



Ethical Challenges in the Play Observatory Project

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Ethical Challenges in the Play Observatory Project



- Overview of the Project
- Research Design
- Ethics Overview
- Ethics in the Play Observatory
- Challenges and Potentials
- Procedures v. Practice
- Examples from the Project
- Discussion Starters

Play in the Pandemic Exhibition Interface
(designed by Episod Studio with the Young V & A)
<https://playinthepandemic.play-observatory.com/>

The Play Observatory: The Team / The Questions



How have children been playing during the pandemic (both offline and online, analogue and digital), from the initial outbreak of the virus, throughout lockdown, and during ongoing social distancing?

How has the COVID-19 pandemic featured as a point of reference in play and peer culture, and what insights does this give into children's unique experiences of it?

What continuities and discontinuities does this play and peer culture have compared to those of the past, and between different communities?

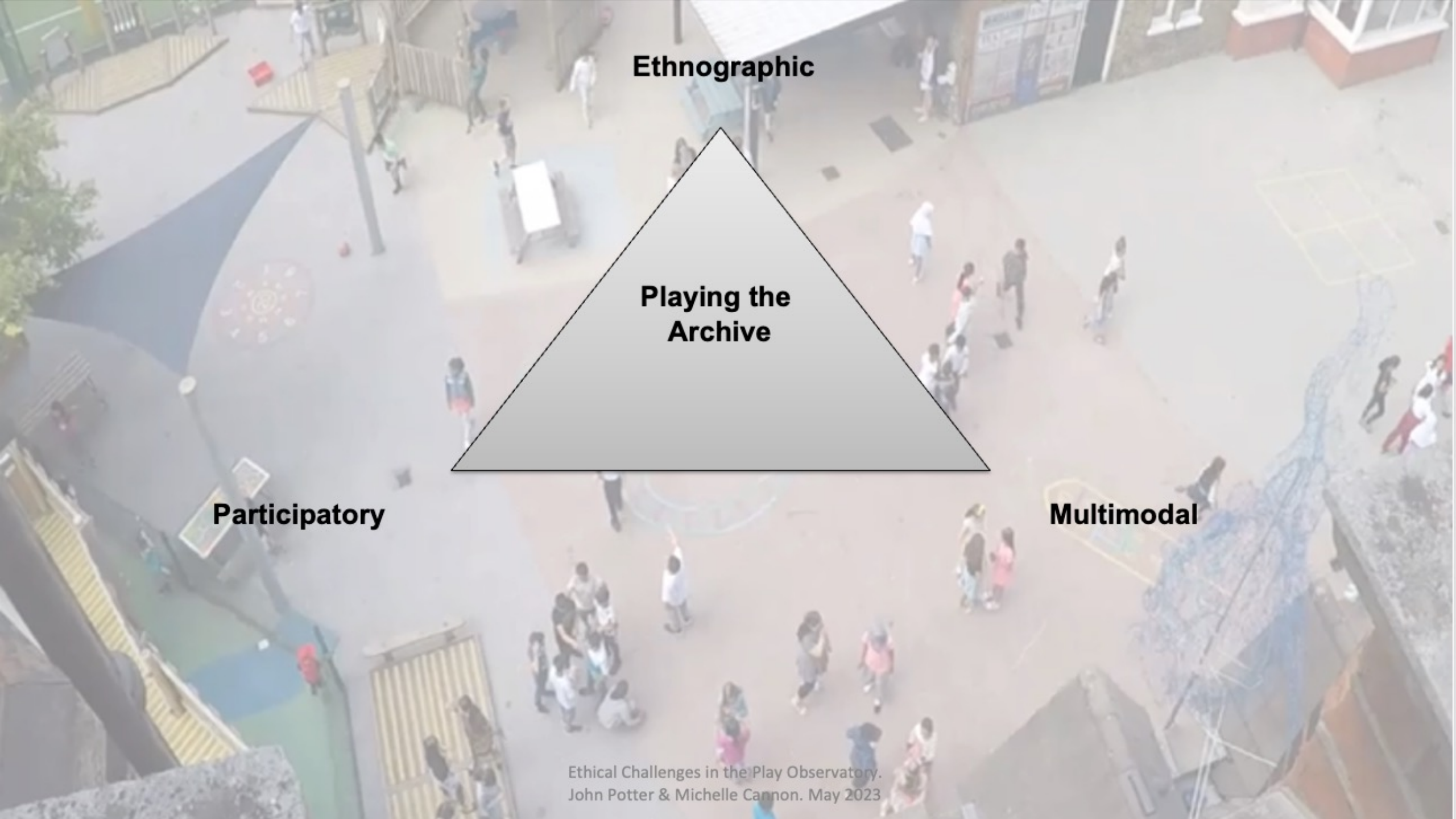
How can interdisciplinary perspectives from cultural studies, folklore studies, history of childhood, media literacies, multimodality and education help us better understand the role and value of play for wellbeing during times of crisis?



Transitions in spaces of play

- Lockdowns
- School closures
- Playground closures
- Youth group closures
- Quarantine
- Shielding
- Self-isolation
- Social distancing
- Bubbles

COVID-19 pandemic deeply affecting where, when, how and with whom children can play.

An aerial photograph of a public square or park area. The square is paved and has various play structures, including slides and climbing equipment. There are many people walking and playing. A large, semi-transparent grey triangle is overlaid on the center of the image. The text 'Ethnographic' is at the top, 'Participatory' is at the bottom left, and 'Multimodal' is at the bottom right. In the center of the triangle, the text 'Playing the Archive' is written.

Ethnographic

**Playing the
Archive**

Participatory

Multimodal

Research Design

Ethnographic

ONLINE
survey
+
case studies



Participatory



All By Myself - Getting to Light at the end of the tunnel



Multimodal

Social Research During the Pandemic

- Changing the methods, not the aim (Herbert, 2020)
- Keeping the essence of methods alive (Barker, 2021)
- *Thinking* ethnographically (DeHart, 2020)

→ Adapting and applying methods to meet project aims and maintain ethos in new context

- Recognising the specific features of online research with children
- Acknowledging limitations, whilst being open to new possibilities

British Educational Research Association (BERA) Guidelines 2018 edition



<https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018>

‘(BERA)... recognises that the community of educational researchers is multidisciplinary and diverse in its application of research approaches and philosophical positions. Concepts such as ‘data’, ‘reliability’, ‘validity’, ‘credibility’, ‘trustworthiness’, ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’ may therefore be understood and legitimately applied in different ways. Ethical review processes thus need to be conducted in an open-minded and inclusive manner. These guidelines do not pre-empt, judge or constrain, directly or indirectly, anyone’s choice of research approach.’

Informed consent

Participants must consent to participating in your research

Participants must be informed about your research and understand what they are agreeing to

Participants can withdraw their participation at any time for no reason at all



Children's information sheet and consent form

Finding out about play

[Tick one box ✓]

I am happy to take part in this project



I am not happy to take part in this project



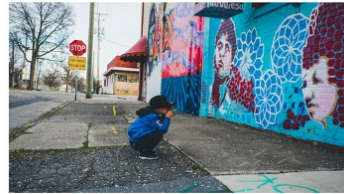
My name is.....

To be completed by researcher:

Date:

Participant identification number for this project:

Finding out about play



We are researchers at University College London and the University of Sheffield, and we want to find out about how children are playing in 2020 and 2021.

We want to ask you to help us in this study by being researchers. That means we want you to help us by sharing some of your ideas and memories about your play and leisure time. These can be indoors or outdoor activities, games and things you do with family members or friends, or on your own. It can be things you have made, like drawings, models, things you played with online, in video games and apps. Your contributions are for people to look at now and for people in the future so that they can see what it was like to be child in the time of coronavirus, when some things about how we normally live were sometimes a bit different.

As a contributor, we will ask you to do upload to our Observatory some information about how you have been playing. You can do some or all of the following things:

- Draw, paint, make collages, or take photographs of the things you have been playing with and the things you have made as part of your play
- Write, or make short video or audio recordings of yourself, explaining some of the things you have been playing
- Take photographs of the places you have been playing in – this can be at home, in your local area, on holiday and so on
- Record yourself talking to a family member, or friend who also wants to contribute to the Observatory, about how your play has been affected by coronavirus:
 - How was your play before lockdown different to your play during lockdown?
 - How is your play at school with social distancing different to the way it was before social distancing? What kinds of games are you playing?



You can share as much or as little as you like.

You can also stop taking part / withdraw if you want to.

Your name will not appear in any writing about the project.

People may be able to see you in films and photographs, but they will not know your name.

Please let us know if you are happy to take part by putting a tick in the box next to the smiley face, or if you do not want to take part, put a tick in the box next to the sad face.

If you change your mind about this at any time, just let us know by emailing us: info@play-observatory.com

The Survey

[Play your part](#)[Resources](#)[Blog](#)[Team](#)[About](#) [Contact us](#)[Play in the Pandemic](#)

What is the Play Observatory Survey?



Hi! I'm Peeps and I explain key points for younger children. The Play Observatory is a project that wants to find out how children are playing in 2020 and 2021.

The [Play Observatory](#) is a project researching children's play during Covid-19 and beyond. We have created an online survey to gather this information and enable as many people as possible to contribute. We want to understand children's play experiences during this unique time in history and inform future generations' understandings of young people's lives.

The information on this page explains how to take part in the survey and what will happen to your contributions. Please read it carefully and email us (survey@play-observatory.com) if you have any questions before registering. We encourage parents/legal guardians to discuss this with their children.

[Who can take part? >](#)

What is the Play Observatory Survey?

[Who can take part?](#)[What are we collecting?](#)[How do we join in?](#)[What files can we upload?](#)[What happens to our contributions?](#)[Pros and cons of taking part](#)[What about confidentiality?](#)[Data Protection](#)[Other ways to be involved](#)[Contacting us](#)[Open the survey](#)

Online in-depth interviews



Building on online survey, adding greater depth to data and offering children further participation through:

- Zoom interviews
- Drawing/mapping
- Film-making
- Advice on project outputs

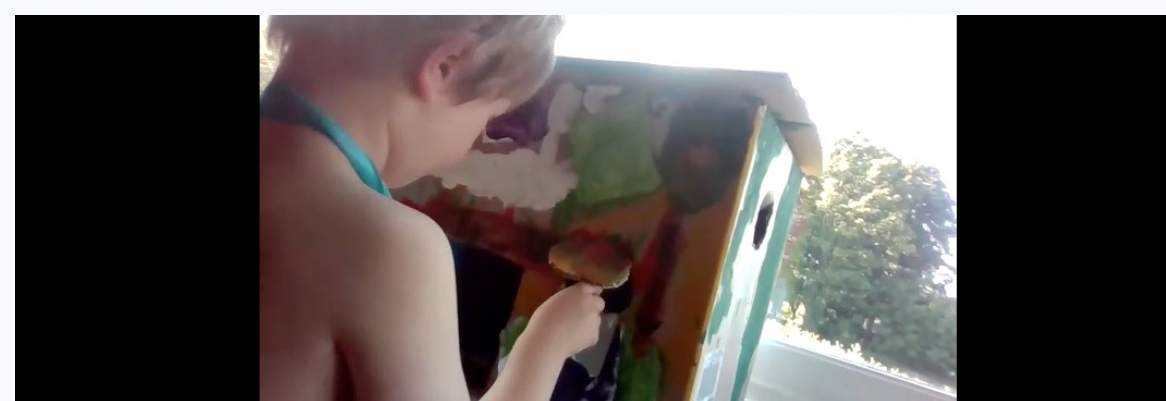
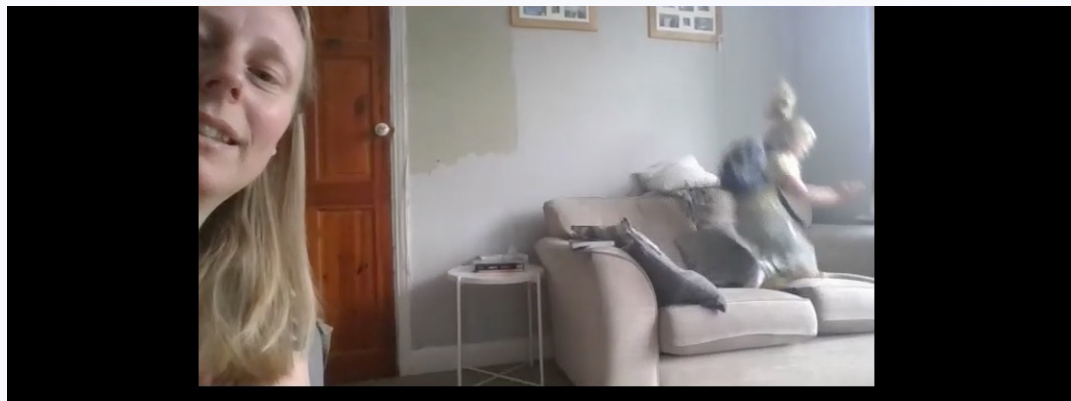
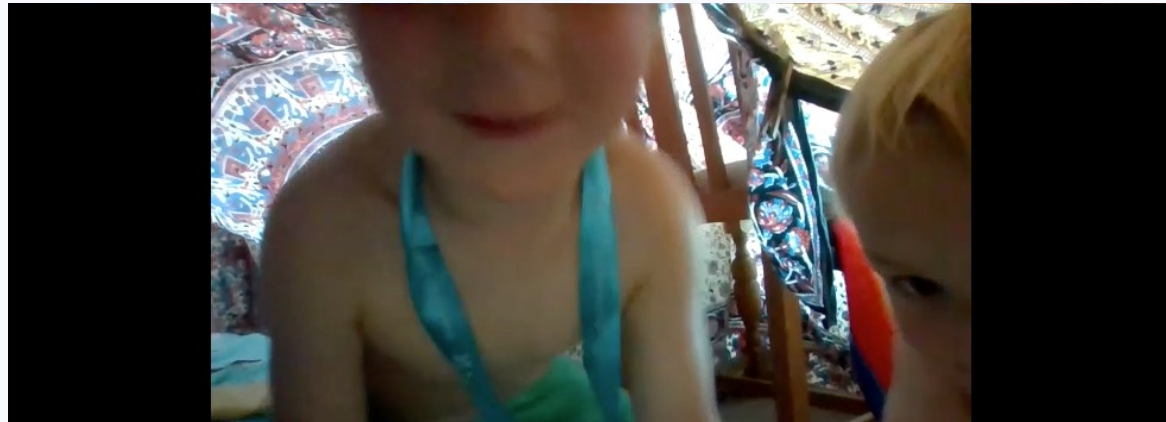
N, age 5

“I’ll get my toys ... he’s asleep”



B, age 3 and R, age 1

“It’s a bear cave”



“Climbing and ... look at me!”

“My special snake house”

Online Case Studies with Children

Some Challenges

- Digital inequalities
- Face-to-face rapport
- Spatial, embodied experiences
- Parent mediation(?)
- A need for flexibility
- Zoom transcription issues

Some Potentials

- Safety of families and researchers
- Overcoming geographical barriers
- Avoiding travel costs
- Convenient for families/researchers
- Growing familiarity with Zoom
- Ease of recording, with lens on researchers too
- Parent involvement
- 'Zooming' into homes: insider/outsider
- Playful methodologies

Social Science vs (Media) Archive Protocols

Social Science

- Attempts to capture the world as it is now
- Governed by ethics procedures around anonymity, consent, and privacy as previously discussed
- Portal / Gateway into New Territory of Ethical Implications
- Multi partner challenges
- Designing for Child Participation

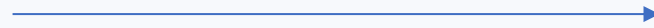
Media Archive

- Gathers information for the future
- Identity and traceability of participants
- Non-participants in shot
- Uploader rights
- Producer & dissemination rights (Creative Commons)
- Copyright issues
- Children's rights
- Lifespan of the dataset

Two Dimensions of Research Ethics

Procedural Ethics

Internal processes
Checklists
Imported from Natural
Sciences



“Ethics in Practice”

Events in qualitative
research
‘Microethics’ in the field
Paying attention to moments
which make meaning

Procedural Ethics, “Ethics in Practice” and the relation of Reflexivity to Ethics

Reflexivity in research is critical reflection on the knowledge produced

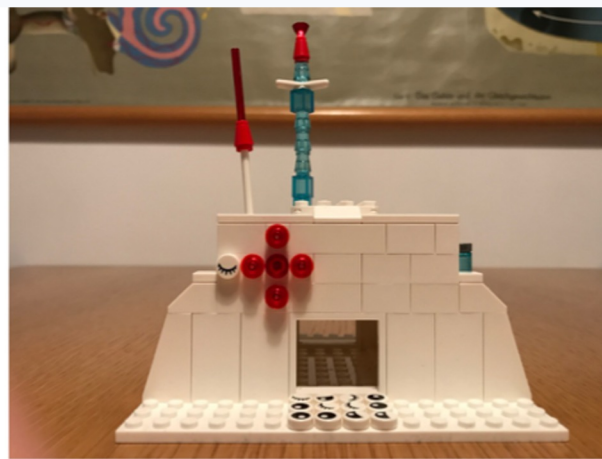
And

Critical reflection on *how* that knowledge is produced

It is strongly related to ethics because ethics *requires* the latter

‘Being reflexive about research practice means a number of things: first, an acknowledgment of microethics, that is, of the ethical dimensions of ordinary, everyday research practice; second, sensitivity to what we call the “ethically important moments” in research practice, in all their particularities; and third, having or being able to develop a means of addressing and responding to ethical concerns if and when they arise in the research...’ (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p 276)

Pandemic Play Submissions



Outside
Inside
Onscreen
Offscreen
Construction
Toys
Objects
Dens
Hiding spaces
Siblings
Virtual ducks
Water
Paint
Lego
And more...



Issues with Louis's Contributions

It's not a rap
It's not a rhyme
It's just things
happening over
time



- Identity and traceability of participants
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Creative Commons licensing

[Creative Commons \(CC\)](#) – a non-profit organization enabling the sharing and use of creativity and knowledge through free legal tools, globally.

Creators can select one of 6 copyright licenses which determine the terms of re-use of creative products by others.

Graphic: CC license spectrum between the most open *public domain* (top), through *some rights reserved*, to the most closed *all rights reserved* (bottom, the default).

Left side indicates the 6 cases of use allowed, right side indicates the license components.

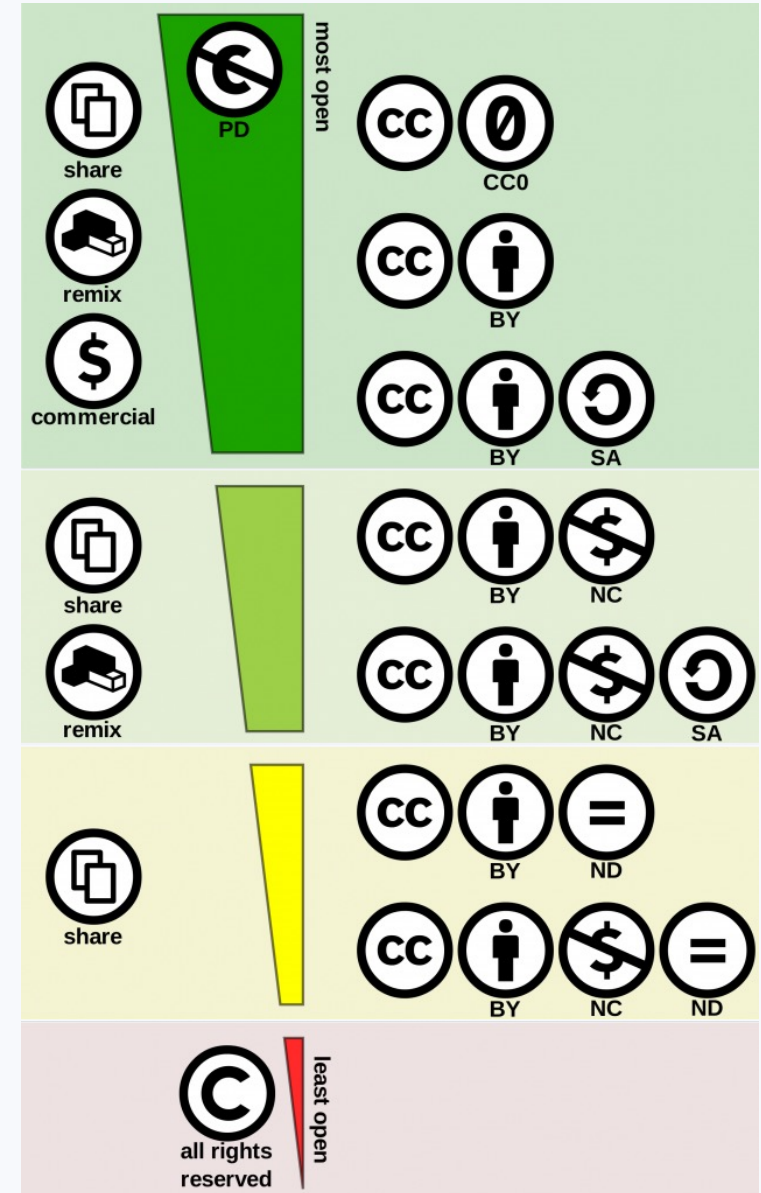
The dark green area are compatible with *Free Cultural Works*.

The light green area is like the *Fair Use* concept.

The two green areas together are compatible with *Remix Culture*.

Example of Play Observatory attribution:

'Hoarding toilet paper', by Woody Brownell, Play Observatory
PL192C1/S002/v1, <https://doi.org/10.15131/shef.data.XXXXX> is licensed under
CC BY-NC-ND 4.0



"Creative Commons License Spectrum" by [Shaddim](#) (CC BY)

Ethical Challenges: Discussion Starters



- Do you have any comments or questions about ethics procedures versus ethics in practice? Based on your own experience?
- How might regular procedures need to change to accommodate digital media?
- How shareable should data be?
- Do you have any further questions for us?

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Play Observatory Symposium Recordings January 2022: <https://vimeo.com/711209842>

play-observatory.com



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