

## A Creative Conversation for Re-imagining Creative Visual Methods with Children and Young People in Pandemic Times and Beyond

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### Abstract

In this project we forward insights about the importance of being in ‘the room where it happens’ – creating tactility and togetherness in the research encounter – for research with children and young people in times of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Created in response to the intense uptake of digital methods catalysed by COVID-19, in this project we productively re-imagine moments from our creative visual research with children and young people from before the COVID-19 pandemic. This re-imagining began early in 2020 and has continued to evolve, incorporating our shifting perspectives and ‘thinking with’ the scholarship of leading creative methodologists. The creative output is in the form of a ‘Prezine’ which is our concept and is a portmanteau bringing together ‘Prezi’ a presentation tool, and ‘zine’. The Prezine charts our creative conversation, moving between four connected rhizomes of thinking about creative research with children and young people: ‘the room where it happens’, being in the encounter, spaces for the unexpected, and what we are calling ‘methodological alchemy’. The Prezine documents our experiment in thinking about research futures where we openly and creatively explore the process of making this reflective resource about research ‘becomings’.

### Keywords

children, COVID-19, creative research methods, digital research methods, online research methods, disability, pandemic, post-digital, visual research methods, young people

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### Introduction

The discussion of creative and visual methodologies in research encounters with children and young people documented in our creative output – a Prezine – began in response to the sudden, intense uptake of digitally mediated research in times of Covid-19 (Ptolomey and Nelson, 2020). Drawing specifically on our doctoral research, we imagined alternative pathways to our research and were struck by the necessity of being in ‘the room where it happens’ (after Miranda 2016) in our work with children and young people. Mindy’s research focuses on everyday life with disabled girls and young women using zine-making workshops as a creative feminist method, and Libby’s doctoral research, ‘Understanding Childhood and Play in the Post-Digital Age’, examined historical and literary representations of play using creative methods of video-making with children. In the Prezine we introduce moments of tactility and materiality in our research, accompanied by re-imagining aspects of our research projects, highlighting scholarship which we are ‘thinking with’.

In the Prezine we move between four connected rhizomes of thinking. We take up Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) concept of the rhizome, to describe the way our ideas emerge across a non-hierarchical network, much like self-seeding plants with roots entangled and overlapping, surfacing where they find nourishment.

The first three rhizomes are: the room where it happens, being in the encounter, and spaces for the unexpected. In the fourth rhizome we forward our concept of ‘methodological alchemy’. Through this concept we look towards a future that harnesses the digital, but still makes space for sticky, exploratory, slow, tactile methods for togetherness – that create room for the unexpected. Methodological alchemy means attending to, while also looking beyond, the ‘nets of a relatively small time horizon’ (Back and Puwar, 2012: 8) – in this case, the Covid-19 pandemic. In this spirit we consider using the pandemic as a portal (Roy, 2020) to imagine a research landscape that can grow in inclusiveness.

## Navigating the Prezine

After initially planning to produce a hand-made zine, we wrangled with the ironic difficulties the pandemic presented – unable to be ‘in the room’ together, the search for a suitable platform resulted in our ‘produsing’ – producing and using (Bruns, 2009) – a ‘Prezine’ (portmanteau of Prezi and zine). Subverting the platform’s intended purpose as a presentation tool we have created a cut-and-paste rhizomatic map and scrapbook of our unfolding methodological thoughts and conversations. The Prezine attempts to convey temporal aspects of our conversations, which took place over around 13 months. The Prezine is intended to chart the beginnings of a journey, which we have no plans to stop travelling. As Honan (2007) has suggested, ‘rhizomes do not have clearly identifiable beginnings and ends. It is impossible to provide a linear description of the journey taken through and across a rhizome’ (p. 533). As much as we sought to find ways to represent the rhizomatic, non-linear approach which characterises our thinking, the Prezi platform imposed directional hierarchy and order. While you can navigate the Prezine along a linear path (taking around 40 minutes to travel), we welcome your resistance against linearity and hierarchy by clicking and dragging in different directions.

## Who is it for?

We imagine this Prezine will be useful to researchers, students and practitioners working with children and young people in pandemic times and beyond, and those who are creatively thinking about space, tactility and encounters in the post-digital times we are in. We believe this output will be of particular interest to researchers, students, and practitioners interested in working inclusively with children and young people using creative methods, posthumanism, new materialism, and digital and post-digital research practices. The Prezine is an experiment in thinking creatively about research presents and futures. We believe academics interested in these concepts and ideas will appreciate our openness and exploratory methods of creating this thinking, reflective and ‘becoming’ resource about research today and in the future.

## Our four rhizomes: the room where it happens, being in the encounter, spaces for the unexpected, and methodological alchemy

The rhizomes focus on four different, but interconnected, aspects of the research encounter. In ‘the room where it happens’ we consider the ways tactility and togetherness can be created between people and materials in spaces and place using what we are calling ‘engagement boxes’ of materials sent through the post, while giving consideration to access needs and budgeting for inclusive research. In ‘being in the encounter’ we examine what ‘beingness’ or ‘togetherness’ in the research encounter entails across spaces, times and platforms of interaction. In this rhizome we consider looking for opportunities to pay attention to children and young people’s experiences and thinking about the ways to meet participants on their own terms, in their own spaces, online and offline. In ‘spaces

for the unexpected' we discuss opportunities for resistance and mischief achieved by introducing materials for creative and destructive processes. Though this, we foreground children and young people's agency. Within these spaces we listen to children and young people to understand the role of structures in their lives, and attend to how they perform their identities. We put forward the concept of 'methodological alchemy' to describe an orientation towards methods as constantly in processes of becoming, being and unfolding. We align our approach with Law's provocation, which asks 'what realities are being made manifest or Othered in this or that mode of inquiry?' (Law, 2004: 155). We pushed ourselves in these unsettled times to reimagine what realities were being (re)made in the pandemic as we worked together-apart and reimagined what our doctoral projects and methods of inquiry mean and could mean. With this Prezine we attempt to carry this knowledge forward, taking with us what we have learnt, seeing more clearly the ways that research methods have Othered and what role inquiry plays in determining how children and young people are seen and heard in research encounters.

## **Ethics and accessibility**

Our Prezine is a multimodal document which includes text, audio, video and images. In order to strive for accessibility to most audiences, we have included Alt Text transcript for the entire document, audio text for the sound clips embedded into the document and subtitles for the videos.

Ethical considerations are reflected upon throughout the Prezine, and both of our doctoral research projects were approved by the University of Glasgow's College of Social Science Ethics Committee. We have consent to use all images and quotes from the participants and their parents/guardians where appropriate.

## **Conclusion**

The creative conversation in this Prezine foregrounds the importance of prioritising children and young people's needs and experiences throughout and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic. Rather than trying to re-create pre-pandemic approaches to research, we put forward the concept of methodological alchemy, exploring the need for creative methods rooted in ethical thinking, being and becoming. Through our concept of methodological alchemy we position ourselves, our fellow researchers, and our participants as entangled with materials in places and space, on a present and future-oriented journey that continues to evolve. Disrupting notions of the powerful individual human alchemist (see Coleman, 2020: 56), we think about the pursuit of methods which are inclusive, desirable, fantastical, playful, future-oriented, live and in the moment, that engage senses and tactility, and create spaces for the unexpected. Indeed, our definition of methodological alchemy is one constantly in the process of becoming, being and unfolding. We invite others to join our creative conversation using the hashtag **#MethodsAlchemy** on Twitter. In this way, invoking Donna Haraway, we ask others to converse with us as we 'follow the threads where they lead in order to track them and find their tangles and patterns crucial for staying with the trouble in real and particular places and times' (Haraway, 2016: 3).

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## Author biographies

Amanda M Ptolomey is a creative inquirer and scholar based across Sociology and Education at the University of Glasgow. Mindy's research explores everyday life with marginalised people using community-led and arts-based approaches. Mindy also leads the research project Researchers Don't Cry?!, and has recently commenced anti-colonial inquiry researching the pasts, presents, and futures of education through quilt making. Alongside academic

scholarship, Mindy has worked in community development and peacebuilding for over a decade. Mindy can be found on Twitter @amandasays

**Elizabeth L Nelson** is Lecturer of Multimodal Literacies at the University of Glasgow. Her research examines play and new technologies in the hands of children, drawing on historical and literary representations of children's play and culture to understand experiences of childhood today. She has published on young people's relationship to digital technologies, historical accounts of play, and creative methodologies in research encounters with children and young people. Her current project examines two unexplored archives of folklore and children's play, working with the children at Golspie High School to examine, respond to and contribute to future archives. She can be found on Twitter @Libby\_Lucy

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