correa-Chávez, R. Mejía-Arauz and B. Rogoff, 303–313. Bingley: JAI.

Gaskins, S., and R. Paradise. 2010. *Learning through Observation in Daily Life.* Vol. 20, in *The Anthropology of Learning in Childhood*, by D. Lancy, J. Bock and S. Gaskins, 85–117. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

Geurts, K. 2003. *Culture and the Senses: Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Hoffman, D. M. 2024. *A Critical Anthropology of Childhood in Haiti: Emotion, Power, and White Saviors.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Hoffman, D. M. 2023. "Multimodality in Children's Socially Situated Learning in Haiti: A Video-based Ethnographic Analysis." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 36 (5): 955-973.

Howes, D., and C. Classen. 2014. *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society.* New York: Routledge.

Johnston, J. 2024. *Aid State: Elite Panic, Disaster Capitalism, and the Battle to Control Haiti.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Kristoff, M., and L. Panarelli. 2010. *Haiti: A Republic of NGOs?* Peace Brief #23, Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace., 187-190.

Landry, T. R. 2008. "Moving to Learn: Performance and Learning in Haitian Vodou." *Anthropology and Humanism* 33 (1-2): 53–65.

Maguire, R., and S. Freeman, . 2017. *Who owns Haiti? People, Power, and Sovereignty.* Gainsville, FL:, FL: University Press of Florida.

Michel, C. 1996. "Of Worlds Seen and Unseen: The Educational Character of Haitian Vodou." *Comparative Education Review,* 40 (3): 280–294.

Patel, L. 2019. "Fugitive Practices: Learning in a Settler Colony." *Educational Studies* 55 (3): 253–261.

Schuller, M. 2016. *Humanitarian Aftershocks in Haiti.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Stoller, P. 2010. *Sensuous Scholarship.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Author Biography

Diane M. Hoffman, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development. She is an anthropologist of education and childhood whose research focuses on understanding the role of culture in shaping teaching, learning, emotion, and self/identity in diverse settings, including schooling, non-school-based learning, and parenting. She has a particular interest in the acquisition of norms of personhood under conditions of minoritization and social disadvantage. She has done ethnographic fieldwork in Japan, Korea, among Iranians in the United States, and Haiti.

Author contact: Diane M. Hoffman, PhD (University of Virginia) hoffman@virginia.edu

To cite this article: Hoffman, Diane M. 2024. "Learning (in) the Environment: Self-education among Haiti's marginalized children." *NEOS* 16 (1).

To link this article: https://acyig.americananthro.org/neosvol16iss1spring24/hoffman/

[i] For a more complete discussion of this research and its cultural and social context, please see Hoffman (2024).
[ii] A discussion of the relationship between the "natural" and "built" environment would entail a much lengthier explanation of Haitian epistemology and spirituality than is possible here. In short, in Haiti, the distinction between "natural" and "built" is less clear and less culturally marked, as in Vodou both embody spiritual meaning and value and such meaning can move from one form to another--e.g. meaning can be transferred from a material/built object to the natural world and vice-versa very readily. Thus, they are all, in a sense, interconnected within the same "environment."
[iii] The practice of sending children to other households is sometimes known in Haitian Creole as "*restavek*" ("stay-with") --a derogative term. However, this is a socially complex and ill-defined practice and not all children sent to live elsewhere are considered *"restavek." Fomasyon* is not limited in age; both young children as well as adults can undergo "training" of various types. It should also be noted that growing up in another household is not just about labor or learning; it can lead to valued emotional attachments and informal adoption as children remain in their "host" families through adulthood.

Reaching: Community-Engagement as Education for Youth Aspiration and Well-being

Joshua Semerjian, PhD (University of California, Merced)
joshsemerjian@hotmail.com

Introduction

This article is about the youth acting subject within an afterschool media production organization. It is based on over three years of ethnographic fieldwork with participants 14-24 years old (5-15 participated at any given time), in California's Central Valley, an agro-industrial region. Since people design projects and practice them intentionally (Ortner 2006), this study examines how agency and development work with youth-driven media projects. Youth use tacit awareness to stimulate action and complete projects based on values not fully represented in popular media. They refuse division and placation as they seek to improve conditions (Kennelly 2011). This dynamic demonstrates that power relations are not wholly structural but also contextual, as people perceive and enter spaces and then take united action.

What educational activities support youth aspiration and community transformation? My proposition is simple: don't think – act. Below, I argue that public action supports youth social-emotional well-being and aspirational growth, while redressing humanity's shift away from interdependence (Critchley 2007). Young people benefit from community-engaged activities. Public action helps youth fit into social structures while improving relationships across differences. My goal is to highlight community actions that support youth well-being and build interactive capacity toward humanity for all. Action is also reaching and is tied to aspiration to the extent that youth gain opportunities to participate in local cultural production.

Problem Statement and Rationale

This project is readily concerned that dominant discourses from corporate media can sideline our deepest human truths. Young people experience contradictions with these broad images and struggle to see the big picture. Also, schooling may not match up with young people's hopes and dreams. Annette Laureau (2003) noticed socioeconomic cultural differences yet identified that affluent and working-class children experienced similar realities with school. Elsa Davidson (2011) saw that children comport away from their truths to fit certain modes of learning. Kim Case's (2016) pedagogical take on disidentification relates to the findings of both Davidson and Laureau. Young people may devalue desired things because their interests seem out of reach. Effectively, young people claim not to like something because it seems unachievable. As a solution, public action is about reaching to accept the world while forming values in action. With youth journalists, I sought to develop a humanity-for-all mentality toward self, others, and society. They expressed not experiencing this mindset otherwise in the popular media, with its polarizing

effects. One of my roles was to help them see beyond this false dichotomy while promoting a deeper awareness of interdependent humanity.

Methods

Research activities involved twice-a-week meetings, including social-emotional check-ins, journalism topics, and methods training, reviewing current events, and discussing future events and actions. As a participant-observer, I facilitated personal reflections and led journalism workshops on media literacy and critical assessments of events. This was my chance to reach out to them as social actors as they sought to reach out to the community for belonging and support. They desired to be known for their efforts. They asserted their avowed identities, photographed themselves, signed their work, and promoted projects.

The organization's leadership team announced public action opportunities for the youth journalists. As work developed, I came to understand that they were reaching for social inclusion. Reach is a key concept and methodology that emerged. Reach is an inward search for an outward expression to seek self-knowledge and build relationships through action. Reaching attends to self with society toward an interdependent local culture. In a community-engaged philosophical way, conversations across differences helped youth participants achieve unity. Balazs and Morello-Frosch (2013) discuss reaching in the context of community-based participatory research (CBPR) as sharing. They say, "Reach encapsulates the degree to which knowledge is disseminated to diverse audiences and translated into useful tools for the scientific, regulatory, policy and lay arenas" (2). This media group had the lay tools for social change, or as Anthony Giddens (1984) calls it, a practical consciousness for right human action. Their social advancement efforts fostered new bonds with themselves, each other, and the community.

Below I present two examples of reaching that highlight the kinds of media projects completed. These actions supported youth unity at community events and illustrate the positive power of reach.

March for Our Lives

On March 24, 2018, in a youth-led movement for gun control laws, "March for Our Lives" captured millions of hearts across the United States. Locally, a coalition of youth groups and adult allies demanded an end to gun violence in schools. The march evidenced power and contention for attendees. Youth actors read poetry and names and argued for and against gun ownership. The group proclaimed that it was time to stop talking and praying. It was time for action. This endeavor showed that people can have productive dialogues across position differences. For example, when a middle-schooler said schools need more security and metal detectors, audience groans swelled. However, people were most interested in producing an educational opportunity rather than attacking the messenger. People may participate in the same action yet have different plans for moving forward together. Perhaps public action need not be about legal change or argument against

an idea or representative ideal. Rather, action can focus on reaching to form possibilities. Reaching related to hope for interdependent humanity across differences.

Trans and Intersex Rights March

Recent data shows an increase in identifying and/or allying with LGBTQ+ communities (Public Religion Research Institute 2024). I consider myself a member of this group and grapple with how reach works where the action is directed at educating a diverse public. On November 17, 2018, the youth journalists initiated a "Transgender and Intersex Rights" march. Along with peer and adult allies, the media group reached for identity inclusion and resistance to identity silence. They expressed frustration that dominant identity discourses hinder growth and do not reflect human interdependence. LGBTQ+ youth and their allies spoke of invisibility and underrepresentation. Through a discourse of resistance, they reached for better terms of recognition. This effort showed a reach to change meanings of sex, gender, and sexuality that value and validate naming and claiming one's identity. It illustrated their refusal of discourses that exclude their identity terms.

Conclusion

Community action is education. The actions presented highlight ideas young people are attracted to as amplifiers of cultural change. They showed how people can work together across differences. The youth media group stood for what they believe is true, rather than simply resisting the status quo as they perceived it. Reach works because it is a memorable moment and the chance to imagine future possibilities. Reaching related also to social-emotional well-being because action facilitated entrance into the public square even as they claimed to resist its present state. The significance was less in the outcomes but in doing something – literally, anything – that sought community health improvement. Moreover, action produced inner changes that supported aspirational reach. The youth journalists showed that reaching is about growth toward humanity for all. We may take cues from scholars who have asserted that cultural practice and community engagement are vital to educating children (Clifton 2017; Lancy 2008; Lancy 2017; Longo 2007). As youth grow, their values change, and this sets the stage for more youth actions; growth is ongoing.

References

Balazs, Carolina L., and Rachel Morello-Frosch. 2013. "The Three Rs: How Community-based Participatory Research Strengthens the Rigor, Relevance, and Reach of Science." *Environmental Justice* 6 (1): 9-16.

Case, Kim. 2016. *Intersectional Pedagogy: Complicating Identity and Social Justice.* 2016. New York: Routledge.

Clifton, Jennifer. 2017. *Argument as Dialogue Across Difference: Engaging Youth in Public Literacies.* New York: Routledge.

Critchley, Simon. 2007. *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance.* London: Verso.

Davidson, Elsa. 2011. *The Burdens of Aspiration: Schools, Youth, and Success in the Divided Social Worlds of Silicon Valley.* New York: New York University Press.

Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration.* Cambridge: Polity.

Kennelly, Jacqueline. 2011. *Citizen Youth: Culture, Activism, and Agency in a Neoliberal Era.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lancy, David F. 2008. *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings.* Cambridge University Press.

—. 2017. *Raising Children: Surprising Insights from Other Cultures.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lareau, Annette. 2003. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Longo, Nicholas V. 2012. *Why Community Matters: Connecting Education with Civic Life.* Albany: SUNY Press.

Ortner, Sherry B. 2006. *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Public Religion Research Institute. 2024. "A Political and Cultural Glimpse Into America's Future: Generation Z's Views on Generational Change and the Challenges and Opportunities Ahead." Washington, DC.

Author Biography

Josh is a recent graduate of the University of California, Merced's Interdisciplinary Humanities doctoral program. He is a scholar of childhood and youth studies interested in highlighting unity across differences as expressed in youth-led community engaged projects. His field combines cultural anthropology and social history with media and communication studies.

Author contact: Joshua Semerjian, PhD (University of California, Merced)
joshsemerjian@hotmail.com

To link this article: https://acyig.americananthro.org/neosvol16iss1spring24/semerjian/

Commentary

Building Stories: Unleashing the Power of Stories to Expand Learning

Drew Kahn, MFA (SUNY Buffalo State University)
kahnaj@buffalostate.edu
https://www.annefrankproject.com/

I remember the moment clearly. It was 2006, and I was sitting in an empty theater following the final performance of our department's unique production of *The Diary of Anne Frank (1947)*. We had two 'Anne Franks' in our production: The Jewish girl we know, hiding from Nazis during the Holocaust, and a Rwandan Tutsi girl we did <u>not</u> know, hiding from Hutu Extremists during the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda. As the director, my justification was simple: to include our black and brown students in the story (more than half our students are non-white). The cast and I circled up one last time, wiped our tears and… there I was in the empty theater. That's it?! After such a meaningful educational process, we just stop there? So, I scribbled some learning highlights beyond the stage that I knew would benefit these students for life: *community building, conflict management, and identity exploration*. Little did I know that I was scribbling the pillars for what was to become [Buffalo State University's Anne Frank Project (AFP).](https://www.annefrankproject.com/)

Fast forward 18 years; AFP has grown into a social justice program at Buffalo State, using stories as the platform for all we do. Most of our work focuses on Story-Based Learning (SBL), moving the academic content from the students 'brains to their hearts, using their bodies, with stories as the curricular foundation. These stories are created by students in their classrooms using the given lesson as the prompt for the story-building. We use the term story-building (not storytelling) to reflect the building block process required for creating meaningful stories (Drew 2020). We train educators, community organizations, and businesses how to harness the power of stories to *Build Communities, Manage Conflicts, and Explore Identities*. Sound familiar? The socio-emotional and academic success we see in our partner schools is overwhelmingly positive. We weave the SBL through the academic fabric of each classroom and school; this is not 'break time' for the 'feel good stuff'; this is pedagogy that addresses the students 'entire learning process simultaneously.

Let me share two examples. Our relationship with Rwanda has developed far beyond the play as we have taken over 170 students to this remarkable country, whose post-genocide narrative is based on forgiveness, unity, and love. My students process their Rwanda experiences in a story-building course with me where they build their own collective story into a new play. This play tours 20-30 local Buffalo public schools, literally bringing their Rwanda inspirations home. This year's play, currently touring, carries the theme: "Your journey towards forgiveness begins with empathy." Is there a high school student in the U.S. who *doesn't* need to hear that? My students follow each performance facilitating an SBL workshop with the high school audience.

The second example is from a teacher's perspective. AFP offers SBL professional development for local teachers each semester. These two-day trainings are followed by weekly classroom visits, assisting the teachers with the application of SBL. A local middle school teacher was sent to our training by her principal, hoping to foster more student engagement in her classes. This teacher was highly suspicious of our work and confessed, "I don't do this kind of stuff!" After one semester with AFP this teacher shared:

> "When students feel a sense of inclusion and belonging in a classroom, it increases their academic performance and intrinsic motivation. SBL provides a framework for illuminating student voice and fostering classroom connection centered on story. SBL allows the classroom to evolve into a community that demonstrates concern for each other, holds each other accountable and allows students to leave the classroom feeling interconnected with a profound sense of belonging."

I am fortunate to be from the theater where so many building blocks to learning exist in our routines. The process for transferring theater practice into pedagogy is not an easy one; it requires devoted collaborations with students and colleagues, support from supervisors, and the ever-present foundation of my heroes: Augusto Boal (*Theater of the Oppressed 1979*) and Joseph Campbell (*The Hero's Journey 1990*). I am fortunate to have had the time to weave these elements into a practice.

I will conclude the same way we begin our work with our partners: "You matter and your stories matter. We, the Anne Frank Project, are here to help you tell your story, because if you don't, someone else will, and they're going to get it wrong." Tell your story!

References

Boal, Augusto. (1979). Theatre of the Oppressed. C.A. McBride, Trans. London, UK: Phitto.

Campbell, Joseph. (1990). The Hero's Journey. New World Library: Novato, California.

Frank, Anne. (1947). Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl. Random House: New York.

Kahn, Drew. (2020). Story Building: A Practical Guide for Bringing the Power of Stories into Classrooms and Communities. SUNY Buffalo State, Buffalo, New York.

Author Biography

Drew Kahn is a Distinguished Service Professor at SUNY Buffalo State where he has taught acting, devised theater (President's Award for Excellence in Teaching/SUNY), and directed productions (Kennedy Center Award) for over 30 years. He taught K-12 populations for 10 years before his work in higher education.

He is the Founding Director of The Anne Frank Project, a multi-layered social justice initiative at SUNY Buffalo State that utilizes the wisdom of Anne Frank as a springboard for the examination of genocide and intolerance through the lens of story and performance.

He presents and teaches internationally on the universal language of theater and the intersection of story, conflict resolution, and community building—most recently in Rwanda, Kenya, Switzerland, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar and Vietnam (Toby Ticktinback Award for Holocaust Education; Community Leader Award, National Federation for Just Communities).

Professor Kahn received his M.F.A. in Classical Acting from Southern Methodist University and his B.A. in Drama from San Diego State University.

Cite this article: Kahn, Drew. 2024. "Building Stories: Unleashing the Power of Stories to Expand Learning." *NEOS* 16 (1).

Link this article: https://acyig.americananthro.org/neosvol16iss1spring24/kahn/

Research Articles: Learning of the Mind and Body

Complicating Global South Femininities: Women's School-Girl Narratives and the Text-ility of School-Uniforms

Aakanksha D'Cruz (Department of Global & International Studies at the University of California, Irvine)
dcruza@uci.edu

"Yea, there were girls who used to wear the skirts whenever they wanted to. And when this became recurrent then the teachers used to make comments…", said Anita[1], in response to my inquiries about sartorial disciplining during her time as a high-schooler at the Delhi Convent School (DCS). DCS is an English-medium all-girls' convent school in New Delhi, India. After graduating from DCS in 2015, Anita went on to pursue a Bachelors' degree in English. She was enrolled in a graduate program at a public university in Delhi when I approached her in 2019 while working on my M.Phil. thesis[2].

During our interaction, Anita alluded to the three sets of school-uniforms she had to wear as a school-girl—the skirt-blouse for days with a scheduled PTE (Physical Training Education) period, the tracksuit for the cold winter months, and the all-season *Salwar-Kameez*[3] for ordinary days. Multiple instances of dress rules violation were narrated by her, whereby girl students were found to be wearing the wrong uniform-set not befitting a particular day/season/occasion and the manner in which violators were reprimanded. This ritualistic morning uniform inspection that occurred at

---

[1] Names of all interviewees have been changed to protect their identities. All interview participants were women over the age of 18 and as alumnae of Delhi Convent School (DCS) spoke of their girlhoods in retrospect. DCS is a pseudonym used to refer to the minority-Christian educational institution in New Delhi. Anita, Sana, Sadhna, and Kamna hail from different religious backgrounds (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh respectively). All four interviewees are highly educated with postgraduate degrees and as middle/upper class women—who grew up in the metropolitan city of Delhi—had experience with paid-formal employment. Their association with DCS roughly coincides with the timeline of the 1960s-2010s; in this time Sadhna and Kamna had also served as teachers at their alma mater. The interviewees spoke in English with intermittent use of Hindi. I established contact with them through common acquaintances who, along with me, had also received convent-school education. My occupational/class position as a postgraduate researcher from an affluent background with a good grasp of the English language took precedence over my non-dominant socio-cultural positionality as a non-Savarna Bihari-Catholic woman. The privilege of possessing the same kind of cultural capital that I critique in the essay allowed me to claim stake in my field of interest and present myself as a subversive insider. Having spent a long amount of time in Delhi had also allowed me to establish a good rapport with the participants.

[2] This essay draws from the final chapter of my M.Phil. thesis titled, Girlhood and School Discipline: Case Study of a Delhi Convent School. Based on women's coming-of-age narratives (8 semi-structured interviews with DCS alumnae who graduated between 1970-2015), the chapter demonstrated how the sartorial (school uniform), the temporal (morning-assembly) and cultural (girl culture/peer relationships) dimensions of school-life at DCS served as modes of disciplining. It broadly discussed the implications of women's retrospective narrations of their memories of girlhood and how their resistance to/conformity with gendered norms should be read in complex terms.

[3] Salwar-Kameez, equivalent to 'trousers-shirt', is a modest garment worn by girls and women in the northern part of the South Asian peninsula. The long top, which usually covers the upper-half of the trousers, can be made to fit loosely and is comfortable to wear. Conventionally, the Salwar-Kameez is a trio and comes with a scarf (dupatta/odhani/chunni). It is often donned as ethnic-formals in public/corporate work-spaces with or without the scarf.

DCS is not a stand-alone occurrence but a daily routine at most schools in India. Bhandari (2014), Dore (2014), Gogoi (2014) and Bala Kannan (2022), in their respective school-ethnographies, have highlighted the place of the school-uniform in the school's disciplinary regime. According to them, the school-uniform encodes norms of respectability and authority, uniformity and institutional prestige, as well as hygiene and social order. The early morning uniform-inspection and embodied scrutinization at DCS resulted in punishments—ranging from teachers' passive-aggressive taunting to a note for the parents on the last page of the school-diary/"almanac" and the levying of a not so hefty but punitive monetary fine—for minor incursions. In another instance, Sana narrated, in detail, the intimate workings of the disciplinary regime of the morning assembly:

> ...we used to like…form queues and go out and then they would just single out and bring one person out…everybody would be in a queue and would be climbing up the stairs and everybody who would pass… they would be monitoring you from top to bottom and you would be scanned for it, and then pulled out…

Both Anita and Sana graduated from DCS in the early 2010s and attended this institution for a considerable part of their childhoods; apart from their families, DCS was the primary site for enculturation into gendered roles/subjectivities. Their recollections stood in stark contrast to Sadhna's narration and observations. Sadhna had attended DCS in the 1970s and was also employed as a teacher at DCS in the 1990s. According to her, the rigidity around the school uniform was a recent development. During her time (as a girl student), she insisted that they would only wear skirts. She vividly remembered the early 1990s, when the *Salwar-Kameez* replaced the skirts. According to Sadhna, the *Salwar-Kameez* was introduced "to protect the modesty of the child" and was an attempt by DCS, a minority-Christian institution, at "being more Indian," but more so, it was done for practical reasons of feasibility, because skirts were inadequate for the colder months. Kamna, who graduated from DCS around the same time as Sadhna, said that their skirts were "very smart" and that they "were all very proud of their uniform." Similar to Sadhna, Kamna had been a teacher of English and Social Studies at DCS at the time the *Salwar-Kameez* was introduced. She distinctly recalled the reaction of girl students in her classes to this change to the school uniform:

> …You know, the girls like they sit anyhow when they're wearing a skirt and then your legs show and they're not mindful of how this…I think… so it's like the girls initially reacted—"we don't want to wear Salwar-Kameez and what is this *behenji*[4] and you know...we look like government school people you know, but then they realized later that you can sit anywhere, you can climb stairs without people [looking up your skirt]...

---

[4] Behenji, is a Hindi-slang used to pejoratively profile unmarried-young girls and women who are typecast as rustic, conservative and uptight. Girls with working-class backgrounds and marginalized caste-identities find themselves to be the frequent target of this stereotyping.

Changes introduced to the school uniform in the early 1990s are an indicator of the shifting contingencies which shaped the evolution of DCS' social charter[5] (Ray 1988). DCS, an institution built in the early 20th century by the Christian missionaries, served as a haven for daughters and grand-daughters of the English-speaking native elites—freedom fighters and the ruling elite, bureaucrats, businessmen, and middle-class professionals in post-independent India. In post-colonial India, DCS played an instrumental role in the political socialization of school-girls through a hidden curriculum comprising the disciplining of the body and a hetero-patriarchal civic education. The 1990s were marked by the embracing of neoliberal values symbolized in the adoption of the New Economic Policy in 1991 which put India on the track of structural readjustments. This rapid and drastic economic reorientation was accompanied by the simultaneous rise of right-wing Hindutva politics of cultural revivalism and social preservation. Thus, neoliberal restructuring of the economy fueled the fears of Brahmanical patriarchy[6] and set in motion a moral panic about cultural traditions and the social fabric of India (Wilson, Loh, and Purewal 2018). Building upon Spivak's (1999, 337) musings on "text-ility"[7], the school uniform is suspended in a social context such that it carries the inscription of shifting politico-historical discourses and sticks to the body of its wearer. The text-ility of school uniforms pertains to cultural politics as well as the symbolic shifts in public morality and can therefore provide insights into the discursive production of femininities.

Ray (1988), in her school-ethnography of St. Mary's Convent School (SMC) located in Calcutta, recognized the presence of "habitus"[8]—a theory of cultural capital by Bourdieu (1977), which has interpretive valency in the case of DCS. The school-girls at both SMC and DCS are postcolonial citizen-subjects who, through an enrollment in their respective schools and continued association with their alma mater, can maintain or lay claims to a high social status. Therefore, even when the

---

[5] Ray's (1988) conception of the social charter pertains to the 'official script' of the school administration/authorities/establishment and the values that the institution thrives to inculcate among its student body. The social charter can be situated by means of assessing the schools' mission statement/goals and motto/codes of conduct/rules and regulations/statement of academic excellence etc.

[6] For further reading, refer to Omvedt (2000).

[7] In her chapter on culture in the 1999 classic A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present, Spivak writes at length about cultural history and cultural production which has come to captivate poststructural/postmodern imagination. She hints at the possibility of a correlation between modes of production and their accompanying cultural explanations. Her mention of the term 'text-ility' is immensely brief. However, despite its phonetic proximity to text/textual, text-ility in effect is a weaving/textile metaphor. Therefore, instead of presenting the social as a text it carries the potential of imagining the social fabric. She identifies clothing as an arena of inscription which is woven into the social text (Spivak 1999, 337).

[8] Bourdieu (1977) envisages the habitus as composed of covert symbolic representations and ritual practices that maintain and reproduce the clout of a group as a whole while simultaneously allowing individual members to draw upon its collective prestige. The habitus maintains its position of dominance through the accumulation of cultural and social capital. In simple terms, some of the ways in which cultural capital manifests itself are—intergenerational wealth of materials/access to language skills/learning of bodily comportment and table manners/niche taste in books etc. Similarly, access to close-knit circles of affluent/influential people, networking and establishing contacts with community leaders etc. are forms of social capital. The theoretical vibrancy of a concept like habitus lies in its ability to theorize the privileged possession of cultural/ social capital in terms that transcend ascriptions of class identity.

interviewees resisted the school's surveillance of dressed bodies, they would conform to school rules and actively appropriate the cultural and symbolic capital they came to acquire as members of the DCS student body. For instance, in Kamna's account, girl students actively disassociated from working-class/public school girlhood experiences captured by the text-ility of the *Salwar-Kameez*. This conflicting tendency of their simultaneous acceptance and criticism of DCS' dress rules appear counterintuitive and reiterate the need for decentering and complicating southern femininities. Therefore, while DCS may be a site for the social reproduction of the normative post-colonial girl femininity, the dominant discourse on girlhood is far from a hegemonizing total.

The text-ility of sartorial reforms at DCS challenge two fundamental conceptions of the girl-child that has come to capture the trans-national imagination of girlhood in the global south: 1) *Girls-as-victims*: the racialized-victimized, educationally disentitled Third-World girl at the core of the 'white savior complex' discussed in Walters (2017), 2) *Girls-as-agential*: the romance of girl resistances through the valorization of marginal girlhoods, like those of Malala Yousafzai, Ahad Tamim, and Autumn Peltier. This double-edged formulation of the girl-child situated in the global south may seem paradoxical at first. However, a closer look reveals that they coexist and are co-constitutive. This phenomenon points toward the epistemological imperative to decenter and complicate southern feminisms and femininities—both in their relation to the global north as well as in the context of south-south relations. According to Desai (2020), universalistic ideations of the global north and south misleadingly compartmentalize and "divide power and privilege in the North from precarity and powerlessness in the South" (382). Whereas, for Asher & Ramamurthy (2020) the regionally over-determined binaries of postcolonial (as South Asian) and decolonial (as Latin American) feminist scholarships snub the potential for building solidarities while overestimating the presence of vicissitudes within the global south. In both Desai (2020) and Asher & Ramamurthy (2020), what constitutes the epistemic positioning of the global north and the global south presents itself as the bone of contention.

To summarize, this essay, through the medium of women's coming-of-age testimonies, began with an assumption that the routine inspection of school uniforms at DCS is a characteristic feature of the school's disciplinary regime and an element of a gendered hidden curriculum. This hidden curriculum shapes girl-subjectivities and socializes them into performing normative/dominant femininity. By drawing upon theoretical concepts like Ray's (1988) "social charter" and Spivak's (1999) "text-ility," the essay explains a) why there was a shift in DCS's dress code in the 1990s and b) how changes in the school uniform correlate to the shifting terrain of socio-political discourse and morality in the era of Hindutva neoliberalism. The simultaneous resistance to and embracing of the dress code by DCS alumnae reflects a complex "habitus" that the interviewees were members of (Bourdieu 1977). Their capacity to lay claims to cultural capital coincides with a simultaneous sartorial regulation of their bodies. This poses a challenge to the neat dyadic theorization of girls as either agential or victims. Therefore, the essay concludes by arguing in favor of complicating global south femininities for a more robust, intersectional, and inclusive reading of hegemonic and marginal girl subjectivities across historical/geographical contexts.

References

Asher, Kiran, and Priti Ramamurthy. 2020. "Rethinking Decolonial and Postcolonial Knowledges Beyond Regions to Imagine Transnational Solidarity." *Hypatia* 35 (3 (Summer)): 542-547. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/rethinking-decolonial-postcolonial-knowledges/docview/2488758766/se-2.

Bala Kannan, Smruthi. 2022. "Clean bodies in school: spatial-material discourses of children's school uniforms and hygiene in Tamil Nadu, India." *Children's Geographies* (University of Chicago Press) 20 (6): 803-817. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2022.2059341.

Bhandari, Parul. 2014. "In Quest of Identity: Student Culture in a Religious Minority Institution." In *Ethnographies of Schooling in Contemporary India*, by Meenakshi Thapan, 182-224. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9789351508069.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. "Structures, Habitus, Power: Basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power." In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, by Pierre Bourdieu, 159–197. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Desai, Manisha. 2020. "Troubling the Southern turn in feminisms." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 27 (4): 381-393. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506820951827.

Dore, Bhavya. 2014. "Living in the Bubble: Rishi Valley School and the Sense of Community*." In *Ethnographies of Schooling in Contemporary India*, by Meenakshi Thapan, 271-332. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9789351508069.

Gogoi, Anannya. 2014. "Kiranjyoti Vidyalaya: A Sociological Narrative of a Government School ." In *In Ethnographies of Schooling in Contemporary India*, by Meenakshi Thapan, 104-153. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9789351508069.

Omvedt, Gail. 2000. "Review of Towards a Theory of "Brahmanic Patriarchy" by Uma Chakravarty." *Economic and Political Weekly* 35 (4): 187-190. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4408843.

Ray, Raka. 1988. "The Contested Terrain of Reproduction : class and gender in schooling in India." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 9 (4): 387–401. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569880090402.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1999. "Culture." In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 312–421. Harvard University Press.

Walters, Rosie. 2017. ""This Is My Story": The Reclaiming of Girls' Education Discourses in Malala Yousafzai's Autobiography." *Girlhood Studies* 3 (3): 23–38. https://doi.org/10.3167/ghs.2017.100304.

Wilson, K., J. U. Loh, and N. Purewal. 2018. "Gender, violence and the neoliberal state in India." *Feminist Review* 119 (1): 1-6. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41305-018-0109-8.

Author Biography

Aakanksha D'Cruz (she/her) is a II-Year Ph.D. scholar in the Department of Global & International Studies at the University of California, Irvine. Her doctoral dissertation will be a study of developmental discourses around education for girls in the Global South. Her most recent publication titled, "Knees and Feet Together, Shoulders Back and Chest Out": Embodying the Hidden Curriculum through Women's Girlhood Narratives" highlights the gendered dynamics of the discursive space of the school which operate through measures of supervision, inspection and reprimand. Her broader research interests fall within the purview of studies of postcolonial India, critical theory, development studies, and girl studies.

Author contact: Aakanksha D'Cruz (Department of Global & International Studies at the University of California, Irvine) dcruza@uci.edu

Authority, Embodied Teaching, and Liminal Education in Japanese Child Welfare: Between Abuse and Discipline

Christopher Chapman (University of Oxford; University of Hawai'i at Mānoa)
christopher.chapman@anthro.ox.ac.uk / crc7@hawaii.edu

Introduction

Child welfare systems are spaces which subvert normative family dynamics because children who enter care often have absent, fragmented, or otherwise unsettled kinships. This subversion impacts learning and education as well: being in care may complicate student-instructor relationships and normative practices surrounding school-based pedagogy. In this paper, I discuss the embodied strategies and tactics of elementary school children in care and their caregivers in an afterschool study hall in a large-scale residential care institution, the Juniper Academy.[iv] I conducted yearlong ethnographic fieldwork here, focusing on the relationship between local practices of care and their mediation of stakeholder well-being.[v] This field site is an interesting setting to consider education because while under the umbrella of social welfare, the Juniper Academy was multiple places at once: a clinic, a school, a home, an office, a gym, a cafeteria, and more. The Juniper Academy is one of nearly 600 child protection institutions tasked by the state to look after children separated from their parents—children who may have experienced abuse, illness, and/or disability. The data this paper draws on comes from participant observation and informal interviews with children and staff in the study hall where I assisted as a volunteer aid.[vi] I saw how teachers enacted a carefulness around the children to avoid being perceived as abusive, a practice that helped reshape the study hall into a subversive educational space—children ignored caregiver requests, talked back, and disrupted study.

Study Time at the Juniper Academy: A Vignette

Located in a residential neighborhood in suburban Tokyo, the study hall at the Juniper Academy was often busy with the sounds of conversation. The children would jest and joke with each other, question and complain about their homework, and tell the adults about their day. Children would arrive one by one as they came back from school, coming into the hall to begin their homework. Set in a large, windowed multi-purpose room, complete with long folding tables, stiff-backed plastic folding chairs, and a variety of playthings in cabinets, the room was always a crowded social space once everyone arrived. Large sliding windows let in the afternoon sun. Through these conversations I learned about the children's personalities and histories. One day, for example, several children discussed at length with each other their family histories—from hometowns to missing parents.

The children molded the study hall into a complicated educational space, and I noticed a pattern in how staff took on the role of teacher as they helped with schoolwork. Everyone was, to varying degrees, lax in overseeing the children's work ethic and correcting mistakes. Similarly, there were hardly any consequences for not following staff instructions. Children regularly did not do their

homework, ignored adults' requests, and played or socialized. One student, for instance, did not complete his arithmetic problem set, instead turning around to talk with his friend. After a care worker repeatedly asked them, without success, to do their math assignment, they went over and did it themself—and the child turned to watch. Megumi, a care worker, said that "[we] try our best to help children complete their schoolwork, but because of the situation [of being in the welfare system], we do not enforce much." On the other hand, staff were quick to reward children for success. Megumi, for example, exclaimed with glee when a girl revealed she received an A on a weekly school quiz—Megumi had the other children, staff, and me congratulate her.

Staff said that children, especially the older ones, understand that they, the children, held real power. The reason was that the children knew that they could report the staff to the administration for being abusive, potentially getting staff disciplined or even terminated—and this had happened. This is interesting because child abuse is a prominent social concern in Japan; staff were keenly aware of the need to be mindful of how they treated children. Staff could not easily administer punitive action and were sensitive in how they asked and behaved. New employee and volunteer training sessions contained meticulous notes on how to interact with children. Adults were advised, for example, to avoid physical contact and speaking too casually. As to how children relayed their occasional complaints, they could talk with staff or use a secure comment box in the head office. Staff encouraged children to submit notes about sensitive matters that they could not otherwise discuss, which were read exclusively by the upper administration. Informational posters around the facility persuaded children to "raise their voice" about any issues they had, safeguarding it as their human right. I also found that children in the study hall knew about the national child abuse reporting hotline, "189." Reporting tactics extended into digital spaces as well. Several negative online reviews of the Juniper Academy were written by former residents; they disparaged select staff for their lack of empathy. This brief snapshot of social life in care at the Juniper Academy illustrates the learning channels and sort-of failures that occurred in a liminal educational space.[vii] The study hall was intended for formal education, but much of the learning that occurred was informal, happenstance, and subversive. This image of daily life muddles the popular narrative of child welfare institutions being strict, harsh places to live.

Between Abuse and Discipline

The ambivalence towards completing schoolwork was a relational strategy embodied by the care workers, shaped by their interactions with children. This teaching style shares similarities with, yet diverges from, those found in the primary school system. Scholars of early childhood education in Japan have documented how the school is a key site of socialization and national identity building (Hendry 1986, Holloway 2000, Peak 1992). Looking at instructors' teaching style, Akiko Hayashi and Joseph Tobin (2015, 19-38) describe that the notion of 'watching over' (*mimamoru*) may play a key role. This is characterized by a passive approach to intervention, and Hayashi and Tobin suggest how this embodied technique helps promote cooperation and independence in children by letting them work out interpersonal issues on their own terms. The authors comment,

however, that Western observers have perceived this strategy as abusive because teachers would not intervene in interpersonal conflicts. Susan Holloway (2010, 122) notes that child-rearing tactics, like school-based pedagogies, have also been characterized by an orientation towards encouraging empathy, independence, and obedience. These techniques comprise a discourse on instilling children with a sense of discipline, a value that features regularly in both education and child-rearing (Holloway 2010, 119-124).

Discipline (*shitsuke*) in contemporary Japan has a historically esteemed role in socialization, following a conditioning approach through "tough love" (*ai no muchi*, lit. 'whip of love').[viii] Abuse (*gyakutai*) occupies an opposing role because child abuse is a prevalent social issue. Discipline and abuse are topics of domestic debate as critics have noted how socialization practices can be excessive. Child abuse rates continue to rise year after year; it carries stigma due to the high prevalence of child abuse discourse in the media, such as news coverage and public awareness campaigns (Chapman 2024, 17-18). Abuse classifications follow World Health Organization criteria: physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, and neglect (Chapman 2024, 107). Caseworkers informed me that physical and sexual abuse are often easy to determine because the body is evidence. However, there are no clear-cut definitions for determining psychological abuse and neglect. This is notable because there are checkered boundaries between abuse and discipline in Japanese schools as well, such as the continued presence of corporal punishment as a means of discipline and abuse of teacher authority (Miller 2013).The ambiguity between discipline and abuse shaped, in part, the educational practices in the study hall. Staff expressed an aversion to being perceived as an abuser, and children demonstrated their bounded authority by acting contrary to study hall workers' directions. Many care workers took their job seriously and stated a genuine interest in helping children excel academically. Yet, care workers I spoke with also told me that they did not know the boundary between abuse and discipline themselves as corrective acts were increasingly becoming seen as abuse. They also said that their chief concern—and job—was to ensure children were in a safe, secure, and happy environment—care and protection were of paramount importance. The way of teaching my interlocutors enacted complicates the narrative of 'watching over.' Care workers were guided by an apprehension toward being watched by the children and disciplined by the Academy administration. This self-discipline, conversely, seemed to promote a lack of educational success in the children, who often received mediocre grades. Yet, the children enjoyed themselves because they turned the study hall into a time of play. At the heart of the matter, potentially, was the mediation of individual well-being. This microcosm of learning did not follow a cultural script, but emerged as a situated, relational practice between stakeholders, shadowed by the increasing diffusion of children's rights, ethics guidelines, and new forms of social precarity in the welfare system (Allison 2013, Chapman 2024). In broader perspective, public concern for child abuse and its impact on relational practices in the Juniper study hall complement Andrea Arai's (2016) analysis of how national unease around socioeconomic downturn reframed childhood and education into discursive scapegoats for societal disruption. Increasing awareness of inequities, issues, and rights in relation to children's social care—

including the competing ways in which they are talked about and addressed—and the continued estrangement of children from normative social and educational ideals speak to a larger system in flux. The Juniper Academy care workers oversaw children's studying with a hands-off approach, yet the context underscores multiple levels of surveillance and structural change. The children's bounded position of authority, then, may be a product of this nebulous political-pedagogical assemblage.

Conclusion

In this paper I have described how education took on unexpected forms in an afterschool study hall in a child welfare institution. Children's and care-worker-turned-teachers' strategies and tactics were negotiated in the context of a controlled, political space—children knew they held the power to report adults; care workers adjusted their teaching styles to allow children more leeway in completing schoolwork and chores. This situated, embodied form of teaching emerged out of a relational space which endowed children with the authority to decide who was involved in their day-to-day lives. Child welfare can be a complicated space not only of kinship, but also of education. Topics like this offer an interesting point of departure for future research on the politics of education vis-à-vis child protection.

References

Allison, Anne. 2013. *Precarious Japan.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Arai, Andrea. 2016. *The Strange Child: Education and the Psychology of Patriotism in Recessionary Japan.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Chapman, Christopher. 2023. "Affinity through Vulnerability: The Politics of Positionality in Child Welfare." *Medicine Anthropology Theory* (Medicine Anthropology Theory 10 (1): 1-9. doi.org/10.17157/mat.10.1.6892) 10 (1): 1-9.

—. 2024. "Dissonances in Care: Childhood, Well-being, and the Politics of Welfare in Japan." University of Oxford.

Hayashi, Akiko and Tobin, Joseph. 2015. *Teaching Embodied: Cultural Practice in Japanese Preschools.* University of Chicago Press.

Hendry, Joy. 1986. *Becoming Japanese: The World of the Pre-School Child.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Holloway, Susan. 2000. *Contested Childhood: Diversity and Change in Japanese Preschools.* London: Routledge.

—. 2010. *Women and Family in Contemporary Japan.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Miller, Aaron. 2009. ""Taibatsu: 'Corporal punishment' in Japanese socio-cultural context."." *Japan Forum* 21 (2): 233-254.

—. 2013. *Discourses of Discipline: An Anthropology of Corporal Punishment in Japan's Schools and Sports.* Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California.

Peak, Lois. 1992. *Learning to go to School in Japan: The Transition from Home to Preschool Life.* Berkely: University of California Press.

Peak, Lois. 1992. *Learning to go to School in Japan: The Transition from Home to Preschool Life.* Berkely: University of California Press.

Author Biography

Christopher Chapman is a cultural and medical anthropologist with complementary training in sociology and social work. His research explores the intersections of care, personhood, and structural inequality, focusing on the mediation of authoritative knowledge and local ways in which people manage their well-being. He also has interests in research design and ethnographic writing, prioritizing questions of power, responsibility, and equity.

Author contact: Christopher Chapman (University of Oxford; University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa) christopher.chapman@anthro.ox.ac.uk / crc7@hawaii.edu

[iv] The names of places and people are pseudonyms.

[v] Child protection is a messy space to be in, and I acknowledge that this research indexes many questions of responsibility, reflexivity, and intention. Please see (Chapman 2023) for an essay which explores my positionality. This research was funded by a Fulbright Graduate Research Fellowship, the Japan Foundation Endowment Committee, and the University of Oxford.

[vi] The number of children with whom I regularly interacted was approximately 30, and in total over 100 children aged 2-18 were in-residence at the Juniper Academy. For more details, see (Chapman 2024, 24-33).

[vii] The social climate of the study hall often varied depending on who was present; everyone had their favorites and people they wanted to avoid.

[viii] For a detailed history of this discourse, see (Miller 2009, 234-245).

Everyday Intellectualism and "Undefining Childhood"

Natalie Gologorsky, MA (Rutgers University)
nmg143@camden.rutgers.edu

Children cross-culturally are famously known as prolific question-askers. These questions are related to processes of intellectual inquiry that children engage in. In this study, I investigate childhood memories of autistic adult women and non-binary people from an online Facebook group from the New York City area, in order to look for clues about where these kinds of processes of inquiry into personal interests might begin, and whether and how they last into adulthood or blur the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. I chose this group because I was familiar with the members from when I lived in New York City for a couple of years, and they are my peers. In addition, a central aspect of the autistic experience, from what I have seen, is focusing somewhat obsessively on particular topics of interest for long periods of time. While it is still my contention that all children (and people in general) explore intellectual interests every day in different ways, I thought that the particular conscious attention that autistic people pay to these processes may prove useful for investigating more openly what that experience of everyday intellectual exploration was like. My data was indeed fruitful in terms of specific details the interviewees provided about these processes.

The study uses three individual, approximately one-hour-long Zoom interviews to explore childhood memories of informal learning that these adults (referred to by pseudonyms hereafter) have. Informal learning is defined here as learning that takes place outside of (and with no connection to) school, for the purpose of exploring one's own interests. I have chosen to define informal learning in this way for the purposes of this study in order to uncover the types of learning that traditional school curricula do not typically acknowledge or address. There is a long tradition of critical social inquiry into the ways in which schools try to define all learning as belonging to or resulting from formal instruction, and the ways in which there is learning taking place outside of the school environment which does not necessarily conform to school goals or purposes (see Lave 1982; 1990; 2019; Willis 1977; Urrieta 2013; 2015; Illich 1971; Paradise 1998; Golding, Brown, and Foley 2009; Graff 2003). Given that children cross-culturally spend many (if not most) of their waking hours outside of school, sometimes pursuing their own interests, this is a significant area of children's intellectual life that this study aims to begin to explore through adults' recollections. In particular, the tendency for informal learning to blur the boundaries between childhood and adulthood is something I aim to explore here. This is based on an understanding that, according to the most accepted definition of childhood within Childhood Studies, childhood is socially constructed, a variable of social analysis, and that children are actors in their social lives and those around them (Prout and James 1997).

Foundations of Memory

In this study, I explore a working concept I'm developing known as "everyday intellectualism." This is everyday, informal learning about interests that serve no practical purpose (e.g., career training) per se. Put simply, this is learning, outside of school, just for the sake of it. Previous literature has referred to children's informal learning outside of school mostly as preparation for community life in terms of performing specific practical tasks (Lave 1982; 1990; Urrieta 2013; 2015). While this is often true and valuable, there are other interests children have that do not necessarily serve an immediate practical purpose, and these are undertheorized and understudied. While it is difficult to locate studies of this specific type of children's informal learning directly, when the focus is broadened to studies of adults' childhood memories of informal learning, three studies provide useful context. The first study is an autoethnography of the researcher's journey from K-12 schools to a research career (Gallardo and Gindidis 2020). Gallardo considers the "intellectual" only within the context of the academic (2020, 292), which sets up a strong dichotomy throughout her account between "intellectual" experiences in school and emotional experiences outside of it. The second study (an interview-based one) provides more circumspect advice for attempting to use adult narratives of childhood memories as a window into childhood experiences. The authors caution that adult memories can be factually inaccurate and are mostly useful for understanding "…idealized forms of childhood, representations, and/or imaginations of cultural norms, values, or symbols" (Harris and Valentine 2017, 506). Even though these adult narratives may not contain factually perfect memories, they can still be useful for understanding how the learners remember and discuss their experience of this learning. The third study is an ethnography of a rural community in the mid-Atlantic U.S., including interview accounts, which emphasize the monumental importance of space and time to childhood experiences of informal learning (Tilhou 2022). Tilhou's project is to undefine childhood by exploring how time moves forward and backward in the process of meaning-making and learning, and how informal learning crosses back and forth between childhood and adulthood, so that "[o]ur ageless childhoods are continuously manifested" (865). This connects to previous research she describes as demonstrating "...that there are enduring characteristics of child that can be found no matter biological age or other adult-like characteristic" (Tilhou 2022, 871). Thus, the folk assumption of distinct "child" and "adult" characteristics is proved to be erroneous in the context of everyday intellectualism, where the child as an everyday intellectual undoes the commonsense association between age and learned wisdom.

All three studies share one feature in common: they point to different aspects of adults' memories of learning social information and ways of being as children, but they do not give us a real sense of what those adults remember about pursuing their interests. In this way, all three of them skate across the surface of childhood memories of encountering people, places, and things without delving into the depths of what it was like to really be in those communities of learners and to be a seeker of something more than an attitude or a fact. This is where this sort of research leaves off, and this is where my research picks up.

Current (and Past) Narratives

When designing this study, I had originally set out to explore how the memories that autistic adults have of following their intellectual interests outside of school in informal learning contexts shape their present-day intellectual interests, and what sorts of relationships they recall forming in childhood while pursuing those interests. To that end, I inductively and qualitatively coded my interviews using the program NVIVO and the coding strategies described in Saldaña (2014). Several themes emerged during this process, but the theme of non-linear movement through time in terms of the way these adults remembered and described their childhood interests was most relevant to my theoretical question about how informal learning collapses many differences between children and adults, and so for that reason and due to limited space, I focus on that theme here.

All three of my participants showed a strong continuity of interests between childhood and adulthood, and this continuity seemed to lead to their sliding back and forth between childhood and adult memories of similar interests. Much more than when they were describing the less common interests they had that didn't continue into adulthood, time seemed fluid in narratives of interest and engagement that spanned long periods. I had 20 instances of the code for "Continuity Between Childhood and Adulthood" across the three interviews. While this is only a handful more in number than the code "Differences Between Childhood and Now," the participants had much longer and more detailed answers for the cases of continuity than of differences. The sole exception to this was Nina's interview, where she only briefly mentioned either differences or similarities between childhood and adulthood since she seemed to enjoy staying with her childhood memories and trying to relive them for our interview. I focus here on Tonya's and Barbra's narratives since they went into the most detail about how their interests as children related to their interests as adults and vice versa. Please note that I kept the syntax of how my interviewees spoke intact as best as I could gather from the recording and my transcription software (otter.ai), to give a sense of their intonation and expression.

When I asked Tonya what she was curious about as a child, she listed so many different interests that I had to ask her how she decided to switch from one activity she enjoyed to another. This prompted her to explain (after describing the reasons for her bedtime routine in great detail), how she grew up with parents who she described as "really strict about going to bed early" but with a family who were "…very supportive of [her] interests" (I had asked her how she got support for her interests), including interests in dinosaurs and animals. She is old enough that she mostly remembers reading books because "…back in the day internet wasn't really that big yet" and her mother encouraged reading both in support of school achievement and because:

> *…the neighborhoods I grew up in, were not safe. So my mom tried to keep me away from that…*

She attributed this unsafe neighborhood to being "just the environment you grow up in when you're in the inner city, unfortunately." The resulting encouragement that her mother gave her for reading resulted in the following:

I love books. I have like 300 books. Now, at this point as an adult, the monster that is developed into is because I have ebooks. But I've always loved books. I've always loved reading, I read to this day, every single day somehow.

Thus, Tonya was quite explicit about the many interests she has now that began in childhood, especially animals and books. But with music, in particular, she was enthusiastic about explaining the connection between childhood and adulthood:

But then what happened was with the music, when I became a adolescent, I discovered music and realized I really loved it. At first, the first music I fell in love with was hip hop. But then I went to high school, and through exposure to music videos, and some other kid, I develop an interest in heavy metal. And rock. So now that's my favorite music, rock.

Notice here how although the structure of this story appears fairly linear on the surface, once deconstructed, the nonlinear order of the story becomes apparent: she begins by describing when she became an adolescent, then moves on to describe an unspecified time when she fell in love with hip hop, then returns to when she went to high school, and ends with the present day (adulthood). It's as if she is skating through the history of her music interest, throwing bits and pieces at me to construct a vivid picture rather than tell one continuous narrative. In this narrative, it is impossible to make neat distinctions between her childhood and adult interests in different types of music, or between her childhood and adulthood at all. This is just one example of how a discussion of personal interests can so quickly collapse any association of age with a neat, linear development from one type of interest to another.

After a short conversation about her interests as a child in which she asserted that she loved rollercoasters as a child and continues to love them as an adult, which prompted me to ask her what about them fascinates her so much, Barbra was even more explicitly non-linear with her description of her love of both rollercoasters and designing them with software, which is charged with emotion:

And I mean, as an adult, I like the sensation of facing my fears. I was really terrified of them as a kid. And I was too scared of them, but I do them because it feels rewarding after face the fears. And, and I think they do have a physically liberating thing, like, just surrendering to gravity. Though, but I think all of that is just rationalizing why I liked them. I don't really know when I'm like, but I would say that even nowadays, I spent some time like watching roller coaster videos.

She does a similar thing when describing her continued interests in learning ballet and dance, or languages (English and Arabic since her first language is Portuguese), or physics in general: she uses emotion and a sense of freedom to bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood, and reveal her common experiences across that divide. It's unclear at times whether she is describing an emotion, thought, or sensation experienced in childhood or adulthood, or both, but that is the whole point.

Undefining Childhood

I began this project looking for the ways in which these individuals' memories might reveal the blurry (or perhaps even nonexistent) boundaries between childhood and adulthood in the realm of informal learning. More specifically, I looked to further explore the phenomenon Tilhou (2022) demonstrated in which adult narratives of informal learning show that childhood practices of informal learning persist into adulthood, and that the concept of childhood is not stable in terms of linear time. Thus, "[t]he stories of past childhoods can remain open, unfinished, as the present retells and uncovers pieces left untold" (Tilhou 2022, 865). What I found is that not only did my participants describe childhood interests from their memories which persisted today, but that their understanding and experiences of those interests today is continuously influenced by these childhood memories, in ways which make it difficult to distinguish between their childhood and adult interests at all. Additionally, the way they describe their memories is riddled with the relationships they had, particularly in Tonya's narrative, where she describes how her interests were structured by her parents and other kids she knew, by her recollection. Yet she never loses herself in these accounts, very clearly articulating how she charted a path for her own interests among this web of social relationships she participated in. This is consistent with some anthropological and other research on memory, which emphasizes how "the past exists in the present" (Cole 2005, 109) and "memory connects the individual and private with the social and public in complex ways" (Cole 2005, 104).

What these interviews reveal is that the boundary between childhood and adulthood can be far more porous in the memories and understandings of adults than many traditional developmental theories would imply (see Tisdall and Punch 2012, 250-251 for a review of widely acknowledged Childhood Studies critiques of traditional developmental theories such as Parsons' or Piaget's). Specifically, the ways in which all three participants explored their interests crossed many boundaries between childhood and adulthood, both in the nonlinear ways they told their stories and in the inventive ways they sought out information or resources about their interests. The resourcefulness of a child (or adult) who is determined to learn something interesting apparently knows no bounds beyond their material conditions. While children occasionally have more time to explore certain interests than adults (but also less freedom), there is no essential, singular quality of "child" or "childhood" that distinguishes the everyday intellectualism of children from adults, or even the everyday experiences of children from adults, at least in these memories. Narrative storytelling by adults about their childhood interests, in conjunction with research with children directly exploring those interests, may be a way to begin undefining childhood and uncovering what lies beneath this construct.

References

Cole, Jennifer. 2005. *Memory and Modernity.* Vol. Blackwell Companions to Anthropology 4, in *A Companion to Psychological Anthropology: Modernity and Psychocultural Change*,

edited by Conerly Carole Casey and Robert B. Edgerton, 103-120. Malden, MA ; Oxford: Blackwell Pub.

Gallardo, Marcela, and Maria Gindidis. 2020. "Emotional Landscapes of Living, Learning, and Teaching: A Lens Within, from Learner to Teacher-Researcher." *The Qualitative Report* 25 (2): 291–305. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2020.4039.

Golding, Barry, Mike Brown, and Annette Foley. 2009. "Informal Learning: A Discussion around Defining and Researching Its Breadth and Importance." *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (University of California Press) 49 (1): 34–56.

Graff, Gerald. 2003. *Hidden Intellectualism.* Vol. How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind, in *Clueless in Academe*, by Gerald Graff, 211-231. Yale University Press.

Harris, Catherine, and Gill Valentine. 2017. "Childhood Narratives: Adult Reflections on Encounters with Difference in Everyday Spaces." *Children's Geographies* 15 (5): 505–516. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2016.1269153.

Illich, Ivan. 1971. *Deschooling Society.* New York: Harper & Row.

Lave, Jean. 1982. "A Comparative Approach to Educational Forms and Learning Processes." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 13 (2): 181–187.

—. 1990. "The Culture of Acquisition and the Practice of Understanding." In *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development*, edited by Gilbert Herdt, James W. Stigler and Richard A. Schweder, 309–327. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—. 2019. *Learning and Everyday Life: Access, Participation, and Changing Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Paradise, Ruth. 1998. "What's Different about Learning in Schools as Compared to Family and Community Settings?" Edited by R. Maguire and S. Freeman. *Human Development* 41 (4): 270–278. https://doi.org/10.1159/000022587.

Prout, Alan, and Allison James. 1997. "A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems." In *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, edited by Alan Prout and Allison James, 6–28. London: Routledge.

Saldaña, Johnny. 2014. "Coding and Analysis Strategies." In *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 253–261. Oxford University Press.

Tilhou, Rebecca. 2022. "Undefining Childhood: A Time–Space Ethnography of the Enduring Child." *Qualitative Inquiry* 28 (8-9): 863–873. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221087676.

Tisdall, E., Kay M., and Samantha Punch. 2012. "Not so 'New'? Looking Critically at Childhood Studies." *Children's Geographies* 10 (3): 249–264. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2012.693376.

Urrieta, Luis. 2013. "Familia and Comunidad-Based Saberes: Learning in an Indigenous Heritage Community." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 44 (3): 320–335.

Urrieta, Luis. 2015. *Chapter Seventeen - Learning by Observing and Pitching In and the Connections to Native and Indigenous Knowledge Systems.* Vol. 49, in *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*, edited by Maricela Correa-Chávez, Rebeca Mejía-Arauz and Barbara Rogoff, 357-379. JAI.

Willis, Paul. 1977. *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs.* Aldershot: Gower.

Author Biography

Natalie Gologorsky is a Ph.D. candidate at Rutgers-Camden's Childhood Studies program. She has an M.A. in Sociology from the New School for Social Research, and a B.A. in Sociology from Mills College. She conducted her B.A. thesis on the subject of children's informal learning in museums using both interview and survey methods, and she has worked with all ages of children in play center, school, and tutoring settings since she was in high school. She is a major autodidact herself, exploring her own interests in education and sociology since adolescence when school did not allow for this.

Author contact: Natalie Gologorsky, MA (Rutgers University) nmg143@camden.rutgers.edu

Commentaries

Unraveling the Complexities of Children's Vacation Time: A Window on Social Inequalities in France

Bertrand Réau, PhD (National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts- Princeton University)
bertrand.reau@lecnam.net

Introduction

The school vacation calendar and the use of children's vacation time are surprisingly not included in the public debate and political agenda regarding education in France. However, vacations are not just leisure time; they are also a time for learning, which directly affects children's social and academic success. Despite occasional targeted actions and limited reactions from parliamentarians, this period escapes political scrutiny despite being occupied by diversified and competitive tourism and leisure markets. The shift from the moralizing discourse of the early twentieth century to the dominance of the leisure business highlights the relative irrelevance of public authorities.

Differentiated Social Uses of Time

This indifference to children's vacation time is underlined by the statistical policies pursued on vacations since the 1990s. From 1956 to 1995, INSEE conducted a twice-yearly survey focusing solely on adult vacations. Since then, the question of "vacations" has only been the subject of two additional surveys by the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) in 1999 and 2006. This question is the subject of occasional surveys, not specifically about vacations. This shortcoming in public statistics has been partially compensated for by associations such as the Observatory of Children and Youths Holidays and Leisure (OVLEJ) since 1999. It is as if the challenges of understanding vacation practices and legitimate social representations of the use of this social time were left to the mobilization of associations and firms with divergent interests. Despite being a prominent political and social issue regarding economic and social inequalities, vacation time remains in the shadows: vacation time is often not addressed in politics and policies.

The well-known inequalities in vacation departure rates for adults and children, with departure rates of 55% to 60% per year for adults and one child in ten unable to afford a vacation in 2021 (INSEE 2023), mask more significant disparities between socioeconomic groups. For example, managers and higher intellectual professionals' children go on holiday three times more often than blue-collar workers and six times more often abroad (Cousin & Réau 2016). These disparities increase with social and economic status. To understand the social uses of this specific time, it is not enough to dichotomize vacations (those who go and those who do not). Numerous and diversified vacation formulas characterize the vacations of the children of executives and higher intellectual professions.

In contrast, the children of blue-collar workers are less likely to go on vacation, centered on one departure or no departure at all. The social uses of these times can vary. One example is the intensive use of free time in educating upper-class children through the multiplication, diversity, and strategic implementation of activities (Cousin & Réau 2016; Denord, Palme & Réau 2020). This time, far from being left vacant, is fully invested. It is linked to other social, academic, and extracurricular activities. It, therefore, seems somewhat pointless to artificially separate social times when they respond to, combine, and complement each other. Beyond suspending social

fractures, vacations prolong and no doubt reinforce them. Social relations and forms of social distinction are not suspended for a summer or a week's holiday (Bruno & Salle 2018; Wagner 2007).

Continuity of Social Times

Bernard Lahire (2019) emphasizes social continuity, regardless of the activities considered. Nevertheless, how does social variation in the use of time contribute to the reproduction of inequalities? Vacation leisure practices are commonly associated with "specialized (rather than general), secondary (rather than primary), and ordinary (rather than noble) practices or skills"(Lahire 2019, 40). However, this "secondary nature" of vacation leisure practices says very little about their role in children's socialization. While many pedagogies draw heavily on play to improve the transmission of knowledge (for instance, Pedagogy of Play, Harvard) how can we consider leisure activities as part of the socialization process? What role do these "secondary" activities play in acquiring "knowledge" and "practice" remains unresolved? Indeed, it is not so much the practice of archery or a card game that matters but the social context in which these practices occur and the associated soft skills, such as autonomy, relational skills, or the ability to do things together (e.g., OVLEJ 2016). We need more precise research on this subject.

It is partly because vacation time is associated with leisure practices that it is not seen as an essential element in the reproduction of social inequalities. However, the fungibility of activities and social time in the upper social classes and the totalizing aspect of education (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot 1997) call into question the simplistic idea of a fixed hierarchy of central and secondary skills. Rather than proceeding with such a classification, it seems more relevant to study how practices accumulate and articulate in the transmission of social dispositions, based on the principle that it is indeed the variety of ways in which skills are transmitted, coupled with their repetition, that contributes to the acquisition of specific skills. Skill-building is relational; learning in one setting can help generate "primary" skills and proficiency in another. Furthermore, it is perhaps these specific skills that make the hierarchical differences. For instance, acquiring sporting, cultural, and linguistic skills, know-how and interpersonal skills through travel, or social skills through group vacations are all "specific" skills that reinforce general skills such as self-esteem, leadership, and the ability to communicate with others.

School reproduces social inequalities through a game of adequacy and inadequacy that varies according to social class. Considering leisure activities during and outside the vacations as "secondary" skills obscures the social functions of these socially differentiated practices in the socialization process of children according to their class affiliation. These secondary skills are derived from secondary activities, while not primary in the hierarchical social valorization of skills. They play a part in acquiring primary skills by diversifying and multiplying the modes of transmission they offer to those who can benefit from them. Distinctively and part of the global education of young elites, they play a part in social reproduction and class inequalities (Lareau 2011; Khan 2011; Sherman 2017; Bruno & Salle 2018).

Conclusion: Towards New Research on Children's Free Time

Children's vacations, characterized by their recurrence and the diversity of their socialization channels, are intimately linked to their other social periods. While it can be a privileged time for developing specialized knowledge and know-how, the crucial question remains: Do they

contribute to acquiring "primary" knowledge, which lies at the heart of inequalities and social hierarchies in our society? To answer this question, we must encourage research into children's free time, recognizing the complex relationship between seemingly secondary skills and the broader process of social reproduction and class inequalities.

References

Bruno I. & Salle, G. (2018). "Before long, there will be nothing but billionaires !" The power of elites over space on the Saint-Tropez peninsula. *Socio-Economic Review, 16 (2), 435–458.*

Cousin, S., & Réau, B. (2016). Sociologie du tourisme. Repères. La Découverte.

Denord, F., Palme, M., & Réau, B. (Eds.). (2020). Researching elites and power. Theory, methods, analysis. Springer.

INSEE. (2023). Focus, March, n° 294. https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6964508

Khan S. (2011). Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Lahire, B. (Ed.). (2019). Enfances de classe. De l'inégalité parmi les enfants. Seuil.

Lareau, A. (2011). Unequal Childhoods, 2nd ed, Berkeley, University of California Press.

OVLEJ (2018), De l'intérêt de vivre-ensemble par les accueils collectifs de mineurs : perceptions des parents, Bulletin de l'OVLEJ, 48. https://www.ovlej.fr/wp-content/uploads/Bulletin48_Ovlej_Juin2018.pdf

Pedagogy of Play, Project Zero, https://pz.harvard.edu/projects/pedagogy-of-play

Pinçon, M., & Pinçon-Charlot, M. (1997). Voyage en grande bourgeoisie: journal d'enquête. Presses Universitaires de France.

Réau, B. (2016). "Tourism, educational travel, and transnational capital: From the Grand Tour to the "year abroad" among Sciences Po-Paris students. " In A. Koh Soon Lee & J. Kenway (Eds.), Elite Schools: Multiple Geographies of Privilege Routledge, pp. 188–202.

Sherman, R. (2017). Uneasy Street: Anxieties of Affluence, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Wagner, A.C (2007). La place du voyage dans la formation des élites. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 170, 58-65.

Author Biography

Bertrand Réau is Chair Professor at the National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts, a National Center for Scientific Research (LISE-CESSP) Researcher, and a Visual Artist. Currently a Visiting Researcher at the Sociology Department of Princeton University, he is working on a book on the sociology of Charles Wright Mills with François Denord. His work focuses on the social uses of time, the globalization of science, disciplinary recompositions around studies, the labor market, political issues of tourism in Southeast Asia, the links between Art and Science, and children's social uses of time. Finally, he contributes to public audiences in mainstream newspapers.

"Catching" Teaching and Learning for a New Cultural Normal

Katherine Richardson Bruna, PhD (Iowa State University)
krbruna@iastate.edu

What is "Culture"?

I have a love-hate relationship with the word "culture." As an educational anthropologist, I love how "culture" references people's complex and messy ways of being, believing, and behaving. As a multicultural teacher educator, I hate how "culture" reduces this complexity into tidy units of messaging about how certain people are a certain way. Textbooks used in teacher preparation, for example, carve up human experience into a litany – a recitation or recurring formula, quite literally -- of identity categories. That sense of "culture" *is* important in naming identities as vehicles through which power does its work of privilege and penalty. Understanding that sense of "culture" is part of developing what Villegas & Lucas call the sociocultural consciousness dimension of culturally-responsive teaching. Onto that sense layers the dimensions of affirming diverse identities and acting as agents of change. Together, these dimensions point to identities as part of a historical landscape of power configuration, one for which future educators need to be prepared as they step into teaching and learning spaces. But that sense of "culture," as identity, isn't enough. We also need to prepare educators to be attuned to the other sense of "culture," that of interactive processes, because it is through interactive processes that identities are mobilized for power's purposes. Future educators have a role to play in transforming these processes, but first, they need to be able to see themselves as reproducers, interrupters, or resisters of time-entrenched privileging or penalizing interactive patterns.

Understanding culture as an interactive process is, in fact, the contribution of anthropology to education. Anthropologists of education have traditionally studied cultural processes as part of transmission dynamics – What ways of being, believing, and behaving are passed from one generation to another, how, and to what effect? Transmission was central to George and Louise Spindler's (1990) thinking when they, the forebearers of educational anthropology, described "observing the cultural dialogue" as the primary practice of educational anthropologists. More recently, Ingold (2011), however, has argued that educational anthropology should focus on practices of attention that are central to human becoming and, by extension, freedom. His anthropology as a "science of correspondence" (p. 70) should, he says, explore how entities co-respond to one another and, in doing so, (re)make themselves and the world. Ingold's re-framing has advantages for the uptake of educational anthropology in educator preparation. Most educators in training don't have the luxury of a multi-generational context and perspective in which to analyze transmission aptly. What they usually do have are field experiences in schools or community-based organizations. These provide important opportunities to practice noticing processes of attention, or co-respondence, in the educator-learner relationship. The challenge is helping educators in training expand their sense of culture beyond the bounded identity categories

through which they have been taught, in and out of school, to recognize it and, instead, understand culture as inter-activity.

This sense of culture underlies another dimension of Villegas & Lucas' articulation of culturally-responsive teaching -- constructivist orientations to knowledge, teaching, learning, and schooling. This dimension references the idea that the world, specifically the world of school, is the way it is because human beings have made it so (not some natural or divine order). This is where I have learned my students, future teachers, really struggle. They may grasp, conceptually, that what we understand as right or wrong thinking is arbitrary, along with the institutional policies and practices we organize to transmit that to the next generation, but they have a hard time applying that understanding in the concrete. For this purpose, we need to give them a new norm for culture, a new cultural normal. I set out to create something to aid them in conceiving of culture as interlocking interactive processes of which they could imagine themselves and their future students as having liberatory potential. I ended up with something that is itself interactive – the Grounded Knowing Culture Catcher.

Why "Grounded Knowing"?

I do my educational anthropology work in science. I encountered the phrase "grounded knowing" as a description of the work of an environmental watershed project involving the diverse positionalities and perspectives of scientists, farmers, government officials, and environmentalists (Ashwood, Harden, Bell, & Bland, 2014). They sought not to name the differences between "everyday" and "specialized" science but to situate, link, and, in their words, "ground" the knowing processes defining and animating the experience and evolution of their, in this way, radically collaborative work. It's about more than acquisition and it's about more than mere participation. "Grounded Knowing" extends the acquisition and participation metaphors, as Sfard (1998) has offered them, for teaching and learning. At the heart of this Grounded Knowing principle is the idea that everyone's thinking makes a contribution. The principle of Contribution acknowledges, affirms, and activates a state of inter-connectedness between the people, place, process, purpose, product, and possibility of actors in an educational context. As Stetsenko (2008) has argued, the principle of Contribution takes the Vygotskian emphasis on the sociocultural context of teaching and learning into a transformative and activist position. In this way, it grounds knowing differently.

"Catching" Culture as Contribution

I wanted to translate Grounded Knowing into a pedagogical premise that the future teachers I work with could understand. I wanted to create a heuristic, a conceptual tool, to help them internalize the idea of interactive processes at the heart of the sense of culture I love. But since the idea itself of a heuristic atomizes knowledge – which is part of the old cultural normal that grounded knowing seeks to resist and replace – the challenge was how to present a model of Grounded Knowing that

wasn't atomistic in its representation. This required a format that wasn't flat and static but moved and interacted in a way suggesting dynamism and multiplicity and novelty reflective of the idea of co-respondence. The result was a tool, that, perhaps fittingly, takes an object iconic to school culture, the proverbial "cootie catcher," and re-sources it for reconstructive purposes, as a "culture catcher" (Figure 1, attached).

Here's how I made it:

 I adapted the table Stetskeno created in which she expands Sfard's Acquisition and Participation metaphors to the metaphor of Contribution. In that table, Stetsenko compares the Acquisition, Participation, and Contribution metaphors across key ideas such as the following, What We Understand Learning To Be, Where We Understand Learning To Take Place, What We Understand The Learner To Do, What We Understand The Educator To Do, What We Understand The Curriculum To Do, How We Understand Instruction To Occur, How We Understand The Role Of Family and Community, and What We Take as Evidence Of Learning. For example, in terms of what we understand learning to be, the Acquisition metaphor of development and learning invests in learning as information processing "in the head." The Participation metaphor invests in learning as being part of communities of practice. The Contribution metaphor of learning invests in learning as transformative collaboration. I then added to this table four additional columns representing central themes I have distilled down over my teacher education experience. I use theme-driven questions to encourage my students to think through their educational practice, generally, and shift them toward learning as Contribution, more specifically:

Intention: What the educator plans to do with students -- the goal to which they set the collective, collaborative, contributive learning purpose.

Interaction: How the educator enables interaction as and for intentional learning as a contribution.

Responsiveness: How the educator's intention and interaction for learning reflects youth and community interests, concerns, questions, and needs for change; how the students relate to the learning purpose and understand their role as contribution; and

Receptiveness: How the educator understands and encourages student learning as adapting to, altering, and advancing the learning purpose; the extent to which the learning purpose is limited by or expands upon its original intention through student contribution and is both transformed and transformational.

I associated each of these four themes with key ideas from the adapted metaphors table. Returning to the previous example, I associated What We Understand Learning To Be, What We Understand The Curriculum To Do, and How We Understand Instruction To Occur, with

the theme of Intention because these ideas guide the planning process, which manifests the educator's intentions. These kinds of associations shaped the arrangement reflected in the Grounded Knowing Culture Catcher.

The Grounded Knowing Heuristic

The Grounded Knowing Culture Catcher heuristic tool facilitates conversation about the principles and practices of grounded knowing or learning as Contribution (contribution is what the C in the center stands for). It assists them in having that conversation in a way that is not fixed, like table, but more flexible. Once folded, future educators can enter the tool through each of the four Intention, Interaction, Responsiveness, and Reception corners. Each corner reveals further extending options the developing educator can pursue in thinking about the principles and goals for practices associated with that theme and idea. For example, if you enter through or "tap" (as we used to do when using the "cootie catcher" on the playground) the Intention corner, you will find under that flap Definition of Learning and Curriculum & Approach to Instruction. If you lift those flaps, you will find Transformative Collaboration (as the definition of learning) and Emergent Human Development (as a curricular and instructional goal). Importantly, in using the tool, the corners touch each other in different ways. When wearing the tool, move your fingers one way and Intention and Reception are linked. At the next level of this linkage, Curriculum & Approach to Instruction and Demonstration of Learning are linked, and at the next level, the linkage is between Emergent Human Development and Transformative Transfer of Knowledge. This creates an opportunity for future teachers to have a conversation about in what ways they think about human development when they are making curricular and instructional decisions and to what extent they center this in their Intentions. Move your fingers another way, and Reception and Responsiveness are linked, creating conversation opportunities around Demonstration of Learning (what they conceive of as evidence, associated at the next level with Transformative Transfer of Knowledge) and Role of Community (understood, at the next level, as an Integral Resource).

In this way, the Grounded Knowing Culture Catcher is a physical suggestion of interactive processes at the heart of education that assists future educators in taking up a sense of culture that goes beyond identity. It can be used to prompt connections between broader concepts and the concrete practices and policies they've experienced in their own schooling or professionalization experiences that they may otherwise be taking for granted (for example, learning-as-Acquisition-driven scripted curriculum) as just the "way it is." Most importantly, they can use the tool to plan around learning-as-Contribution, to observe for Contribution, to ground Grounded Knowing as part of their teaching philosophy. Gaining a new sense of culture as co-respondence, teachers find the freedom in their roles as they recognize it in and rally around it for their students'.

As you move into the articles of this special issue on Building Blocks of Knowledge: Investigating Education, Learning, and Knowing in Children and Youth, I invite you to consider how the authors

and the young people with whom they work in school spaces and beyond, collectively construe the Intention, Interaction, Reception, and Responsiveness of their efforts. How are those efforts guided by a sense of culture in, as, and for learning not bound to static identity but fueled by catalytic Contribution? I hope that, whether educational anthropologist or not, or lover or hater of "culture" or not, for scholars of education like you, the Grounded Knowing Heuristic invites a new cultural normal, one of paying attention to, of noticing and naming, the co-respondence of children, youth and adults, in the myriads of mutually emergent processes of becoming human, together.
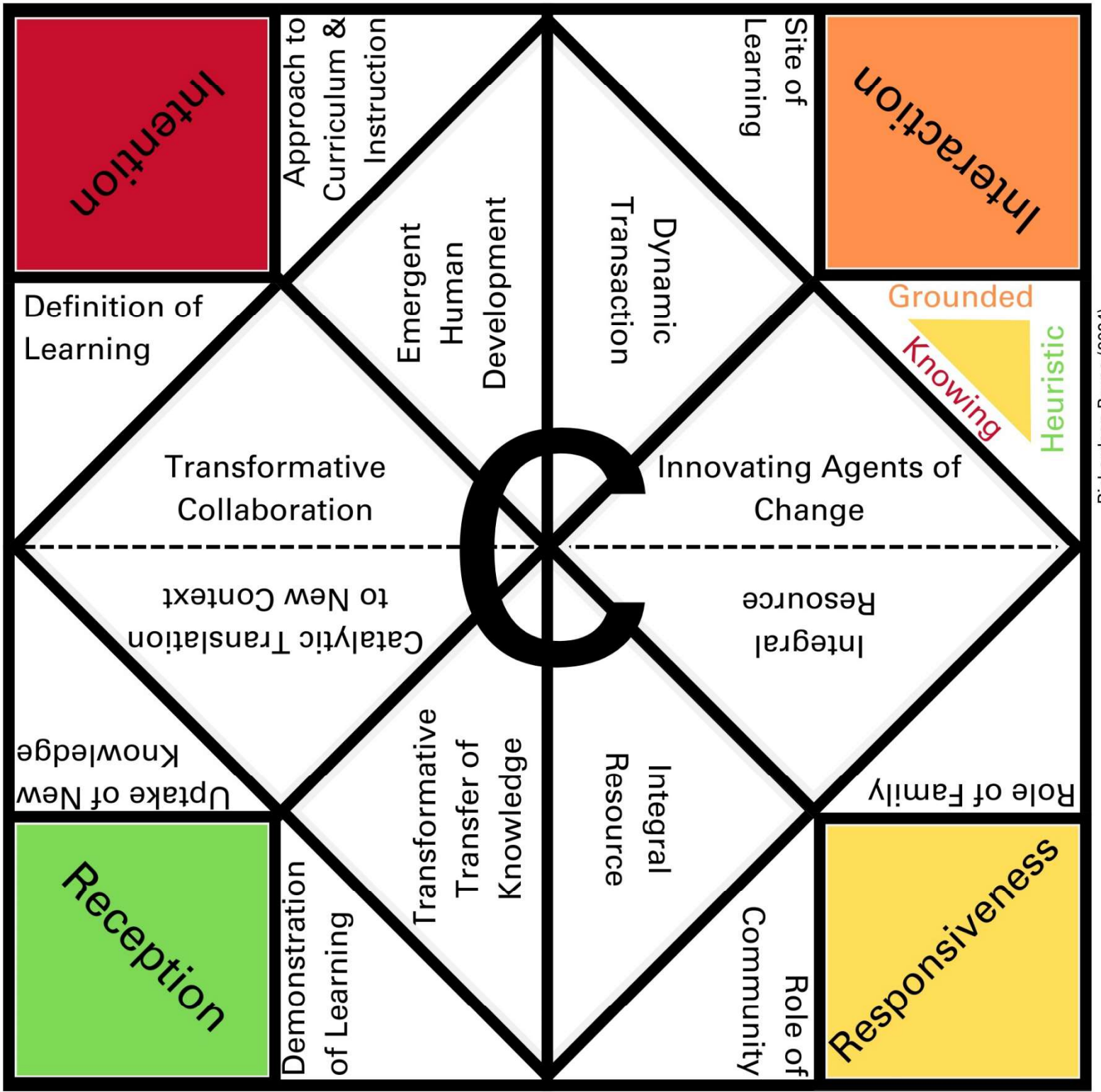
References

Ashwood, L., Harden, N., Bell, M. M., & Bland, W. (2014). Linked and situated: Grounded knowledge. *Rural Sociology, 79*(4), 427-452.

Ingold, T. (2011). Being alive: *Essays on movement, knowledge, and description.* New York: Routledge.

Sfard, A. (1998). On two metaphors for learning and the dangers of choosing just one. *Educational Researcher*, 27(2), 4-13.

Spindler, G., Spindler, L., Trueba, H., & Williams, M.D. (1990). *The American Cultural Dialogue and its Transmission.* New York: Routledge.

Stetsenko, A. (2008) From relational ontology to transformative activist stance on development and learning: Expanding Vygotsky's CHAT project. *Cultural Studies of Science Education 3, pp. 471-491.*

Villegas, A.M. & Lucas, T. (2002). *Educating culturally responsive teachers: A coherent approach.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Cite this article: Bruna, Katherine Richardson. 2024. "'Catching' Teaching and Learning for a New Cultural Normal." *NEOS* (16) 1.

Link this article: https://acyig.americananthro.org/neosvol16iss1spring24/bruna/

Figure 1

Intention

Approach to Curriculum & Instruction

Definition of Learning

Emergent Human Development

Site of Learning

Dynamic Transaction

Interaction

Grounded

Knowing

Heuristic

Transformative Collaboration

Innovating Agents of Change

Catalytic Translation to New Context

Integral Resource

Uptake of New Knowledge

Transformative Transfer of Knowledge

Integral Resource

Role of Family

Reception

Demonstration of Learning

Role of Community

Responsiveness

Richardson Bruna (2024)

Constellations

Book Review: Children of the Rainforest: Shaping the Future in Amazonia by Camilla Morelli

Julie Spray, PhD (University of Galway)
julie.spray@universityofgalway.ie

"I could vividly imagine myself as one of the Matses children as the book was so relatable," wrote undergraduate student Rebecca Sherlock after reading the ACYIG Inaugural Book Prize winner Camilla Morelli's *Children of the Rainforest.* For Rebecca, herself a member of a minority ethnic group in Ireland, Morelli's book helped her see and conceptualize her own experiences of unspoken cultural change—and the role her own child might play in such transitions.

I made Morelli's ethnography the centerpiece of my newly developed *Global Childhoods* course before I was even halfway through my first read. For these second-year undergraduate Children's Studies students, Morelli's book was their first taste both of reading ethnography and of a truly holistic view of how childhoods are produced, reproduced, and change in local contexts. A challenge of teaching the only anthropology course in an interdisciplinary Children's Studies program is guiding students to identify, dismantle, and reconstruct their ethnocentric, Eurocentric, or positivist views of childhood–views that are often actively reinforced in their contemporaneous courses from other disciplines, let alone their own society—all within just ten classes. For this reason, I was delighted to outsource some of the work of unsettling worldviews to Morelli's ethnography. Students were required to read a chapter most weeks, and by loosely following the book's themes with the teaching curriculum, we could connect elements from the ethnography—from children's play and work to the cash economy and globalization—to the anthropological concepts (e.g., culture; cultural relativism; holism; structure) introduced in class. In our final class, students acquired their "participation mark" by completing a short activity: to write a two-sentence "mini-review" of Morelli's ethnography. With their permission, I incorporate some of their reviews, like Rebecca's above, to support my strong recommendation of this text for use with students, along with my endorsement as a valuable contribution to the anthropology of childhood.

Morelli's remarkable ethnography traces how Indigenous Matses children are actively driving cultural change in their communities in a globalizing world, addressing old questions about children's agentive roles in generational cultural shifts, and suggesting provocative new questions about what anthropology may have been overlooking about the cultural and global significance of children's imaginings, affective attachments, and aspirations. Students emphasized the book's structure as a key ingredient to conveying a sense of how cultures change. As Kamile Briedyte describes, "The way Morelli begins the book discussing the previous generations' lives among the rainforest, working her way towards today's generation, portrays the differences fantastically. This layout does a great job of showing just exactly how the Matses people became who they are now." Student Tia Gallagher agreed, "This ethnography is beautifully written to show the continuous shifts in culture within the Matses community. Morelli brings us along in her journey with the Matses children, giving us the opportunity to have an insight into the lives of this evolving community."

These evolving cultural practices were brought to life through detailed depictions of children's lives, activities, imaginings, and desires. These details present a rich ethnographic picture of a lifeworld radically different from students' own childhoods. Emma Jordan summarised the vividness that had stuck with her, "I found their change in how [the Matses] hunt over the years from the forest to the water fascinating. The next generation are more driven toward making money and aiming to live a lavish lifestyle amongst the *chotac* [non-indigenous], all while their elders force poison on them." The immersive experience of following Morelli's child informants seemed to more effectively destabilize students' assumptions about who children are and should be than any evidence I could present from the lectern. As Sinéad Lawless described her experience, "Not only did reading this book provide a deeper perspective on how life varies so much in different cultures, but also shed light on my culture, how we live, and how strange or obscure some things that are considered normal or day to day really are. I think what made the book so compelling is it is about real life and real experiences."

Morelli's book is visually enriched with children's drawings and photographs, making this an engaging and accessible text for a wide readership. Student Hazel Shevlin noted, "I enjoyed the pictures throughout this book, giving me a clearer image of what's being described. Especially the image of the boys holding up a fish, and now only for the picture, I never would have been able to imagine a child that age to be capable of that skill." Morelli's clear and compelling storytelling makes it appear that ethnographic research with children in a remote forest setting is easy. It is not. To so effectively trace the processes of cultural change from local to global levels *from children's perspectives* takes an ethnographer of impressive skill and demands tremendous emotional and physical labor.

Students suggested they would recommend this book to parents (Sinéad Lawless suggested, "I think it would greatly impact new parents' views and that it's important to let children have independence even if the outside world is scary."), anyone working with children, and "18-20-year-olds." I would also suggest anthropologists or social scientists—particularly those without a strong background in the anthropology of childhood—will derive value from this fresh perspective on the classic question of how cultures change. In a globalizing world where Western systems are rapidly colonizing Indigenous cultures and epistemologies—including with Western assumptions about children as passive reproducers of adult culture—children and childhoods must be liberated from their silos as niche areas of study and re-visibilized as central players in global culture change.

Cite this article: Spray, Julie. 2024. "*Children of the Rainforest: Shaping the Future in Amazonia* by Camilla Morelli." *NEOS* 16 (1).

Link this article: https://acyig.americananthro.org/neosvol16iss1spring24/spray/

Book Review: Praise for *An Ordinary Future*: Rethinking Inclusivity through Emotionally Honest Scholarship that Interrogates Anthropological Paradigms of Disability

Jennifer Lee O'Donnell, PhD (Texas State University)
jlo98@txstate.edu

Manya Kagan, PhD (University of Pennsylvania)
manyakagan@gmail.com

This year, the Anthropology of Children and Youth Interest Group (ACYIG) inaugurated an annual tradition of recognizing outstanding contributions to the anthropology of childhood and youth through a book award. Among many excellent contenders, one publication was honored with this distinction. However, this review focuses on a different submission that profoundly resonated with us, not only as scholars and anthropologists but also as educators and parents. Despite the challenges of fitting the book into our award criteria, we found its impact undeniable and felt compelled to highlight its significance. We strongly recommend *An Ordinary Future: Margaret Mead, the Problem of Disability, and a Child Born Different* by Thomas W. Pearson to a wide audience, including anthropologists, educators, and parents, for its compelling insights and narrative.

An Ordinary Future masterfully combines scholarly research with the emotional depth of a memoir, presenting a nuanced discussion on disability rights from both personal and academic perspectives. Central to the book is Pearson's experience raising Michaela, his daughter with Down syndrome, which he uses to explore broader societal attitudes and treatments of disability. The narrative draws upon historical figures such as Margaret Mead to argue that disability is a construct that requires a reevaluation of our approaches to inclusion and rights.

Pearson introduces the book with a preface that sets an intimate tone, sharing the joys and challenges of family life and framing the subsequent exploration of disability through personal and societal lenses. Early chapters delve into the emotional journey following a diagnosis of Down syndrome, offering insights into societal discomfort and the need for acceptance and understanding. The narrative critiques historical and cultural perceptions of normality and disability, drawing on the works of notable scholars to underscore the urgency of rethinking these concepts.

As the book progresses, Pearson addresses the problematic history of eugenics and its contemporary implications, advocating for a recognition of human differences rather than a pursuit of conformity. The discussion extends to educational inclusion and the dilemmas posed by advances in prenatal testing, highlighting the complexities of parenting and societal values in the context of disability. Pearson's personal decisions and advocacy underscore the narrative's call for a shift in societal attitudes toward embracing diversity and challenging stigma.

The epilogue reflects on how Pearson's experiences have influenced his professional and personal life, advocating for integrating disability studies into broader societal discussions. *An Ordinary Future* is notable for its honest recounting of the author's journey and insightful analysis of disability's historical and societal dynamics. Pearson's blend of personal anecdotes and scholarly reflection invites readers to reconsider their perceptions of disability and champion a more inclusive society.

Pearson's work on disability rights, which skillfully interweaves personal narratives with academic analysis, has significantly reshaped our perceptions of scholarly writing. This book demonstrates how integrating personal experiences with scholarly rigor can enrich our understanding of disability and inclusivity, challenging us to reconsider the role personal stories play in academic research. The depth of emotional and academic insight presented transcends the usual criteria for academic awards, compelling us to recognize its broader relevance to academic discourse and its potential impact on fostering inclusivity and rights within both educational settings and broader society. *An Ordinary Future* emerges as an essential read for a diverse readership, illuminating the path toward a more inclusive world and advocating for transformative change. We commend Pearson for his vulnerability and insightfulness, and we highly recommend this book to anyone looking to deepen their comprehension of disability, humanity, and the combined power of empathy and scholarly inquiry.

Cite this article: O'Donnell, Jennifer Lee and Manya Kagan. 2024. "Praise for *An Ordinary Future*: Rethinking Inclusivity through Emotionally Honest Scholarship that Interrogates Anthropological Paradigms of Disability." *NEOS* 16 (1).

Link this article: https://acyig.americananthro.org/odonnell-kagan/

Learn From Children, Always: In Memory of Valentina Glockner Fagetti

Gabrielle Oliveira, PhD (Harvard University)
Gabrielle_oliveira@gse.harvard.edu

What happens when we center children's perspectives, actions, words, play, and experiences in research? That was the question my dear friend and Mexican Anthropologist Valentina Glockner Fagetti asked me back in 2010 when we first met in New York City. I had just attended a conference where Valentina had passionately presented her work on *niños jornaleros* (child laborers). My first reaction to watching her present was to think that a public anthropology of childhood is possible. You can, in fact, have deep compassion and empathy while conducting the most heartbreaking work. Anthropologist Ruth Behar (1996) explained that feeling in her acclaimed book, *The Vulnerable Observer*. Valentina ran with it. She deconstructed the very idea of a separation in knowledges between adults and children, and saw herself not as a researcher, but as a learner and an advocate. She was relentless.

Valentina embodied the genre of rigorous public scholarship. From her earliest writings on migration and childhood, she covered topics like indigenous migration, forced displacement, children's labor, and the children and families' movement across borders. Her contributions were endless. At the very beginning of her career, her undergraduate thesis on the experiences of migrant and working Mixtec children won two of the most prestigious national awards in anthropology in Mexico and was published as a book in 2008: *De la Montaña a la Frontera: Identidad, Representaciones Sociales y Migración de los Niños Mixtecos de Guerrero*. I return often to this book. The stories of Maribel, Epifanio, and Griselda—who I came to know so intimately—have been the foundation for much of my own understanding of migration across the Americas.

Valentina wrote in the book's opening statement, "For the first time in my experience as an anthropologist and as a human being, I had allowed myself to enter the home and heart of a family to which I did not belong. With them I came to create bonds so close that on many occasions they made me question - not without certain fear - if the work I had been doing could be considered anthropological or not" (2008, 14). She continued by asking herself more complex questions: "How do I report this data? How do I write about it?" Her strategy was to ask the children how they wanted their stories to be told.

As she sought to stay true to children as the experts of their life experiences, Valentina proved over and over her boundless ability to connect across cultures and countries. In a chapter of the book *Childhood and Youth in India,* edited by Anandini Dar and Divya Kannan, she brought together the experiences of Rajni and Reina—two girls, one in India and the other in Mexico—to show children's work in a globalized neoliberal world. She wrote:

> Both Rajni and Reina travel several kilometers daily. Countless times, they bend
> over, pick up what their small skilled little hands find, and put it in a sack that hangs
> at their waist. Their expert eyes search for what they recognize as valuable. For

them, collecting vegetables or recyclable waste is not a choice, but a matter of survival. Despite living in two very different countries and regions of the so-called 'Global South', their work similarly takes place at the extreme ends of two multi-billion-dollar value chains that are essential to the global economy: the fresh food production industry and the recyclable waste industry (2023, 162).

Valentina had the distinct ability to connect the children's everyday experiences with the macro social structures of our world. She was fearless in her capacity to advance arguments that exposed the role of neoliberal policies in children's vulnerabilities and survival. It was as though she had more space inside of her to take in stories than any other human being I have ever met. How can someone hold so many stories of beauty and suffering inside their body? Valentina could. In another sharp piece of so many beautiful articles, *Children Crossing Borders,* edited by Alejandra J. Josiowicz and Irasema Coronado, she wrote about a concept I have used in my own work when speaking about migrant children's experiences at the U.S-Mexico border, what she called "embodied experiences of the border."

> I state that the border as a regime and the experience of border crossing produce new individual and collective agencies, life trajectories, and meanings deeply felt and ingrained within the bodies, identities, and subjectivities of young crossers. Hence, posing the border as method, and as an "anthropological tool," allows us to interrogate the ways in which the border and border crossing are crucial sites for the production of individual and collective experiences and knowledge (2023, 129).

Honoring the idea of a collective, Valentina brought together a group of women scholars from across Latin America in a team called *Colectiva Infancias*. Her vision was to make our scholarship public, useful, and meaningful. With the support of the National Geographic Foundation, our team built a mosaic of stories that intersected with one another and showed the power of collective action. Often, I find myself re-reading her words and finding new meanings in her writing. Her descriptions were thick with details, her photos were portraits of childhood, and her analysis was always sharp and profound. Valentina was a teacher, mentor, and friend to so many.

Personally, I feel indebted to Valentina. She is the reason I was able to do fieldwork for the very first time in Mexico back in 2010. Her parents, Julio Glockner and Antonella Fagetti, took me in and taught me what it meant to do engaged anthropology. I often return to the last messages we exchanged over WhatsApp—voice memos and ideas that now exist in a suspended time. Whenever I complained about the work I chose to do as a researcher and how much it broke my heart, she used to say, "Our biggest rebellion is to try to be happy in this messed up world." Trying to be happy was an act of resistance, a way to honor the children and youth who so lovingly shared their lives with her. Vale passed away suddenly in December of 2023. She left us too soon, but she left a legacy equal to a hundred lives lived. I can't think of an anthropologist of childhood who has left a bigger mark on my work than Valentina did. But above all, she was a mother, a partner, a daughter, and the most amazing friend anyone could ever ask for. *Te extraño!*

Cite this article: Oliveira, Gabrielle. 2024. "Learn From Children, Always: In Memory of Valentina Glockner Fagetti." *NEOS* 16 (1).

Link this article: https://acyig.americananthro.org/neosvol16iss1spring24/oliveira/

About NEOS

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.

About Anthropology of Children and Youth Interest Group (ACYIG)

Launched in 2007 as an Interest Group within the American Anthropological Association, the Anthropology of Children and Youth Interest Group (ACYIG) now boasts more than 1200 members in over ten countries. Members include academics and practitioners who publish on and work with, children all over the world. The need for an anthropological interest groupconcerned with children and childhood continues to center on the fact that, despite growing interest in the area of cross-cultural research on childhood, children's experiences, and children's rights, there are very few established places to discuss and publicize such work, especially outside the realm of education and health disciplines.

NEOS Editorial Board

community engaged research methods. For her GRI master's program, Alana conducted community engaged participatory research with a grassroots collective of local educators, parents, and community members working to open an independent charter high school. As part of her doctoral research, she is currently investigating the intersection of policy and gender/sexual development at a middle school.

Anne-Marie Bedard, MA, *Assistant Editor*
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.

Sean Heath, PhD, *Assistant Editor*
Sean is a Social Anthropologist specializing in water, the senses, wellbeing, and the politics of bodily movement. He received his PhD in 2022 from the University of Brighton where he conducted research with age-group competitive swimmers in the UK, which examined the sensory aspects of immersion in water and the sociality of club swimming and how these affect youths' wellbeing. Currently, he holds a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Postdoctoral Fellowship at KU Leuven studying water stewardship and the environmental politics of wellbeing in the entangled relationships between arctic waters, the senses, and place. Between cold-water dips and outdoor swims, he has also examined the emplaced entanglements between the material, social, and emotional experiences of outdoor swimming in "natural" environments in Canada, the UK, and Norway. His work has been published in the leading journals *The Senses and Society*, *Body and Society, HUMOR,* and the edited volume *High Performance Youth Swimming*."

Alexea Howard, MA, *Assistant Editor*
Alexea Howard, M.A., is an independent researcher and scholar whose degrees are in Anthropology (BA Honors from the University of California, Los Angeles and multi-award winning graduate scholar from California State University, Long Beach) with further education in Psychology and Addiction Studies. Alexea specializes in medical and psychological anthropology and her approach to research is interdisciplinary and mixed-methods in nature, blending frameworks and methods from medical and psychological anthropology, psychology, and public health. Her current research interests include perceptions and understandings of health and illness, maternal health and mental health. Alexea teaches as an adjunct professor in Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology's Psychology Division. She also develops and teaches independent studies courses and research projects for community college students in California and internationally. In addition to teaching and her work with NEOS, Alexea serves her local community as a task force member and coordinator for an NGO focused on increasing literacy rates and enthusiasm for reading in elementary students at underserved schools in Los Angeles. She also provides support and consultation on research,

evaluation, curriculum building, and strategic initiatives for NGOs, institutions of higher-education, individuals, and budding programs.

Jennifer Shaw, PhD, *Assistant Editor*
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.

Kiana Vu (she/her), *Copyeditor*
Kiana Vu is a PhD student at SUNY Albany.