

# Curating Childhoods

## Workshop Report

Liam Berriman & Rachel Thomson  
Centre for Innovation & Research in Childhood &  
Youth, University of Sussex

'Curating Childhoods: Developing a Multimedia Archive of Children's Everyday Lives' is funded by an AHRC Digital Transformation Amplification Award (AH/M002160/1).

For further information, please contact Dr Liam Berriman ([l.j.berriman@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:l.j.berriman@sussex.ac.uk))



Curating Childhoods: Workshop Report by Liam Berriman & Rachel Thomson is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

## Summary and aims of the workshop

On Saturday 6th December 2014 we invited children, families, researchers and archivists involved in a series of research studies, including the [Face 2 Face project](#), to take part in a day of discussions, games and activities at the Mass Observation Archive (MOA) building: The Keep. The main aim of the event was to explore with the workshop attendees: (1) how the research data generated as part of our studies would be archived, managed and cared for by the MOA, and (2) what kinds of issues are raised by archiving, in particular: confidentiality, anonymity, consent, data re-use, and boundaries between the public/private.

Prior to this event, some of our child participants had been involved in an ESRC-funded NCRM methodological innovation project called 'Face 2 Face: Tracing the Real and Mediated Across Children's Cultural Worlds'. This study provided a unique opportunity to explore how new forms of qualitative longitudinal and multimedia methods can be used to trace children's face to face and mediated lives across different temporalities (e.g. long/short, fast/slow). The Face 2 Face study's research design consisted of two main parts: first,

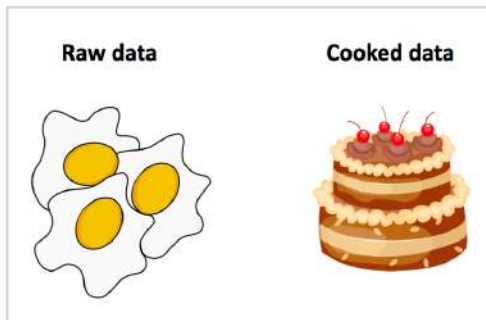


The Keep. Source: © Ryebrook <http://ryebrook.co.uk/uploads/45.-The-Keep.jpg>

exploring practices of **documenting** children's everyday lives using a range of methods and multimedia devices across different spaces and times within the day e.g. school, home etc.; and secondly, experimenting with **showing** and **sharing** research data through 'cooked' ethically sensitive [online multimedia documents](#) that re-animate the documented day. Following on from the Face 2 Face project, the Curating Childhoods study provided the next logical step in this sequence by considering the **archiving** of data. Developed in collaboration with the Mass Observation Archive, the project has worked in close consultation with children and their families to explore how we archive accounts of everyday life in the digital age. Building on on-going dialogues with our participants and their families, the workshop provided an opportunity to bring them *into the archive* to help shape and inform future research and archival practices. In this way, we sought to build a new kind of 'reflective space' (Nolas, 2015) in which young people could directly engage and participate in discussions about their data with other concerned parties (e.g. parents, researchers and archivists).

## Introducing the workshop

The workshop began at 11am, with participants finding their way to The Keep by car and public transport. A low midwinter sun and biting cold temperatures greeted us at both the beginning and end of the workshop, and the closeness to the Christmas holidays meant that some families were unable to attend due to other commitments. In total six young people, accompanied by family members, joined us. The day began with a welcome by Liam Berriman who described the



aims of the workshop, and the kinds of activities and discussions that were planned. He also introduced the concepts of 'raw' and 'cooked' data that the research team had been working with to distinguish between data that had been curated and published as multimedia documents online ('cooked') and data that would be placed in the archive ('raw')<sup>1</sup>. Raw and cooked formed part of a small lexicon of important words and phrases that would be introduced and discussed over the day, including: *data re-use, anonymity, consent,*

*confidentiality, embargo* and *archive*. Our aim was to familiarise participants with these terms whilst also exploring their own interpretations and definitions. We also wanted to find out what words participants felt were relevant when talking about their data is or should be used. Cardboard signs were placed around the workshop with these key terms on, and a number of 'blank' signs were available for new words and phrases arising from the workshop activities. These signs were also used later in the day as hand held props during 'talking head' sections for the workshop films.

### First activity: Data re-use

The first group activity of the day used a series of scenarios to explore how participants would feel about data being re-used in different ways (for example as education materials or art installations), by different people (for example linguists, television researchers, and journalists), and at different times in the future (next year, twenty years time). Led by Rachel Thomson, workshop participants (including the adults) were asked to position themselves along a continuum from feeling 'very comfortable' (the far left side of the room) to 'very uncomfortable' (the far right side of the room), depending on the scenario described. Once everyone had selected their position, each person was

#### The documentary maker

- In 20 years time (2035) a documentary film team using the archive want to have the contact details for young people involved in F2F so that they can interview them about changes over their life course.



<sup>1</sup> The distinction between 'raw' and 'cooked' is taken from the work of anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss to differentiate what is found in nature from what is a product of human culture. [Daniel Cohen](#) later adopted the terms for digital history projects, enabling a distinction as follows: 'Raw digital history comprises documents, information and communications that are heterogeneous and that have little, if any, organization. Cooked digital history takes such historical materials and adds helpful markings and a measure of homogeneity' (2004: 337). We learned about the terms from University of Sussex historian, Dr Lucy Robinson.

encouraged to share why they felt comfortable or not. Using a set of flip charts, Liam recorded key words and phrases provided in these reflections. People responded in a range of fascinating ways. Sometimes researchers were more worried about their data being re-used than were participants. In some cases young people felt happy with something that a parent was alarmed by ('I'd like to make my own choice'). In other cases parents were more relaxed than their children. Time made a big difference – some were worried that the passage of time would make them embarrassed by the silly things they said as children ('twenty-years is a long time'). Others felt that data would feel less personal and more historical with time.

### **'Dear future user': Postcard writing**



Following the group activity we invited all the assembled workshop participants (young people, family members, researchers and archivists) to write a postcard to a future user of the project's data. Our aim was to produce a set of documents that would accompany the data collection in the archive, and which would be mandatory reading for any future users of the data. In introducing this activity we tried to be as un-prescriptive as possible and asked participants to reflect on what they would personally want to communicate to a future user of the data. As the postcards would accompany the dataset, we were keen to maintain a link between the postcards and individual project participants without compromising anonymity. As such, we asked participants not to sign the postcards with their 'real' names but rather to use their research pseudonyms. Some examples include a parent asking that the future user 'treat this data with the trust and integrity with which it was given', a researcher explaining that 'the data is messy and imperfect, just like us' and a young person who hopes that 'the information based on me helps you with your research. I hope you can interpret it well. Please try to keep it as accurate as possible.'

### **The Archive tour**

The archive as a physical and architectural space was of central importance to the workshop. Rather than simply denoting abstract 'storage' we wanted our research participants and their families to experience the archive as a space where data 'lives' and is used in a variety of ways. As the last morning activity, Fiona Courage led a tour of The Keep for both the families and researchers that took them through the 'lifecycle' of a document, starting with its arrival at the archive. This provided an opportunity to see and experience the archive as a physical space, populated by a variety of people, documents, tools, and boxes. Before the tour started, we invited the participants to record their experience using iPod Touches we supplied. What we hadn't anticipated (having only



brought only three iPod Touches with us) was how popular this activity would prove to be. Consequently, some of the young people used their own phones or parent's instead. Reviewing the recordings of the tour afterwards, we were fascinated to see how each of the young people saw the archive - particularly in the case of one eight year old who had to stand on tip toes to be able to 'see' some of the archive's rooms.

### **Second activity: Group sessions**

The second group activity of the day involved three parallel group sessions, separated into 'adults' (led by Fiona), 'older children' (led by Liam) and 'younger children' (led by Rachel). The aim of these sessions was to explore some of the key terms and issues that had been raised in the morning in more detail, particularly around consent, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. Each group had a 'sweet bowl' containing a set of scenarios that were specifically created for that group. In the case of the younger children, these

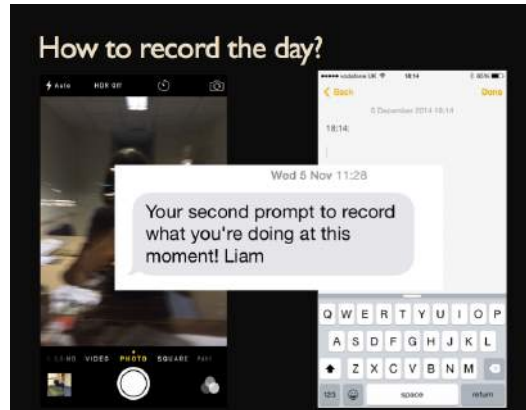


focused on what they would share with others, such as at home or school or as part of research. For the older children, the scenarios focused on sharing, decision-making and forms of responsibility. An underlying theme of the older children's scenarios was the idea of how and when they feel able to make choices and decisions for themselves (such as when to do homework and what time to go to bed), and in what instances they feel they needed parental help or support (such as taking part in research or buying a mobile phone). For the adults, the scenarios focused on 'sharing' information, and how they decide what aspects of their family life to share with others and on what terms - particularly focusing on the boundary between 'the private' and 'the public'. Parents often described encouraging their children's involvement in the research in the hope that they would find it a positive experience and would value the record of their lives in the future. For some parents research data was simultaneously a public record and part of the private family document. Younger children were fascinated by ideas of open access and were keen that their opinions and permission were sought when their data were re-used. As part of these sessions participants also contributed new 'keywords' to those used by the researchers and archivists. In the case of the teenagers this included: 'trust', 'mindfulness', 'respect' and 'responsibility'. (The workshop films can be accessed online [here](#).)

### **Day in a life: Past and present**

Our final session of the day involved looking at different 'day in a life' and archival records, and inviting the participants to experiment with recording their own 'day in a life' over the winter holidays. The session began with a presentation from Kate Howland who talked about the research team's own experiments in recording a 'day in their life' on the 5th November. Kate's presentation demonstrated how each of the researchers had documented their day and had compiled these 'raw' ingredients into a cooked document. The different examples included: a

day recorded using a diary app called [‘Momento’](#); a day video recorded on a phone and edited in iMovie; and two days recorded on mobile phones (using sound recording and camera functions) and presented in Word and PowerPoint. Kate described how each researcher had approached the task in a slightly different way, with each facing their own particular challenges. To help them, Liam sent the research team text message reminders on the day. It was proposed that the participants might also find this a useful prompt. During the session we suggested that the 28th December could be a ‘self-documentary’ day for the group, with all participants recording the same day.



Following Kate’s presentation, Fiona led a short talk on the history and background of the Mass Observation Archive’s diarists and the annual May 12th diary day - both of which have traditionally focused on adults. For 2015, the MOA plans to broaden its May 12th plans by inviting children and young people to document their day for the Archive. One of the MOA’s

primary reasons for being involved in the Curating Childhoods project has been to explore how these documentary activities can be opened up in a way that involves both children and their families. As part of her presentation, Fiona also shared materials from the Archive’s collection that had been created by and with children and young people, including a set of photographic flipbooks created by school pupils for the Brighton Photo Biennial, and a set of older documents produced by young women describing the contents of their wardrobes in the 1950s. These documents provided workshop participants with the opportunity to engage with the tactile qualities of



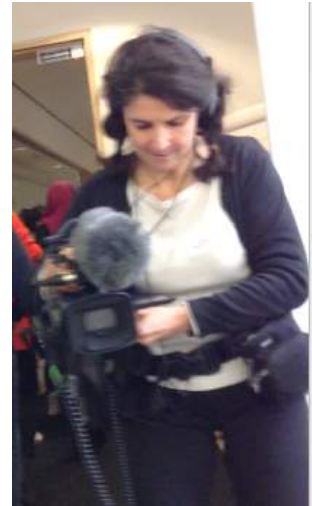
The flipbooks. Source: © Nigel Green  
<http://bpb.org.uk/2014/event/the-mass-education-project/>

the archival materials. Older documents came with a ‘special’ viewing board that helped participants to leaf through more fragile archival papers, whilst the flipbooks invited a more hands-on playfulness of flicking through images at different speeds.

## Recording the day

To communicate the findings of our workshop with a wider audience, we decided to produce a set of short online films that would be targeted at different groups (e.g. researchers, archivists and young people). We invited Susi Arnott - a documentary filmmaker who had worked with us on the Face 2 Face project - to film the workshop activities and discussions. This included ‘action’ footage of the activities and discussions, and ‘talking head’ segments of participants speaking directly to camera and reflecting on issues raised in the workshop. Whilst some

participants were initially nervous and self-conscious about being filmed, Susi's friendly style of filming meant that people gradually grew more comfortable with being filmed. In addition to Susi's footage of the day, we used sound recorders to produce audio records of the day's discussions. We also provided three iPod Touches for participants to take part in documenting the day by recording images and videos.



Recording the day raised issues that were strongly linked with the overarching themes of the workshop. Consent was a particularly significant issue, both in terms of: (1) participants providing consent to be filmed on the day; and (2) participants providing further consents for the footage to be used, stored and made public post-event. Participants were given consent forms on the day that addressed all of these issues, however we also promised to seek further consent and approval for the films during the editing process and prior to the films being made publicly available. This built on our existing practice of treating consent as an on-going dialogue, rather than simply a single moment at the beginning or end of the research process. As an experienced filmmaker, Susi also practised consent 'in action' by informing participants that at any point they could raise the palm of their hand to indicate that they did not wish to be filmed at a particular moment.

A second issue raised by filming related to the anonymity of the participants - an issue that had broader implications for the workshop as a whole.

### **Anonymity and internal confidentiality**

One of the ethical challenges for the workshop was to bring research participants together who had previously been anonymous to one another. In the invitation to the workshop we made it clear to our participants and their families that attending the workshop would mean breaching the internal confidentiality of the project, by disclosing their identities to other participants. We encouraged them to reflect carefully on this before accepting the workshop invitation. However, we were also aware through our conversation with participants that many of them were keen to meet other people involved in the project and to share their experiences. As such, we felt confident that the workshop would be a positive experience for all involved. On the day of workshop we also established a set of ground rules that emphasised the importance of respecting each other's anonymity outside of the workshop.

The filming of the workshop posed further challenges around anonymity and confidentiality. During our research we had adopted a cautious approach to data collection that avoided recording faces or identifying features (e.g. school names) that could disclose a person's identity. The workshop films represented the first time that participant's faces would be captured and recorded for the study. In producing the films as public documents we decided that their identities would not be linked or associated with their project pseudonyms and their archive data. Nonetheless, we recognised that this was not a guarantee that connections *wouldn't* be



made, and so the films were carefully edited to avoid revealing any further information about the participants' real identities, including names and which specific studies they have been involved. Building on discussions begun during fieldwork, we worked with participants and parents to agree what kind of confidentiality we could and should offer.

## **Learning points and recommendations**

In this final section we reflect on what new issues and forms of understanding were generated by the workshop, and how these might translate into guidance for different groups involved in working with children and young people's research data.

### **Researchers**

*1. Employing exemplars to illustrate potential future uses and users of data* – Despite on-going dialogues with our participants and their families around data archiving during our research projects, the data re-use scenarios presented in the workshop frequently elicited surprise. Responding to a scenario of data re-use by other researchers, one parent described how “taking part in this research I hadn't necessarily thought about how other researchers would use it [...] I hadn't considered it that much if I'm honest”. With the provision of scenarios, participants and their families were able to gain a more concrete sense of the way that data might be used, enabling them to ask questions about what the future life of data might be. As such, we recommend that scenarios and examples may play a useful role in the consent process, particularly in instances where data may have multiple future users. Scenarios provide new opportunities for reflecting on data re-use in ways that are more concrete and salient for participants and their families.

*2. Reflecting on use of research language/terminology* – During the workshop, keyword boards helped us to discuss a range of important research concepts (e.g. consent, confidentiality, embargo) that we often take for granted on information sheets and consent forms. However, we still found that the terminology remained too abstract or obscure for the majority of participants and that this acted as a barrier to shared understanding.



Through the use of 'blank' boards, we invited participating to share their own priorities and concerns for their data, allowing us to explore other key terms that held significant value, such as 'trust', 'respect' and 'responsibility'. We recommend carefully reflect on the forms of language used when discussing important ethical issues relating to data, and to invite participants to formulate concerns and priorities in their own words. Our videos provide a few examples of the types of key terms that might be explored with research participants [[link to videos](#)].

*3. Responsibility to participants post-research* – Reflecting on what happens to data 'post-research' has raised important issues around on-going researcher responsibility to participants after a study has concluded. During the workshop, both researchers and participants

acknowledged the significant relationships of trust developed during research. As responsibility for data shifts from a researcher or research team to an archive, this raises new concerns as to how this transition is managed. This devolution of responsibility concerns both researchers and archivists, and care needs to be taken in establishing new relationships of trust with participants as guardianship of data undergoes transition. We recommend that researchers build time into their research designs to discuss this process with participants and their families, potentially acting as a communicative bridge between participants and archivists (see below).

*4. Consent as relational* – Within research, and particularly research ethics guidelines, there is often a presumption that adults are able to ‘independently’ consent to research participation, whilst children are ‘dependent’ on adult support and guidance for informed consent. Amongst our teenagers we found a degree of wariness at the prospect of making future decisions about research by themselves, particularly in early adulthood. Our proposal is that consent be seen as a relational process where both adults and children may benefit from support and guidance from others when choosing to consent to participation in research – particularly in studies requiring significant investment from an individual. This might involve recommending that participants take the time to speak to relatives or close friends before consenting to participate in research.

## **Archivists**

*1. Relationship with research participants* – One of the main benefits for the archivists involved in the workshop was the opportunity to meet research participants whose data they would be looking after. While it may not always be practical or feasible for archivists to meet research participants, the workshop demonstrated that a more three-way relationship between researchers, archivists and participants has the potential to open up new dialogues around the future care of data. Connected with the issue of researcher responsibility post-research (see above), the opportunity for participants to visit the archive and meet archivists may also provide a means of facilitating new relationships of trust as guardianship of data is devolved. This may involve organising group tours of the archive or outreach activities, such as workshops. Such activities may be of value to both research participants and archivists as a way of facilitating new relationships of trust.

*2. Participant investments in data* – The workshop drew particular attention to the desire of many research participants to *know* what happens to their data after it has been archived. Whilst participants generally didn’t express a desire to give consent every time their data was re-used, many still wanted to when and how data was being used. This raises a challenging logistical issue for archivists who may not always find it feasible to contact participants each time data is used. A recommendation from the workshop was that re-use of data might be documented by archives so that research participants could be informed on a regular basis (e.g. annually) as to how their data is being used, potentially in the form of a newsletter. This would enable research participants to have a more concrete sense of the ‘life’ of their data.

## Data users

Our final set of recommendations relate to future users of archived data.

1. *Remembering that 'data are people' (reflecting on the concerns of data depositors)* – During our scenarios exercise, participants – including children, parents, archivists and researchers – shared a number of concerns around how data might be re-used in the future. This included apprehension around re-interpretation and re-presentation of data, and how the context of the data collection may be lost. As a means of



addressing and these channelling these concerns, we asked each person at the workshop to write a postcard to future users that would be included with the deposited data collections. This included requests to remember that “data are people” and therefore “messy and imperfect”. There were also many entreaties to “treat the data with respect” and to “look after it”. Whilst the inclusion of such messages for future users is a rarity, we suggest that they represent a set of hope and concerns that should ‘speak to’ all users of archived. We therefore urge all re-users of data to remember that ‘data are people’, ensuring that analysis involves careful reflection of the potential concerns of those whose data has been deposited.

2. *Managing data linkage* – Our final recommendation relates to an important ethical issue for archivists, researchers and data users. With the dawn of new forms of multimedia and digital data, key concerns are being raised around the potential for linkages between data that may compromise confidentiality and anonymity by inadvertently revealing research participants’ identities. In the case of qualitative longitudinal research this issue becomes increasingly salient as new layers of data are accumulated over time forming rich accounts of individual’s lives, but also making it more difficult to ensure anonymity across linked sets of data. Managing these concerns around data linkage at the point of data collection poses an increasingly onerous task, and would involve researchers having to censor data ‘on the go’ in order to prevent potential linkages with past and future data. As such we need a broader sense of how responsibility for managing data linkages occurs across the life cycle of data. Whilst researchers should always be mindful of the potential data linkages they are creating, such connections will not always be evident or visible until a dataset is analysed through different refractive readings. This raises a key concern about how we manage data linkage at the point of re-use, where unanticipated data linkages may occur. As such, we wish to emphasise the important responsibility of data users, in partnership with archivists, in helping to mitigate potential data linkages.

## **Bibliography**

Cohen, D. 2004. 'Digital history: the raw and the cooked' *Rethinking History*, 8(2), pp. 337–340. Available from: [http://www.dancohen.org/files/dig\\_hist\\_raw\\_cooked.pdf](http://www.dancohen.org/files/dig_hist_raw_cooked.pdf)

Nolas, M. 2015. 'Children's participation, childhood publics and social change: A review'. *Children and Society*, 29(2), pp. 157-167. Available from: [https://connectorsstudy.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/nolas\\_cs\\_post-review\\_final.pdf](https://connectorsstudy.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/nolas_cs_post-review_final.pdf)