

# METHOD GUIDE 10

## Global research on children's online experiences: Addressing diversities and inequalities

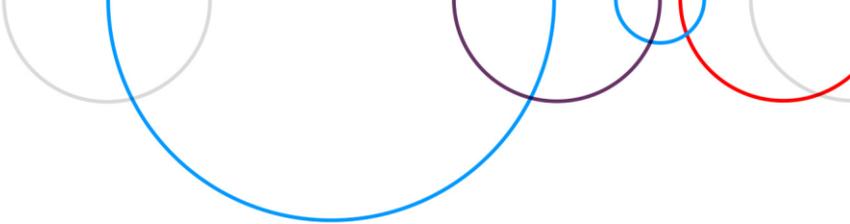
Shakuntala Banaji  
London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

November 2016

**GLOBAL  
KIDS  
ONLINE**

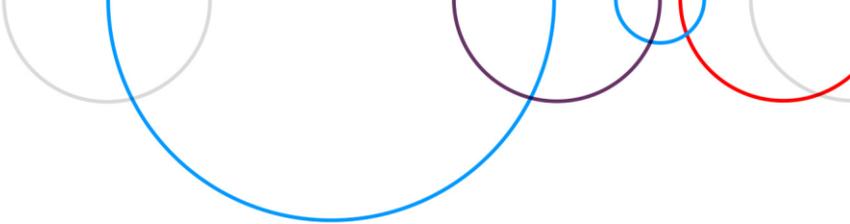


[www.globalkidsonline.net](http://www.globalkidsonline.net)



## Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Global Kids Online</b> .....  | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Abstract</b> .....  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Key issues</b> .....  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Main approaches</b> .....   | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Identifying good practice</b> .....                                 | <b>14</b> |
| <b>Useful online resources</b> .....                                   | <b>18</b> |
| <b>References</b> .....  | <b>19</b> |
| <b>Checklist 1</b> .....   | <b>22</b> |
| Do's and don'ts for researchers, practitioners and local partners..... | 22        |
| <b>Checklist 2</b> .....   | <b>25</b> |
| Key definitions .....  | 25        |



# GLOBAL KIDS ONLINE

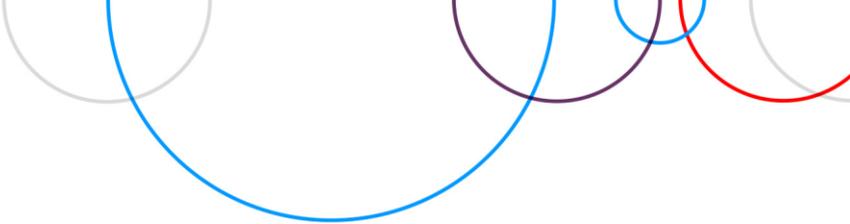
Global Kids Online is an international research project that aims to contribute to gathering rigorous cross-national evidence on children's online risks, opportunities and rights by creating a global network of researchers and experts and by developing a toolkit as a flexible new resource for researchers around the world.

The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of children's digital experiences that is attuned to their individual and contextual diversities and sensitive to cross-national differences, similarities, and specificities. The project was funded by UNICEF and WePROTECT Global Alliance and jointly coordinated by researchers at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, and the EU Kids Online network.

## **The preferred citation for this report is:**

Banaji, S. (2016) *Global research on children's online experiences: Addressing diversities and inequalities*. London: Global Kids Online. Available from: [www.globalkidsonline.net/inequalities](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/inequalities)

You can find out more about the author of the report here: [www.globalkidsonline.net/banaji](http://www.globalkidsonline.net/banaji)



# ABSTRACT

This Method Guide examines the connections between knowledge production, power, inequality and exclusion in the production of international research about children and new or emerging media. Drawing on feminist and postcolonial debates about knowledge, it points to the existing inequalities between research and theory from the global North and the global South. How are issues of power and privilege embedded in a research process that claims universality? How is the focus on children's internet use globally already underpinned by particular biases and exclusions?

The Guide points to evidence that persistent social inequalities and vulnerabilities are transposed to mediated environments, and discusses the challenges of thinking about 'children online' when children are never an homogeneous group. Finally, it considers the best ways of ensuring that knowledge produced about the media use of children from discriminated and excluded groups across the world represents them fairly, and is useful to children in those groups.

## KEY ISSUES

Comparative research on issues related to children and childhood yields potentially significant rewards. Improvements in criminal justice frameworks relating to children, in definitions of children's rights under the law, and in relation to health and social provision, are rarely achieved without empirical evidence and careful analysis of circumstances and processes in international contexts.

Discussions of how children interpret, negotiate and relate to old and new media, and use media tools and technologies in their everyday lives (boyd, 2014; Buckingham, 2007; Livingstone, 2009, 2014; Selwyn, 2009), have been helpful to some parents and educators. In Europe and North America, such studies have challenged myths that all children are equally comfortable with online social networking; they have shown that learning and media literacy are complex processes that occur despite, not because of, technology. They have demonstrated that different children viewing the same complex media content or faced with similar media tools can respond in a tremendous variety of ways, from disengagement or boredom to participation and creativity. They have inspired similar studies in different locations. Nevertheless, as Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) point out, despite much interesting and nuanced discussion, problematic assumptions about children, empowerment, learning and digital media continue to circulate. Cummings and O'Neil (2015) suggest that these assumptions are sometimes linked to other troubling presuppositions about the homogeneity of cultures, politics, technologies and histories in locations outside the global North.

**“Common misleading assumptions include the notion that all children in the global North are well fed and have access to technologies; that there is an ‘average’ 12-year-old; that we live in a ‘global village’ because the internet now connects everyone; and that children and youth are ‘digital natives’.”**

Conceptualisations of social actors (children, families, communities, practitioners) and their locations (geographical, historical, cultural) may be rich and deep in international contexts where there has been prior research on a variety of aspects. These conceptualisations, when applied in other contexts (where research on political, cultural and contextual factors is less nuanced or less cited) can sometimes lead to stereotyping or increased invisibility for certain groups of children. In the US, Attewell and Winston (2003) and Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) point out that specific definitions of ‘problems’ around children and online content, or children and learning, or funding and ‘solutions’, sometimes ignore evidence that complicates or contradicts central assumptions about black and Hispanic communities. Indeed, central assumptions are often built around concepts that are extremely questionable, as Ginzburg argues:

*“... concepts such as The Digital Age have taken on a sense of evolutionary inevitability, thus creating an increasing stratification and ethnocentrism in the distribution of certain kinds of media practices, despite prior and recent trends to de-Westernize media studies... Work in new (and old) media that is being produced in indigenous communities might expand and complicate our ideas about “the Digital Age” in ways that take into account other points of view in the so-called global village.” (2008: 127).*

Other common misleading assumptions include the notion that all children in the global North are well fed and have access to technologies; that there is an ‘average’ 12-year-old; that we live in a ‘global village’ because the internet now connects everyone; and that children and youth are ‘digital natives’. All of these assumptions are specific to socioeconomic class and geography, but they have played a major role in shaping the ways in which social change, risk and harm for children are conceptualised in international media projects. And yet, from the perspective of hundreds of millions of rural and/or working-class children in the global South, and from the perspective of destitute, looked-after, homeless and incarcerated children in the global North, these assumptions bear little relation to their everyday experience

(Balagopalan, 2014; Katz, 2004; Nieuwenhuys, 1994; Wells, 2014).

Literature reviews (Twigg et al., 2014; UNDP, 2013) reveal that 12-year-olds in Brazil might indeed be urban, white and middle class and spend time online playing games, chatting on social media, researching for school projects – and they might spend less time outside the home and school than previous generations. Or they might be urban, black, and poor, or lower middle class, and live in a cramped apartment where there is a lack of money for schooling let alone for new technologies. They might spend almost all their time on the streets; they may come from communities such as the ones engaged in the landless workers movement (see [www.mstbrazil.org/](http://www.mstbrazil.org/)), and have little or no access to steady media of any kind, let alone to the internet, and spend much of their time moving around in the countryside, outdoors. Twelve-year-olds in China might be the favoured ‘only’ children of professional couples with high ambitions and wide pursuits, or they may belong to rural-to-urban migrant communities without access to libraries, housing and schooling allotted to urban children (Wong et al., 2007).

**“Sadly, research questions transferred (e.g., from the global North to the global South, or from wealthy neighbourhoods to impoverished ones) without attention to local and international inequalities can generate contaminated knowledge.”**

Twelve-year-olds in India or Pakistan might be upper caste, middle class and urban, in strict disciplinarian schools for much of the day and in extra tuition during the evening, with family access to the internet, mobile phones and television. Or they might be urban working-class girls who labour as maids and cleaners, or boys who work as mechanics and tea boys, spending their lives servicing the needs of wealthy adults; or they might be rural and impoverished, from minority religious or Dalit communities, living in fear of social violence from higher castes, from majority religious communities, moving from place to place, landless, homeless, in school seasonally and erratically, if at all, despised by their teachers, and

never having used an internet-connected mobile (Banaji, 2015; Dyson, 2014; Khan, 2007).

Sadly, research questions transferred (e.g., from the global North to the global South, or from wealthy neighbourhoods to impoverished ones) without attention to local and international inequalities can generate contaminated knowledge. This is knowledge that sustains inequality by reproducing mistaken assumptions that are harmful to some groups of people. In every periphery of the West there are also multiple other peripheries: excellent research pays attention to these deep contextual variations in children’s lives.

### Case study: South Africa

In Nxaruni, a rural area in the Eastern Cape province, our enumerators noted that some questions in the survey did not fit the context very well. Because the demographic is low income, some questions are not applicable. However, beyond simply being ‘not applicable’, the enumerators point out that even asking children some of the questions included in the Global Kids Online (GKO) survey reflects poorly on them as interviewers. They emphasise that, “when we ask children here, in very poor communities, if they often play games on X-box ... it makes us look stupid.” Such questions can make the children uncomfortable because they might think the interviewer is strange for asking about things they should know does not exist here. Our enumerators emphasise how they need to always be aware of the local context and be mindful and flexible when asking such questions – questions that they know are not suitable for the context – and ask it in a way that makes it seem less of a stupid question, or in a way that conveys to the child that the interviewer knows that the question is inappropriate.

## Epistemology and reflexivity

Contaminated and colonial knowledge framed as 'development' (Ferguson, 1994) can increase the risks of exclusion for millions of already 'peripheral' communities. The framing of contaminated and colonial knowledge as development in the context of children and the online sphere can mean the unthinking translation of a global North agenda for children in the global South; it has created the assumption that information and communication technologies (ICT) will benefit all children equally. It causes actual material harm to significant numbers of children in working-class, indigenous and/or rural populations across the global South; it does the same in the global North through the re-direction of financial resources from one 'priority' area to another. This can happen despite the 'best intentions' of the charitable and institutional funders, or the experienced academics, researchers and individuals involved in framing projects, and of the committed practitioners in the field. The rest of this section explains some of the forms and consequences of contaminated knowledge about children across the world, discusses why the data being produced, gathered or analysed in relation to 'the digital' might be flawed, and suggests how critical practitioners and researchers might plan and carry out more critical and reflexive studies.

Being critical and reflexive about research with children and about digital technologies requires clear thinking: there are tricky ethical and political issues to consider, and the scope of technology research is also changing rapidly. Even the naming of a research project (or the resulting publication) is a significant action. Naming is a form of representation, as many scholars, including Said (1978), Mohanty (1991) and Mamdani (2007), have pointed out, and is a powerful tool for directing thought and future action. The naming of research projects about children can direct thinking from the outset and can shape or affect the outcomes. The wording of the title can make an implicit claim to comparability and universality that needs to be interrogated in light of work by scholars such as Mignolo (2009, see below). Words such as 'Latin American children' or 'global' or 'teens' or 'digital age', when they appear in titles, carry expectations that will affect how the research is interpreted, used, circulated and valued. It might be better to opt for a more modest or local title that more accurately describes the sample and field. However, this choice might also have

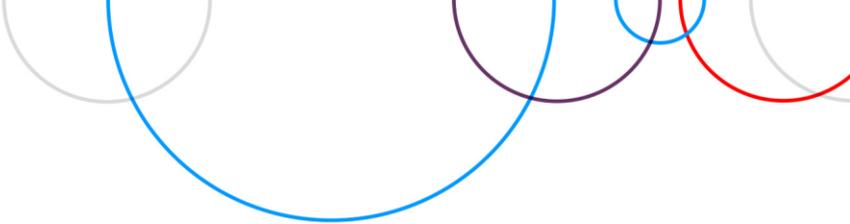
consequences for the reach and influence of the research, so this is always a difficult decision.

Framing and defining the problems for investigation in internationally comparative research is another contentious area that should be approached reflexively. There are two ways of addressing this: first, by ensuring diverse children's right to participate at every stage of designing the research. Research that wishes (and/or claims) to provide an internationally comparative view of children and childhood should be (and sometimes is) based on the views and opinions of children from diverse backgrounds (Beazley et al., 2009; Ennew, 2003). However, more frequently (and often for complex reasons of logistics and time), adults set research agendas with little or no input from children. Of course, consulting children does not guarantee unproblematic research questions or outcomes. Sometimes, the children consulted in the framing of the research or the formulation and operation of research methods have been cherry-picked from certain neighbourhoods or institutions, and even if they are self-selecting and respond to an open call, they are often motivated and significantly literate; this can mean that they act, in the words of some researchers, as 'mini-adults'.

Children also reflect the social class and race that they inhabit, and may set agendas or ask questions that are not relevant for all children. Nevertheless, projects that make an effort to include diverse groups of children at every stage, and in ways that pay attention to their relative lack of power, can avoid many problematic normative assumptions. A second crucial way is, of course, by ensuring that nominally representative samples are truly reflective of child populations, and this might entail some judicious weighting in some cases. One might, for instance, have to do additional street corner sampling in areas with large street-living populations who are not covered by postcode-based surveys.

**“Children reflect the social class and race that they inhabit, and may set agendas or ask questions that are not relevant for all children.”**

The social class of funders and researchers also affects project outcomes in complex ways. Decisions about the titles of projects, research questions and the aims and objectives of comparative research are too



frequently made by adults embedded in middle and/or upper-middle class lives, with cultural values and social networks to match. The effects of these power imbalances, decisions and inequalities can be profound. While there are well established and powerful global South elites that include cosmopolitan and aspirational middle classes (some of whom rear children much as they are reared in the global North middle classes), research conclusions should avoid magnifying the circumstances, values and views of North American and European middle and upper-middle class and urban families as if these reflect the 'reality' experienced by the rest of the world (Burman, 1995; Ennew, 2003; Solorzano, 1998).

### **“The social class of funders and researchers affects project outcomes in complex ways.”**

Paying attention to history, to socioeconomic inequalities, and to the views of poorer or less educated parents, teachers and children in thinking through the research can lead to more significant and less biased findings. In circumstances where we pay attention to power imbalances between researchers and the researched, global North and global South institutions and adults and children, this attentiveness will be extremely useful in documenting accurately, and critically analysing, the values, views, norms, creativity and concerns of lower-middle-class, poor and destitute children.

Unfortunately, then, while research is generally exciting because it opens up possibilities for new knowledge and social change, much research claiming an international or global status might actually make life worse for children. Contemporary scholars, activists and researchers know this from the many studies of aboriginal children that justified the stolen generation and the criminalisation of entire communities in Australia, New Zealand and Canada via the use of residential 'penitentiary' schools. It is also possible to see this in supposedly scholarly textbooks championed by the Hindu right in India, which justify violent racism against Muslim men, women and children, and violent atrocities against Dalits (Teltumbde, 2010).

In the field of development, while some research has been used in pro-social ways to enhance the reproductive rights of girls and women, or to protect

workers in hazardous workplaces, much research has led (directly or indirectly) to the destruction of the environments of rural peoples and forest-dwelling communities in favour of economic progress for mining conglomerates and energy companies (Ferguson, 1994). Research about childhood and digital tools and technologies that is tied even in subtle ways to large corporations and to a political ideology such as neoliberalism (which encourages capitalist expansion and consumption, or a hegemonic dependence on the English language) can damage indigenous sharing networks and systems. And research may unintentionally serve the interests of religious nationalist groups or authoritarian regimes by increasing their capacities for surveillance and control over dissident populations. Children live in all of these contexts and are affected by the outcomes.

### **“Many scholars from the global South argue that contemporary knowledge production and circulation is deeply inequitable and often colonial.”**

Many scholars from the global South argue that contemporary knowledge production and circulation is deeply inequitable and often colonial. Some projects carried out within this context are thoughtful and reflective. Others are not. As scholars, researchers and practitioners, we can choose to reflect critically on knowledge and to distance ourselves from powerful colonial knowledge-production techniques (Grosfoguel, 2007; Todd, 2016), or we can profit from the status quo. What does this mean? Scholarship and media originating in just five or six English-, French-, German- and Spanish-speaking countries (which often contribute to the continued 'othering' of the global South or of particular national, religious or ethnic groups within the global South) is considered to be 'global' media and 'global' research. Meanwhile, unfortunately, most research originating from within the global South is treated in one or more of four ways: to be ignored as if it had not been done at all; to be examined in relation to theories assumed to be essentially and exclusively Western; to be compared to 'normal' data arising in middle-class global North contexts; or to be taken at face value as an example of 'indigenous' and local knowledge, which is more powerful and plausible, and does not need to be subjected to rigorous scholarly scrutiny. As Mignolo discusses:

*“Once upon a time scholars assumed that the knowing subject in the disciplines is transparent, disincorporated from the known, and untouched by the geo-political configuration of the world in which people are racially ranked and regions are racially configured. From a detached and neutral point of observation ... the knowing subject maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them.... At stake is indeed the question of racism and epistemology....” (Mignolo, 2009, p. 1)*

Mignolo’s point, like that of feminist ethnographers and geographers (cf Todd, 2016; Visweswaran, 1997), is that no research observation, theoretical framework or research design is detached and neutral, and that those who speak as if they are may often be the most prejudiced or unreflexive. As Grosfoguel reminds us: ‘Nobody escapes the class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical, and racial hierarchies of the “modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system”’ ([www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-07-04-grosfoguel-en.html](http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-07-04-grosfoguel-en.html)).

**“Scholarship and media originating in just five or six English-, French-, German- and Spanish-speaking countries is considered to be ‘global’ media and ‘global’ research.”**

If we claim to be ‘neutral’ or ‘scientific’, or that knowledge has a single racial and geographic lineage, we are, in fact, positioned in particular ways in social structures and in histories of thinking. Todd argues powerfully that some of the most significant and useful knowledge disseminated by white Western philosophers and theorists of technology shamelessly uses and does not acknowledge the work of indigenous peoples, activists and philosophers. Thus, perhaps, by refusing to be openly critical about the perspectives from which all knowledge is made and distributed, many of us (knowingly or not) serve already powerful interests.

It seems, then, to be politically and ethically imperative to question ourselves (and our assumptions, values and frameworks) when embarking on research into children and media. This recommendation can seem disconcerting. It certainly contradicts some of the

academic report-writing techniques encouraged in mainstream research and advocacy. Recognising the deeper epistemological critiques is also difficult for many of us. Mignolo, Grosfoguel and others can come across as angry with ‘established knowledge’ in a way that may be unpleasant and uncomfortable for Western-trained social science researchers, particularly those who have never had any reason to question their own gender, race or class privilege.

It is particularly difficult for European and North American female researchers/funders who have experienced discrimination and felt oppressed by virtue of gender for many decades; it is also difficult for researchers and funders from middle-class, African, Asian or Latin American families who may have experienced complex discrimination based on race and/or gender, but may not have questioned the fact that their way of seeing the world contains traces of their social class.

**“It seems, then, to be politically and ethically imperative to question ourselves (and our assumptions, values and frameworks) when embarking on research into children and media.”**

Some highly reflexive work is filled with difficult terminology and demands further reading of historical texts – this can be a barrier for many researchers, both in global North and global South institutions. Often it seems easier to reject de-colonial and critical race scholars’ critiques as fanciful, outdated or too politically radical; to remain secure in our identities; and to carry on framing research questions, getting funding and writing reports as we have been taught to. But, of course, as I hope you will agree, we are neither all-knowing nor objective and neutral. Researchers such as Gajjala (2012), Balagopalan (2014), Burton and Mutongwizo (2009) and Prinsloo and Walton (2008) demonstrate a more reflexive approach by embracing contextually situated, reflexive research about international women and children, whether or not their studies’ focus is digital media. The rest of this Guide aims to provide further tools for recognising and – where there is a will to improve – strengthening contemporary research about children and digital technologies.

# MAIN APPROACHES

Much international comparative research regarding children and media has conducted and analysed surveys in a limited number of countries in North America, Australia-New Zealand, Europe and East Asia. In robust quantitative studies, such as those carried out in Europe under the aegis of the EU Kids Online project, it is common for nation-states to be used as axes of comparison. This situation is particularly complicated when a project aims to do global research using questionnaires or surveys, whether with adults or children.

The World Hobbit Project, which produced a much-debated, multilingual online questionnaire for use in more than 30 countries, found extremely variable take-up rates, particularly in poorer global South countries, where many young people have limited access to Wi-Fi-enabled mobiles. However, it was not simply the numbers of responses that varied. Many global North respondents evidently related to some questions (and answered them with more passion) because they related to the assumptions in these questions more easily than a majority of respondents in low-income global South contexts. Questions about the fantasy genre, about Tolkien fandom, and about specific Hollywood actors (which resonated with global North audiences and upper socioeconomic income audiences in the global South) were trite or irrelevant in India, where Bollywood films and actors were being banned or censored under a new far-right government, and in Colombia, where the largest pro-democracy movement in decades was taking place (Banaji, 2016).

**“How can one capture and convey the complex worldviews and experiences of children with regard to media and technologies in different contexts?”**

How can one capture and convey the complex worldviews and experiences of children with regard to media and technologies in different contexts? Even highly nuanced reports may increase the invisibility of children from less well-off socioeconomic or peripheral geopolitical groups if they happen to draw on findings from surveys that had uneven take-up rates due to technological or literacy factors. Some questionnaires

are administered with spatially proximate communities, or those who can be accessed through schools (Selwyn et al., 2010), and researchers are thus better placed to ask and understand the children’s contexts. However, whether or not communities of children who lack a voice get to tick boxes on the questionnaire may not be the primary concern for reflexive research. An equally important question is whether a questionnaire is written in such a way that it can capture diverse children’s worldviews and experiences. Ironically, perhaps, the children in neglected communities make up a ‘majority’ of the world’s children (Banaji, 2015; Wells, 2014), but frequently do not find their perspectives and concerns embedded in survey questions.

**“Even highly nuanced reports may increase the invisibility of children from less well-off socioeconomic or peripheral geopolitical groups.”**

Like children in the Muslim, Adivasi and Dalit communities in India, children in squatter communities in South Africa who are currently being displaced by urban construction projects experience some risks of daily life in quite different ways than their urban middle-class peers. To complicate things further, factors such as gender, disability, homelessness, labouring and school-going, being rural or hyper-urban, being an internal or an international migrant, hailing from a stable region or from a war-torn or drought and flood-hit one, will each have significantly higher impacts on children in countries with large economic divides than they will on ones with mature social security systems (Bowen, 2015; Wells, 2014).

Whether children hail from strict religious backgrounds or secular ones has already been seen to play a major role in their media-related experiences in the US and the UK (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004; Seiter, 1998), yet this is often ignored in studies of children and media in the global South (Strelitz & Boshoff, 2008), where religiosity may be viewed as a cultural given (and therefore normalised). The experiences and perspectives of working children, unhappy children, angry children, illiterate children, and those with significant caring responsibilities that prevent them

from attending local schools can be excluded by (or lost within) survey research that is based in schools and carried out alongside school authorities.

Assumptions about the significance of particular forms of education or media are therefore often based on skewed samples.

**“Like children in the Muslim, Adivasi and Dalit communities in India, children in squatter communities in South Africa who are currently being displaced by urban construction projects experience some risks of daily life in quite different ways than their urban middle-class peers.”**

A study that wishes to explore the question of whether children in Peru and India are ‘endangered’ by lack of digital literacy might already be inflected in a particular direction, depending on key assumptions. Working mainly with urban, school-going children, definitions of children’s safety as residing in a ‘media literacy curriculum’ and a notion of ‘endangerment’ might be articulated primarily in relation to understandings of urban, middle-class lives in Western countries. As Burton and Mutongwizo (2009) have shown in their work about violence and everyday technologies with South African teens, projects (if articulated differently) might take account of the specific ways in which schooling and online discourse are beset by complex practices of local and national racism, and histories of violence. In the cases of India and Peru, this would mean considering the effects of racism, violence and technology on the lives of hundreds of millions of Dalits and Adivasis, and on millions of indigenous Quechua. In this context, UNDP (2013) concludes:

*“Unequal outcomes ... appear to be strikingly persistent for specific individuals and disadvantaged groups within a population (such as women, racial and ethnic minorities). This suggests that factors related to prejudice and discrimination continue to powerfully reinforce and reproduce inequalities. Indeed, certain individuals and groups have opportunities consistently inferior to those of their fellow citizens merely on account of birth circumstances. And these predetermined background variables make a major difference*

*for the lives they lead. Not surprisingly, unequal opportunities lead to unequal outcomes.”*

At another level, finding exciting and creative uses of digital media tools among children, it may be tempting to write as if the possible has become probable, and to assume a bright future. Here, although this advice might seem outdated in places that have modernised their digital infrastructures, it is worth bearing in mind Warf’s warning that:

*“To speak of the Internet as liberatory in impoverished social contexts such as Mozambique or Bolivia, with high illiteracy rates ... is absurd. What is more, within such nations network nodes are invariably concentrated within cities, whereas the plurality, and often the majority, of the population lives in rural areas.... Under such circumstances, claims of cyber activism as a substitute for real political change are misleading and dangerous.” (Warf, 2001, p. 8)*

In light of conclusions such as these, the significance of any single factor (such as schooling or digital media) in children’s lives makes sense only within specific, clearly described contexts. Nevertheless, it is not unusual to find that the studies of media and children undertaken in global South contexts place technologies and media rather than children and social processes at their core (Bahamondez et al., 2011; Garai & Shadrach, 2006). What does this mean? If the object of our research is mainly media or ‘the digital’, then it is possible that the route towards finding out about this will exert an inexorable pull in our survey questions and on child respondents. If the object of the research is media-related risk, or media-related learning, we might end up finding out many interesting things about media-related risk, and about media-related learning. But we might also miss potential responses about non-media-related experiences, risk and learning, which are equally if not more interesting, and which could have had a bearing on how we interpret responses and findings about digital and media issues in children’s lives.

**“A study that wishes to explore the question of whether children in Peru and India are ‘endangered’ by lack of digital literacy might already be inflected in a particular**

## direction, depending on key assumptions.”

So, if questions are phrased more openly – and consider media/digital among a range of other factors – we might find out about the complicated contexts and meanings related to digital and analogue media content and technologies in diverse children’s lives. ‘Other factors’ – family relationships, labour expectations, hunger, sexual identities, caste, or race humiliation, and non-digital subcultural leisure – cannot be imported into a research project after the survey has been conducted: findings generally reflect the initial framing of the key objects of research.

The implications of framing are even more wide-reaching when it comes to how we understand who children are and how they live in the world. Much research about children in the global South has been accused by Balagopalan (2014), Burman (1995), Wells (2014) and others of writing about children and childhood as if a single, essential set of attributes and experiences characterises childhood across the world. These authors suggest that if the ideas of children we have in our project have not been examined, the projects may overlook significant aspects of working-class and global South children’s lives – for instance gender-based or racist exclusion, caste or ethnic micro-aggression, police violence, religious violence, hunger, poor sanitation, maternal mortality, violence in the home, bullying and aggression by peers, teachers, and a discriminatory curriculum. They identify several dangers to be guarded against, including euro-centrism, implicit racism via a belief in modernisation development goals, orientalism, contempt for global South researchers, and viewing white, middle-class childrearing practices a universal norm. While online porn, bullying and threats (which are hugely prevalent in some contexts) need to be taken as seriously as offline bullying and violence, vast numbers of children are still very rarely online, or are never online on connections good enough to enable bullying.

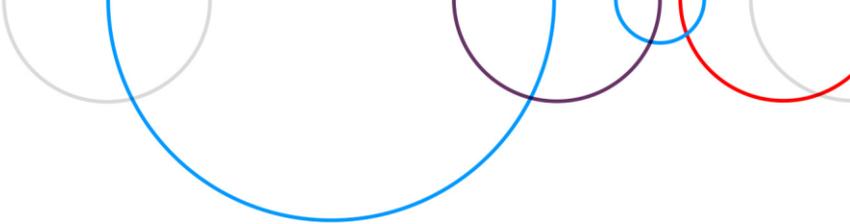
**“The implications of framing are even more wide-reaching when it comes to how we understand who children are and how they live in the world.”**

Further, the ways in which children get bullied on- and offline are complex and layered. They often involve adults, ‘trusted’ authority figures (such as headteachers, parents, teachers or religious elders) and repeated, gendered violence that the children may have come to regard as normal. These complex layerings of inequality, violence and discrimination are difficult to ascertain and discuss even in questionnaires that specifically target such subjects. Likewise the ways in which children negotiate, avoid and deal with such experiences, and the creativity or complicity they exhibit, are not easy to express in discussion with strange adults, and impossible to condense into brief survey answers. So how can investigations into children’s relationships to media and technologies be conceptualised and undertaken so as to avoid the pitfalls above?

Asking how any subset of children conceptualise, regulate, feel about and make meaning from what they do in digital contexts requires vast contextual knowledge. The language in which we think, communicate and frame questions to ask in interviews and surveys shapes the ways in which our data subjects, and our data, will ‘speak’ to us. The word ‘digital’, for instance, encompasses computers and other devices connected to the internet, computers that are not connected to any network, digital games consoles of varying ages, smartphones (connected to the internet), and smartphones (with no connection). In the Philippines, Brazil and urban India, the proportion of children who have never used computers or smartphones, and of children who have used only computers, is higher than the proportion of children who have used the internet (Banaji, 2015).

**“The language in which we think, communicate and frame questions to ask in interviews and surveys shapes the ways in which our data subjects, and our data, will ‘speak’ to us.”**

The proportion of children whose parents own mobile phones with limited data packets is many times greater than those whose parents have high-spec smartphones with wireless access or data connections. Phones may be used communally for listening to music, and for playing quite dated digital games like Snake and Pac-Man, but are often not (or only intermittently) connected to the internet in India,



Brazil and the Philippines. Even calling patterns vary, with many poor children in Asia and Africa only able to give 'missed calls' rather than actually to pay for texts; yet these children still find themselves counted within the digitally connected. In discussions with children and with parents, differences between what children in highly mediated contexts and significantly non-mediated contexts consider to be on- or offline are common, and need to be clearly delineated. Confusions can also arise about what is meant by 'online' and 'offline', and using the word 'digital' can deepen the confusion; many electronic devices are subsumed under the word 'digital' – so DVD players, VCD players and non-smartphones also commonly get called 'digital'. Boundaries are unclear and porous, and the reports produced or books based on research should take steps to avoid homogenisation or confusion and retain the complexities.

**“Asking how any subset of children conceptualise, regulate, feel about and make meaning from what they do in digital contexts requires vast contextual knowledge.”**

Large institutions with funding at their disposal and an interest in children's lives, smaller organizations that receive funding to carry out research, or even individual researchers tend to apply a specific lens to what they research, be it digital technologies, health, participation or resilience. And what they look for and recognise may not reflect people's priorities and needs in the researched communities. This disconnect is something that we tend to recognise when we hear researchers, scholars or tourists discussing an area in which we are well versed, or an aspect of theory in which we have been immersed for many years. The complexity and cultural differentiation of a majority of children's lives across the global South, from Central America and Southern Africa to South Asia and Eastern Europe, needs to be embedded in the structures of research and research design. Working-class children in Bucharest and upper-middle-class children in Lahore have very few life experiences in common. A lack of sustained historical knowledge and self-reflexivity can damage the outcomes of a project irreparably (Baaz, 2005; Beazley et al., 2009).

**“Local partners sometimes strategically submit to the will of the funding body in order to secure funding, while time-pressed, highly trained, methodologically competent researchers may have little leeway for reflection, and the project will still be seen as successful in its own terms.”**

Significantly, these weaknesses might not lead to a breakdown in communication. Local partners sometimes strategically submit to the will of the funding body in order to secure funding, while time-pressed, highly trained, methodologically competent researchers may have little leeway for reflection, and the project will still be seen as successful in its own terms. The lack of reflexivity will be institutionalised and rewarded: the inability to 'see' or 'record' which aspects of the project may be damaging because of deep and lasting age, class and race biases, or because of the global geopolitical privileges of the research team or practitioner team will not be challenged.

These weaknesses in projects, and the ways in which they are framed as successes, may contribute to a devaluing of local and indigenous knowledge, as well as to an endorsement of unequal power relations. Regardless of short-term and limited knowledge gains or long-term reputational gains, such processes do not serve the interests of children in most communities in the world. So what kind of research can serve the interests of a greater proportion of children across our vast, unequal and complex globe?

# IDENTIFYING GOOD PRACTICE

For hundreds of millions of children, normal life includes open drains, a lack of toilets and sanitation, a dozen people sleeping in a room, no street lights or footpaths, barely literate teachers and semi-literate or non-literate parents. Tens of millions of children across the world work 7–12 hours every day. They experience various forms of violence, including sexual abuse, every week (Banaji, 2016; Burman, 1995; Kovats-Bernat, 2006; Khan, 2007; UNDP, 2013; Wells, 2014).

Most children living in these circumstances take an active role in the lives of their families and communities. They may well be traumatised by some aspects of their lives, but they contribute to economic resources, and to social rules that help to regulate customs, often participating in institutional and communal practices of discrimination, or subversion, conservation and survival. Almost all of these communities of children lead rich imaginary lives, have nightmares, do their best to avoid pain, and carve out spaces for ‘fun’ with a range of everyday objects from syringes, glue, dust and stones to rodents and insects (Banaji, 2015; Katz, 2004).

So the question of which comparators and in which contexts ‘internet risks’ and ‘digital opportunities’ are being conceptualised remains central to thorough research in global contexts. Actually saying anything meaningfully comparative about children and digital technologies might mean restricting the question to contexts that display at least some similarities – asking what urban middle-class children in a variety of countries do online, what hearing-impaired children in informal learning circumstances do, or what rural school-going children do, might yield plausible answers.

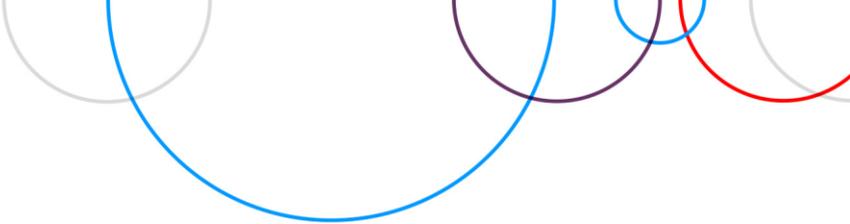
Kovats-Bernat (2006) discusses media, violence and everyday life for street-connected children in Haiti, while Balagopalan (2014) examines the lives of poor children and charity interventions for education in the environs of Calcutta, India. Instead of starting with assumptions of violence and victimisation, Kovats-Bernat and Balagopalan both use ethnography to uncover the ways in which children experience, describe and think about difficult and painful aspects of their lives on the street. Media features at times in both these accounts, sometimes imposed by adults (as in

the case of the street child ‘voices’ invited by a radio station in Haiti), and sometimes used by the children to inform their imaginations of different lives. In both studies, data collected suggest that children themselves sometimes resort to deceit or violence as agentic choices in making their lives on the streets; they also show considerable generosity and solidarity in maintaining each other’s right to survival. In both studies, assumptions about ‘normal’ childhood and media representations of the street as a place of object corruption both play a role in misrepresenting and stigmatising the children. Digital media are all but absent.

**“The question of which comparators and in which contexts ‘internet risks’ and ‘digital opportunities’ are being conceptualised remains central to thorough research in global contexts.”**

Using close observation and qualitative interviews, Khan (2007) analyses educational policies, schools, discourses about education, non-governmental organizations’ (NGOs) anti-child labour actions and the experiences of children in the football manufacturing industry of Pakistan. After analysing multiple interactions with campaigners, employers, NGO personnel, parents and children in very poor communities, Khan begins to question the ways in which bans on child labour actually affect the children’s lives. His analysis suggests that the ways in which anti-child labour discourses have played out are problematic because they do not provide alternative resources to feed the families of the very poor, and because they drive both manufacturers and children out of sight, so that child labour is further domesticated, hidden and devalued, and hazards and accidents are unreported.

Katz (2004) compares children and labour in New York and in a Sudanese village, showing how economic globalisation has vastly different outcomes for children in rural and urban, global North and global South contexts. Her detailed, historically contextualised observations of children’s role in everyday life and their



contribution to economic and social practices leads her to understand aspects of their agency very differently to previous studies: children, too, are historical actors, with complex pressures and motivations. In specific national or geographic contexts, their use of technologies and interactions with each other and with community rules or rituals become more or less salient. In places with ample educational opportunities to mix with children across faiths and cultures, and where incoming children feel welcomed into the school community, children may gain the confidence to reveal more about their home backgrounds and lives. In other places, where the social environment is hostile to migrants, they may rely almost solely on communication with their families and communities for a sense of support and belonging.

**“Older children from deprived families who have to ‘share’ technologies with parents, grandparents or older siblings have to develop strategic codes for communicating aspects of their identity that they suspect might cause disapproval.”**

In families with disposable capital and much media and technology, the salience of each individual technological gadget is reduced, whereas in families with few economic and technological resources, watching television programmes in one’s home language can take on a greater significance as a media encounter.

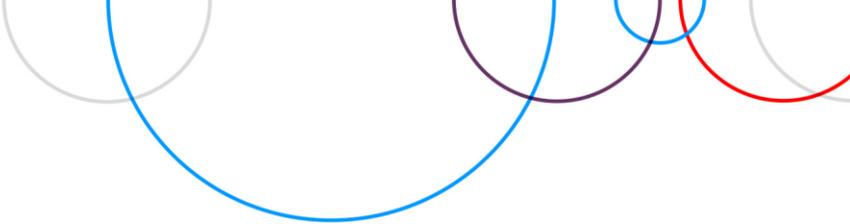
De Block and Buckingham (2009) examine the ways in which international migrant children from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America now residing in Europe negotiate their way through friendship, school, belonging and nostalgia via the use or rejection of particular forms of media. They find that many of the children in their study are deeply committed to local non-digital relationships with other schoolchildren, with their community and friends, and are desperate to integrate, and so at first refuse internet-enabled nostalgia for the homes they have left behind. In fact, when offered opportunities for digital communication, some of the child migrants and refugees opt for more material transactions such as sending letters and packages. Others choose to spend time in the school toilets rather than online. Although some of these

studies might reveal findings that are subject to further change as mobile phones become more ubiquitous with Western children and middle-class children worldwide, these studies model research on international childhoods that takes issues of reflexivity and knowledge production, inequality, racism and method seriously.

Methodologically, these studies (de Block & Buckingham, 2009; Katz, 2004; Khan, 2007; Kovats-Bernat, 2006) favour extensive, multi-sited qualitative research in local languages, strong researcher embedding in contexts, observation or full ethnography. Another interesting and useful choice made by these researchers is the wide lens with which they examine children’s lives. Whether their studies are about violence, education, labour, homelessness or media, the central objects of study are not singled out and interrogated in instrumental ways. These studies allow interconnections to emerge between formal and informal educational contexts; between children’s ingenuity, and resilience; and the harm that they have experienced. Based on such specific contextual knowledge, the studies define and discuss risks and opportunities. These studies pay attention to shifting hierarchies of respect, pleasure, violence, dignity and security that emerge in children’s accounts of their lives.

**“We are never just studying children, but always also children from particular classes, castes, racial, religious and political backgrounds.”**

Another aspect of these four studies that makes them templates for best practice is the way in which they pay attention to intersectional aspects of identity. We are never just studying children, but always also children from particular classes, castes, racial, religious and political backgrounds, with certain abilities: middle-class, female children from atheist families; or black boys from urban housing estates; or rural children from deeply religious backgrounds; or indigenous children whose parents are labourers in the mines; or children who already know they are gay, long before they are allowed to talk about their sexuality. These studies show how different aspects of children’s intersecting identities are more or less significant in different areas of their lives – at work, or home, or the mosque, or school, during play, or



festivals, or with friends and siblings, online or on the streets at night. These studies allow the children involved to define and redefine how they explain and view their own identities.

So why, in a Guide on digital media, online risks and children's opportunities online should we consider studies that show little interest in the digital sphere? Any study, whether quantitative or qualitative, which hopes to contribute to knowledge about children and the internet or media of any sort should take very seriously the need to be interested first and foremost in children as agentic beings embedded in complex social structures and relationships. This does not mean that 'media' and/or 'the digital' are not interesting in themselves, or that intergenerational aspects are irrelevant, or that, at points in the research, these key priorities will not come to the fore. In fact, the ways in which some children maintain multiple Facebook or Instagram accounts and WhatsApp groups to present different aspects of their identity or to protect themselves from family surveillance or community politics may be of particular interest. Additionally, older children from deprived families who have to 'share' technologies with parents, grandparents or older siblings have to develop more strategic codes for communicating aspects of their identity that they suspect might cause disapproval.

**“The cost of reflexivity in quantitative research can be significant, but the rewards are significant too.”**

Meanwhile parental ignorance and complacency about how and where they upload data about their children, particularly among the middle classes in South Asia or Latin America, continues to enable sexual predators and pornographic service providers access to photographic and other material. However, the foregoing point about an interest in children's lives as part of complex structures means that research, where interest in children's relationships to and thinking and feeling about online experiences or digital tools and content is the guiding element, might not learn many new or relevant things about children who come from communities with which the researchers are unfamiliar. Even with children from familiar communities, nuances, patterns and connections will be obscured or excluded that might otherwise have shed light on the key themes of the research.

As Ryan and Golden (2006) have argued, the cost of reflexivity in quantitative research can be significant, but the rewards are significant too. In fact, asking questions about researcher identity and perspective at the question-design stage, as well as honestly and openly reporting relationships, methods, impediments and short cuts, can significantly strengthen the research's meaningfulness to particular communities.

In circumstances where multi-sited questionnaires with children and families are the chosen method, other good practices include feeding the qualitative findings from reflexive interviews and observations with children into the process of designing and administering questionnaires; including street corner sampling to achieve a richness and depth in coverage; and interrogating all experimental or survey findings through further focus groups and interviews with children.

Further international comparative research might suggest ways for researchers, digital practitioners, programmers, policy-makers, teachers and parents to discuss televised or internet-based content differently with 7- to 15-year-olds in rural areas of France, China and India, or urban areas of Chad, Ghana, Brazil or Argentina. Such research could point adults and children towards exciting and creative content, towards leisure and pleasure, or resistance and activism in their specific contexts. It could widen options for choosing internet platforms in indigenous and vernacular languages, for showing solidarity with others interested in similar causes, for avoiding capitalist scams, for safeguarding personal data for governments and other authorities, for disengaging from or resisting the narrowing of net content by corporations, and for opening up debates around how to deal with hate-speech, sexual bullying, frightening, exploitative or threatening programmes or websites. Such research, whether extended, ethnographic and qualitative or quantitative, needs to bear in mind Ruby's (1991) injunction to speak alongside children in these communities even to the point of showing the conflicts that exist between and among them and between your perspective and theirs, and to not speak 'about' or 'for' them.

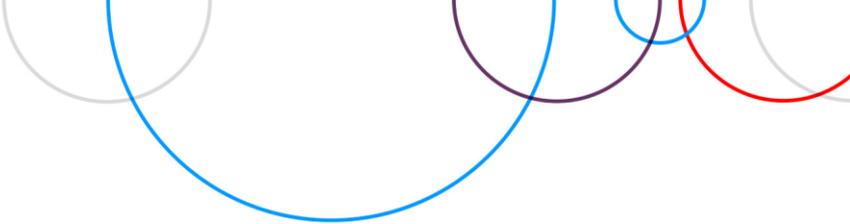
## Case study: Korean family orientation and ICT

Thomas et al. (2005) discuss the relationship between cultural values and digital technologies, using the case study of Korean families, and drawing on the work of Yoon (2002). It is not uncommon for young people in Korea to share their personal space in the home with others and for their rooms to be accessible to other family members without permission. This has implications for the nature of ICT adoption and the usage of digital devices that are often familial rather than individual possessions (Thomas et al., 2005). The study argues that for many young people calls from parents are more significant than calls from peers, and are seen as a form of 'affection' and expression of family bonding. This relates not only to the immediate family but also to kin and quasi-family members whose calls are also treated with respect (Yoon, 2002, cited in Thomas et al., 2005). Hence, approaching such a context with research tools developed in relation to a more individualistic Western context will not capture well the cultural specificity of the local use of digital technologies. Thomas et al. (2005: 23) conclude that 'while we can find similar examples to Western studies of children wanting more independence and using the mobile to be more independent, we often find that the mobile also reproduce more traditional Korean identity.'

## Case study: Researching diversity and inequality in Serbia

The Global Kids Online (GKO) team in Serbia identified a gap in the research on children's lives in the digital world related to the underrepresentation of minority ethnic children and children with learning disabilities. To address the insufficient knowledge about these children's internet practices, the team conducted focus groups with Roma children and children with additional educational needs enquiring about their online practices, skills and overall experience with digital technologies. The researchers were particularly interested in the ways in which these children, who often face discrimination in the Serbian society, can be supported, and if online technologies can be used to overcome their social marginalisation. The GKO study in Serbia found that, in contrast to some initial expectations, the practices and online activities of children from the selected minority groups did not differ much from the general population of children, and it was mainly age and gender that differentiated the young online users. In this case, the team concluded, the online world offered more opportunities for integration and inclusion and better treatment than their everyday offline surroundings. In fact, children from these groups spoke of the ability to find culture-specific materials that created a feeling of belonging, such as this Roma boy aged 12: "Sometimes, as no one speaks our language at school, I type something on YouTube into Romanian and hear our voice, and that's nice, I can understand everything."

For further details on the Serbian findings, see the GKO Serbia country report, available at [www.globalkidsonline.net](http://www.globalkidsonline.net).



# USEFUL ONLINE RESOURCES

## Snapshot of inequalities in different countries

### Canada

Al Jazeera (2015, 17 December). Canada acknowledges abuse to First Nations.

[www.facebook.com/ajplusenglish/videos/657536674387843/](https://www.facebook.com/ajplusenglish/videos/657536674387843/)

### Philippines

Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center (2010). *Indigenous peoples in the Philippines: Continuing struggle*. FOCUS, 62.

[www.hurights.or.jp/archives/focus/section2/2010/12/indigenous-peoples-in-the-philippines-continuing-struggle.html](http://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/focus/section2/2010/12/indigenous-peoples-in-the-philippines-continuing-struggle.html)

### US

Pew Research Center (2015, 17 December). *Parenting in America: Outlook, worries, aspirations are strongly linked to financial situation*.

[www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/parenting-in-america/](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/parenting-in-america/)

## Additional resources

Grosfoguel, R. extended blog.

[www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-07-04-grosfoguel-en.html](http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-07-04-grosfoguel-en.html)

## REFERENCES

- Attewell, P., & Winston, H. (2003). Children of the digital divide. In P. Attewell & N. M. Seel (eds) *Disadvantaged teens and computer technologies* (pp. 117–136). Münster: Waxmann.
- Baaz, M. E. (2005). *The paternalism of partnership: A postcolonial reading of identity and development aid*. London: Zed Books.
- Bahamondez, C. V., Winkler, C., & Schmidt, A. (2011). *Utilizing multimedia capabilities of mobile phones to support teaching in schools in rural Panama*. CHI (Computer Human Interaction) 2011. Proceedings of the SIGCHI (Special Interest Group on Computer Human Interaction) Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, pp. 935–944.
- Balagopalan, S. (2014). *Inhabiting 'childhood': Children, labour and schooling in postcolonial India*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Banaji, S. (2015). Behind the high-tech fetish: Children, work and media use across classes in India. *International Communication Gazette*, 77 (6). Available at <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/61686/>
- Banaji, S. (2016). *Children and media in India: Narratives of class, agency and social change*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Beazley, H., Bessell, S., Ennew, J., & Waterson, R. (2009). The right to be properly researched: Research with children in a messy, real world, *Children's Geographies*, 7 (4), 365–378.
- boyd, d. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.
- Bowen, Z. (2015). Play on the mother ground: children's games in rural Odissa. *South Asian History and Culture*, 6 (3), 330–347.
- Buckingham, D. (2007). *Beyond technology: Children's learning in the digital age*. London: Polity.
- Buckingham, D., & Bragg, S. (2004). *Young people, sex and the media: The facts of life*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Burman, E. (1995). Developing differences: Gender, childhood and economic development, children and society. *Children & Society*, 9 (3), 121–142.
- Burton, P., & Mutongwizo, T. (2009). *Inescapable violence: Cyber-bullying and electronic violence against young people in South Africa*. CJCP Issue Paper No. 8. Cape Town: CJCP (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention).
- Cummings, C., & O'Neil, T. (2015). *Do digital information and communications technologies increase the voice and influence of women and girls? A rapid review of the evidence*. London: ODI (Overseas Development Institute).
- de Block, L., & Buckingham, D. (2009). *Global children global media: Migration, media and childhood*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Dyson, J. (2014). *Working childhoods: Youth, agency and the environment in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ennew, J. (2003). Difficult circumstances: Some reflections on 'street children' in Africa. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 13 (1). Available at [www.crin.org/en/docs/Difficult%20Circumstances%20-%20Reflections%20on%20Street%20Children%20in%20.pdf](http://www.crin.org/en/docs/Difficult%20Circumstances%20-%20Reflections%20on%20Street%20Children%20in%20.pdf)
- Ferguson, J. (1994). *The anti-politics machine: Development, depoliticization and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/zp4xs9h>
- Gajjala, R. (2012). *Cyberculture and the subaltern: Weavings of the virtual and real*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Garai, A., & Shadrach, B. (2006). *Taking ICT to every Indian village*. New Delhi: One World South Asia.

Ginzburg, F. (2008). Rethinking the digital age. In D. Hesmondhalgh (ed.) *The media and social theory* (pp. 127–44). New York: Routledge.

Grosfoguel, R. (2007). The epistemic decolonial turn. *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2–3), 211–223.

Katz, C. (2004). *Growing up global: Economic restructuring and children's everyday lives*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Khan, A. (2007). *Representing children: Power, policy and the discourse on child labour in the football manufacturing industry of Pakistan*. Oxford and Karachi: Oxford University Press.

Kovats-Bernat, C. (2006). *Sleeping rough in Port-au-Prince: An ethnography of street children and violence in Haiti*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press.

Livingstone, S. (2009). *Children and the internet: Great expectations, challenging realities*. Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Livingstone, S. (2014). Developing social media literacy: how children learn to interpret risky opportunities on social network sites. *Communications*, 39 (3), 283–303.

Mamdani, M. (2007). The politics of naming: Genocide, civil war, insurgency. *London Review of Books*, 29 (5). Available at [www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n05/mahmood-mamdani/the-politics-of-naming-genocide-civil-war-insurgency](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n05/mahmood-mamdani/the-politics-of-naming-genocide-civil-war-insurgency)

Mignolo, W. (2009). Epistemic disobedience, independent thought and de-colonial freedom. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26 (7–8), 1–23.

Mohanty, C. T. (1991). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. In C. Mohanty, *Third world women and the politics of feminism* (pp. 51–80). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Nieuwenhuys, O. (1994). *Children's lifeworlds: Gender, welfare and labour in the developing world*. London and New York: Routledge.

Prinsloo, M., & Walton, M. (2008). Situated responses to the digital literacies of electronic communication in marginal school settings. In N. Pecora, E. Osei-Hwere, & U. E. Carlson (eds) *Yearbook 2008: African Media, African children* (pp. 99–116). Göteborg: Nordicom,

Göteborgs universitet. Available at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.578.3446&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Ruby, J. (1991). Speaking for, speaking about, speaking with, or speaking alongside: An anthropological and documentary dilemma. *Visual Anthropology Review*, 7 (2), 50–67.

Ryan, L., & Golden, A. (2006). 'Tick the box please': A reflexive approach to doing quantitative social research. *Sociology*, 40 (6), 1191–200.

Said, E. W. (1978). Introduction and Chapter 1. In E. Said (ed.) *Orientalism*, (pp. 1–28 and 49–73). London: Penguin.

Seiter, E. (1998). *Television and new media audiences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Selwyn, N. (2009). The digital native: Myth and reality. *Aslib Proceedings: New Information Perspectives*, 61 (4), 364–379.

Selwyn, N., Potter, J., & Cranmer, S. (2010) *Primary schools and ICT: Learning from pupil perspective*. London and New York: Continuum.

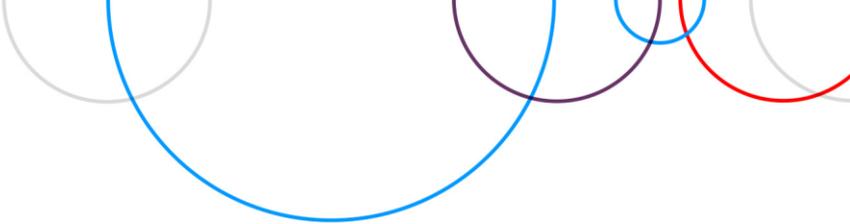
Solorzano, D. G. (1998). Critical race theory, race and gender microaggressions, and the experience of Chicana and Chicano scholars. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11 (1), 121–126.

Strelitz, L., & Boshoff, P. (2008). The African reception of global media. In S. Livingstone & K. Drotner (eds) *International handbook of children, media and culture* (pp. 237–254). London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage.

Teltumbde, A. (2010). *The persistence of caste: The Khairlanji murders and India's hidden apartheid*. London: Zed Books.

Thomas, F., Haddon L., Gilligan, R., Heinzmann, P., & de Gournay, C. (2005). Cultural factors shaping the experience of ICTs. In L. Haddon (ed.) *International collaborative research. Cross-cultural differences and cultures of research*. Brussels: COST. Available at [www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/whosWho/AcademicStaff/LeslieHaddon/CulturalFactorsChapter.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/whosWho/AcademicStaff/LeslieHaddon/CulturalFactorsChapter.pdf)

Todd, Z. (2016). An indigenous feminist's take on the ontological turn: 'Ontology' is just another word for



colonialism. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 29 (1), 4–22.

Twigg et al. (2014). *Voice and agency: Empowering girls and women for shared prosperity*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2013). *Humanity divided: Confronting inequality in developing countries*. UNDP Report on Inequality 2013.

Wells, K. (2014). *Childhood in global perspective*. Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity.

Wong, K., Fu, D., Li, C. Y., & Song, H. X. (2007). Rural migrant workers in urban China: living a marginalised life. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 16, 32–40.

Visweswaran, K. (1997). Histories of feminist ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26, 591–621.

Warf, B. (2001). Segueways into cyberspace: multiple geographies of the digital divide. *Planning and Design*, 28, 3–19.

Warschauer, M., & Matuchniak, T. (2010). New technology and digital worlds: Analyzing evidence of equity in access, use, and outcomes. *Review of Research in Education*, 34 (1), 179–225.

## Web resources

The World Hobbit Project:

[www.aber.ac.uk/en/news/archive/2014/12/title-160859-en.html](http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/news/archive/2014/12/title-160859-en.html)

<https://globalhobbitca.wordpress.com/2015/11/04/global-reach-of-the-world-hobbit-project/>

# CHECKLIST 1

## Do's and don'ts for researchers, practitioners and local partners

### Step 1: Identity and reflection

- Locate your own identity, identifications and motivations for taking on the job/project – and keep readjusting your view of yourself in new contexts. Be honest about your own class, racial position, educational biases and cultural and religious assumptions.
- List your relevant experience, skills and knowledge and how they suit you for the job. Have you worked with children before? Which age groups? How much training have you had? Have you worked with digital technologies? Are you a practitioner or a developer? Do you generally tend to trust or distrust particular technologies and digital platforms? Have you used the internet in the country context you are researching? A lot? From public places? What was the experience like in terms of connectivity?
- Now re-list these issues, thinking about how they might influence how you will do the job – your biases perhaps, or the languages you cannot speak, the fact that you happen to think children should not spend more than X hours on screens, or that you believe families need two parents, or the fact that you use a maid from time to time, the fact that hunger has not played a major role in your decisions about whether to top up your phone, the fact that your university was the 'best in the country' and teaches in English, or uses a Westernised knowledge framework, the fact that particular types of dress or facial piercing strike you as 'exotic', the fact that you feel very angry, and identify strongly with a particular group and despise another, or the fact that you might never have been challenged by the police for loitering or protesting.
- Check to see what kind of contract you are being asked to sign, and how it meshes with stated goals of the project, the funder and the organization carrying out the research. For instance, when a contract that draws on the experiences of marginalised people and uses the labour of a team of researchers assigns intellectual property rights

to a particular international organization or corporate body, there is a serious danger that the work being done will be inserted into a colonial and/or neoliberal framework. Weigh that danger up against the significance of getting your research perspective out into the public domain and to a wider audience.

### Step 2: Historical knowledge and geopolitics

- Whether you are a local, and 'know' a lot about the context, researching the history of the country and locality you are working in and preparing evidence of the following might be worthwhile: when was the country colonised, if at all? By which nation or nations? When did the country win independence? What is its current form of governance? How close to Western European and North American regimes is the government? Is the ruling elite from a particular language group, religion, ethnicity, caste? What kinds of tax laws are there and are they enforced? What do official poverty statistics tell you about the country? Does this match with unofficial/subaltern accounts of poverty/segregation/unemployment/the justice system?
- Observe the complexities of what the local 'community' means in the country – who has power, who does not, who is in, who is out, who 'talks', who does not, who relates well to whom? Why?
- What communication medium is cheaply available? Is it used by all families? How was your family experience growing up different to/similar to the norm here? How is your experience colouring your evaluations of children's lives here?
- Locate the 'local partner' within the political frame outlined above, and keep readjusting your view of them based on how they tackle issues on the project/research.
- What kinds of official national and international statistics are available about the various demographic groups in the area you are researching? How were these generated and do they tell the identical or contrasting stories about poverty, exclusion and wealth and inclusion? What measure of trust can be placed in their accuracy?

How have they been used and interpreted to date by other researchers?

### Step 3: Institutional due diligence: democracy and transparency

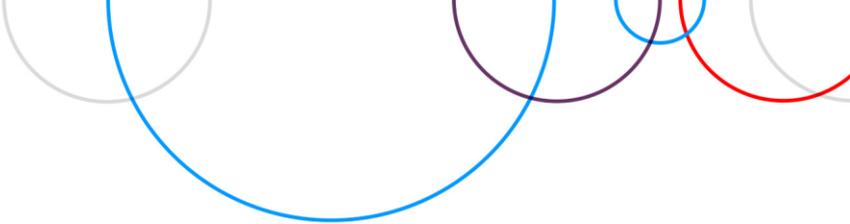
- Trace the history, politics and ideology of your funder, donor or employer organization within a matrix of international geopolitics, power and previous projects. This will be one of the most significant factors shaping your research/intervention.
- Who is the donor/funder and who is the commissioned organization? Are either of them linked to a government or a powerful international organization? Are they a wing of a governmental body? Do proper research, on even the biggest names. Find out their history, their own major funding sources and the histories of significant personnel – which other organizations or think tanks did they come from and do they belong to? What are the political interests of those?
- What political and ideological traditions have they emerged from in relation to world geopolitics, discourses of development and discourses of childhood? If the work is about media, technologies and children, do any of those who work for the funder have connections to corporate media and technology organizations? What are the implications of such connections, if the answer is yes?
- Examine the commissioned organization to see what the major conflicts and trends within the organization have been. Does the organization appear to have a homogeneous or a complex and contradictory identity? Are they known for democratic organizational practices? How are internal conflicts dealt with?
- What are the funding body's general goals, and what do you know about their previous projects? On what kinds of evidence do they tend to base their conclusions? Have you seen the real-world effects of any of their research?
- What is their specific interest in this particular project? In particular, which aspects of their stated core goals and aims would a project be attempting to meet? And what are the unspoken, unwritten goals and aims that you can identify as being linked to this project?

### Step 4: Philosophy and praxis

- How much local/ national/ regional knowledge is the project based on and how does this balance against citations from international studies?
- What kinds of assumptions about children, about childhood, about communities, about democracy, about technologies, about media, about digital, about risks and about prosperity and aspiration are being made by the project? Make a 10-point list. What evidence are these assumptions based on? How are the project's main research questions related to these assumptions?
- What are the project's short-term aims/goals? How are they expressed, and to whom are they accessible? What are the project's intended tangible outcomes, if any? Who do you think they will actually help? What's your evidence for this?
- What kinds of praxis exist on the project? Have the funders taken the time and trouble to include gender-balanced, racially/class diverse, age-ranged local children/adults in the framing of the 'problem', the research goals and the methodologies? Is there an atmosphere of mutual pedagogic learning/reflection, or is time compressed by a series of hurried deliverables? Is there a therapeutic dimension to the project in communities that have suffered disasters or other kinds of prolonged instability and injustice? If so, is this implicit or explicit?
- Do the international donors consider the local partner as an 'equal'? What is their 'ethos' in dealing with local partners? What cues alert you to whether the donor considers their organization superior to the local partner organization – might your impressions just reflect the views of a particular aid worker/volunteer?
- How do or might the project's goals and outcomes mesh with or serve the interests of particular global corporate interests? For instance, what are the implications of particular findings for the producers of technology? Or the writers of textbooks? Or for internet service providers? Or for policy-makers at the Ministry of Education? Do you see any potential conflicts of interest or dangers here?

### Step 5: Integrity and social change

- Some of these questions must be asked before the research begins. But all of them should be revisited after the research concludes. If all goes well, you feel satisfied with most aspects of your project experience, you produce a report and record of data and other activities, you feel that everyone's role has been properly acknowledged, and that the balance of praise and blame is fair,



that the project has produced new knowledge that will help to improve all children's lives in the area, or the lives of a specified subset of children over a period of time. Still, it is worth evaluating your experience by asking questions, as there may well be a follow-up or a next project.

- How is the research titled and disseminated? Titles are one of the most common means of making limited and contextual findings appear universal. This turns them from relevant knowledge into misleading and colonial knowledge. Publishing a piece of research about, say, mobile phones and children on a social housing estate in the Netherlands, or about helmet cameras in a skate park in England, under a title such as 'Children and mobile phones', creates and circulates a myth. It is not quite a lie, but it is not accurate information either. Why does work undertaken by Malaysian scholars in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand about children and mobile phone use not get to call itself 'Children and mobile phones?' Why is it titled 'Children and mobile phones in Asia' instead? We should all think carefully about how many aspects of children and technologies would have to be covered before research could legitimately call itself 'global'.
- What kinds of generalizations are being made in the research reports and publications based on it? How strongly are conclusions being worded and highlighted? Has it been presented to and in the communities where it took place? Were participants given the option of commenting?
- Set yourself some 'red lines'. If the funder did this (edited your report inaccurately, censored some findings, asked you to rush an extended process, told you to cut corners by leaving out particular cohorts for consultation, asked for photographs that depict only smiling and empowered or only sad and labouring children)... or tried to do that (take credit for your work, blame a single group for the failure of a project, suppress the findings completely) ... your response would be...?
- Use your knowledge to act accordingly – which might involve really difficult choices, that is, respectful or critical? Say something and lose your job or keep quiet? Push your own ideas or let someone else implement something inefficient? When would you walk away? What kinds of actions would cause you to blow the whistle?

# CHECKLIST 2

## Key definitions

| Term                              | Definition   |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Critical Race Theory (CRT)</b> | Theory and practice developed in the field of law and education that pays attention to the multiple racist discriminations and daily 'micro aggressions' faced by children and adults from religious and minority ethnic groups. While developed in the specific context of North America, CRT has been used by researchers to be aware of encoded and embedded racism, cultural discrimination and exclusion and absence of black, indigenous, working-class and/or low caste voices, cultures and experiences in textbooks, curricula, films, television news, boardrooms, nurseries, courts, examinations and sundry other sites. |
| <b>Colonial times</b>             | The period between the 15th and late-20th centuries during which more than half of the world's populations residing primarily in the global South – Asia, Africa, Latin America – but also in indigenous communities in North America and Australia-New Zealand – were subject to brutal and racist rule by Whites of Caucasian origin and European descent.   |
| <b>Coloniality</b>                | Events, processes, systems and relationships in the postcolonial era that exhibit aspects and symptoms of racist colonial power relations, identity and worldviews, but that may also be highly modern in their formations or other attributes. For example, during colonial times, indigenous languages were erased and devalued, while English, French, Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese were imposed, and still rule the education systems of many ex-colonies.  |
| <b>Contaminated knowledge</b>     | Any knowledge that implicitly or explicitly justifies, celebrates or reproduces patriarchal, racist, colonial and pre-colonial or modern capitalist social class systems, inequalities, injustices, prejudices, exclusions, biases and myths.  |
| <b>Epistemic</b>                  | Relating to knowledge (about the world, the self, spirituality etc.), philosophies of knowledge and knowledge production.  |

---

**Intersectionality**

A theory that suggests that identities are not singular and fixed but overlapping and unstable. We are not just women or men, but women or men of a certain age, race, geographic location, sexual orientation, spiritual or religious belief etc. Different aspects of our identities will come to the fore at different times. These overlapping identities mean that some of us experience oppression and discrimination as well as solidarity and fellowship, in complex and changing ways.

---

**Knowledge production**

The undertaking of any kind of empirical research or theoretical work that claims to be or to lead to scientific descriptions of and explanations about events, processes, relationships and other phenomena in the world.

---

**Postcolonial**

While traditionally taken to mean societies after the end of colonial rule, this phrase also refers to the condition of contemporary societies that have been through colonialism but have never truly decolonised by facing and debating issues of geopolitical and social power and inequality after decolonisation. Such societies – both those that colonise and those that were colonised – construct their populations' identities and histories in relation to the colonial period in ways that do not require a more complex re-evaluation of ethical, historical and social knowledge and practices. It has been argued that children are always positioned within all societies as the recipients of adult care, knowledge and control, and hence that children are always in a position whereby their perceptions of the world can be 'colonised' or undermined by those of adults. Further, children in global South postcolonial societies might be doubly subject to powerful adult regimes of thinking and being.

---

**Praxis**

Action infused with thought and emotion, brought to fruition with the help of others; practical interventions in the realms of inequality and injustice that take theories about why the world is the way it is very seriously, and try to apply these reflexively in building alternatives.

---

**Reflexivity**

The ability to locate, describe, analyse and be critical of one's own positions of power and privilege within global systems of geography, race, class, gender, knowledge, sexuality, age and the body. The impulse to reveal and work against one's own privileges in all research relationships, written texts and everyday circumstances.

---