Why the Anthropology of Children & Youth?

Research in Madagascar.

Interest in cultural transmission, code-switching & the mediation of identity markers to new generations.

Migrant children & code switching,
Presentation of two case-studies:

Sandra Evers & Marry Kooy in Mauritius;

Sara ter Beeke & Sandra Evers in the Netherlands.
Our Work

Chair of EASA Anthropology of Children and Youth Network (based at VU University, Amsterdam)


Joint research programme with Professor Lydia Krabbendam (educational neuroscience) on the influence of culture on neural processes. Funded by Dutch Science Foundation → focus on children’s code-switching.

Currently visiting professor at UBC, work with Jennifer Vadeboncoeur, Nancy Perry, Barbara Weber.
What is code-switching?

We study both linguistic and cultural code-switching as analytically defined by Molinsky: "Yet whereas linguistic code-switching describes the act of switching from one language to another, cross-cultural code-switching describes the task of moving between culturally ingrained systems of behavior." (Molinsky 2007: 623).

Interdisciplinary approach: e.g. anthropology, history, linguistics and cognitive sciences.

We innovate on this proposed analytical distinction by pointing to the importance of setting.
What is code-switching?

As argued by Chan (2007:181), migrant children can experience differences in practices, beliefs, and values between norms in the home and those in the school. Whereas Molinsky (2007) talks about ‘cross-cultural code-switching’, to describe the act of adaptation between “different cultural norms for appropriate behavior” (Molinsky 2007:624), we argue that migrant children switch between ‘settings’, instead of ‘cultures’. These settings are demarcated according to three key identifiers: **location**, **language**, **people**.
Analytical Distinction

- **Location** as identifier of **physical** differences
- **Language** as identifier of **linguistic** differences
- **People** as identifier of **cultural** differences
Research Methods

Methods stem from: computer-linguistics, neuroscience, pedagogy, sociology, anthropology, education research.

Today we focus on:
- Drawing, Photo and Theatre Elicitation.
- Participant Observation.
- Extensive participatory interviewing.
- Network Analysis (including digital networks) – mapping children’s networks
- Source mapping – where do children draw information from?
Where do the children get their information from?

Intermediality chart

Social Environment

School (Teachers / Curriculum)

Peers

Imagination, cognitive & physical processes

Modern media

Religious and cultural references
The role of the senses

What does the oval represent?

Senses: what children hear, see, taste, smell, touch and feel (emotive, indexical positioning in the social setting).

Intermediality: the cognitive and physical fields where a child receives, processes and interprets information received from media and mediations.
Location (home setting) – Case 1

- History: eviction from the Chagos islands;
- Socio-economic realities;
- Fragmented kin groups;
- Violence in the home and social environment;
- Life in Mauritius: Sagren ("sorrow"), latristes ("sadness"), lamizer ("misery", "poverty").
- Children’s economic and care responsibilities.
- Social position of “Creoles” in Mauritius.
Domination in education and media of Indian Mauritians (67% of population, “Creoles”: 28%).

ZEP schools.

“They are not intelligent enough”.

Keeping the social environment out – what the school gate cannot stop from coming into the school setting.

Absence of children – high drop-out rates.

Representations of children’s background in the curriculum.
“Well they are not really from India, but it would have been nice.”
Language (home setting)

- Creole dialect in the house, parents often do not speak English very well.
- Parents also have disrupted schooling trajectories.
- Parents have no faith that education can change the destiny of the children.
- Parents cannot help their children sufficiently & homework classes are not affordable (such classes are common for Indian-Mauritian children)
- Disconnection between the care-givers and the school.
Language (school setting)

- English and Creole.
- Intermediality between Indian Mauritian children and their teachers.
- Hindi classes in the school.
- Reinforcement of Indianess and the marginalised cultural position of the Creole.
- Religious anchoring of Indianess in wider society, language, school, religion and media.
People (home setting)

- Imagined and real social networks of the children.

- Gendered dreams of a better life in Chagos: Boner (“happiness”), ansam (“togetherness”).

- Chagossian children as brick and mortar of the imagined and real community of chagossians.
Teachers often only discovered that children had a Chagossian background during the drawing exercises and/or were unfamiliar with the plight of the Chagossians.

Chagossian children derive pride from “being Chagossian” & “we are not just Creole”.

Children as code-switchers & “cultural navigators”

Energy that can be boosted by the teachers to make sure that they do not unhinge from the school system.
History: Migration to the Netherlands in the 1960s – 1970s, during a period of labour migration, Amsterdam West (Kolenkit), the largest immigrant groups being from Turkish and Moroccan descent (almost 80%).

In 2009, the Kolenkit area was labeled “”worst” (an area thought to be poor, unsafe, etc.), due to high crime rates and the poor socio-economic status of the majority of the residents.

Restrictions of children in the public space. Children as language brokers for the parents and grandparents.
Kolenkit church
The inspection established a list of primary schools that are labeled as “weak”; a very weak school is defined as a school with insufficient educational outcomes.

To gain a deeper understanding of the rules and codes of each setting, the children engaged in “Theatre Elicitation”.

Children as “cultural navigators” & first signs of unhinging.
Children speak Turkish or Moroccan at home but with siblings they speak Dutch.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ‘home-school switch’</th>
<th>Teacher’s perspective</th>
<th>Children’s perspective</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linguistic differences</strong></td>
<td>At home, children speak their parents’ mother tongue, at school, they have to speak Dutch.</td>
<td>Various languages are spoken at home and at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural differences</strong></td>
<td>Parents are authoritarian; therefore children find it difficult to accept ‘mild’ instructions from teachers.</td>
<td>Creative ‘mixing’ and ‘blending’ of cultural practices (Long et al., 2007:240)</td>
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</table>
In school children are obliged to speak Dutch, this is reinforced strictly and signs are posted everywhere.

Code switching, example of Dunya, who speaks Kurdish with her mother, Dutch in the school but taught herself some Turkish and Moroccan to be able to communicate with her friends of school.

Dunya: Miss, are you a Dutchwoman?
Researcher: Yes, and you too, right? You live here…
Dunya: Yes, that’s true. But I’m not a REAL Dutchwomen. (informal interview Sara ter Beeke, 26-4-2013)
People (home setting)

- Imagined and real social networks of the children.
- The role of religious cultural anchoring.
- The perception of what a child is and what the roles of children should be.
- Socio-economic aspects and lodging challenges.
Neoliberal education & children as individuals instead as part of collective & extended kin group anchoring.

“I” is the first word learned in school.

Children as code-switchers & “cultural navigators”

Energy that can be boosted by the teachers to make sure that they do not unhinge from the school system.
What are the personal and social variables influencing cross-setting code-switching?

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<th>Concepts</th>
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<td>Migrant children’s ability to draw upon different resources and integrate them</td>
<td>Syncretism/hybridity (Duranti 2001; Hendry 1999 in Long et al., 2007:241) (Long et al, 2007:241) Bi-cultural competence (Sundar, 2008:255)</td>
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<td>Migrant children’s ability to determine what is “appropriate” behavior</td>
<td>Decoding skills (Stanton-Salazar, 1997:13) Metacognitive ability (Earley &amp; Ang, 2003 in Molinsky, 2007:626)</td>
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Personal Variables

**Linguistic competence**: ability to switch from one language to another; related to ‘linguistic code-switching’ (Heller, 1988 in Molinsky, 2007:623)

**Bi-cultural competence**: ability to draw upon different resources and integrate them (Sundar, 2008:255); similar to ‘syncretism’/’hybridity’ (Duranti 2001; Hendry 1999 in Long et al., 2007:241) (Long et al., 2007:241)

**Decoding competence**: ability to observe and determine what is “appropriate” behavior (Stanton-Salazar, 1997:13); similar to ‘metacognitive ability’ (Earley & Ang, 2003 in Molinsky, 2007:626)

**Performance competence**: ability to copy behavior and perform cross-setting code-switching; ‘task performance’ dimension of code-switching (Van Maanen, 1979, in Molinsky, 2007:624); related to ‘behavioral capabilities’ (Earley & Ang, 2003 in Molinsky, 2007:632)
Social Variables

**Social environment:** the safety of a context (e.g. parents are supportive) determines children’s attempts to ‘switch’; related to ‘contextual variables’ (Molinsky, 2007:626)

**Socio-economic barriers:** can form obstacles to engage in settings (Stanton-Salazar, 1997:24)
Other Findings

Location - Physical settings. Children’s descriptions of differences are limited to the explicit rules of a specific setting, as a lot remained at the level of "what goes without saying" as internalized practices. Theatre elicitation to unravel such distinctions.

Language. As argued by Kramsch (2003) and Brown (2002), language identifies boundaries between members of different cultural groups. But the pilots show various languages in just one setting. This suggests that it is not as simple as separating the settings along linguistic lines.

3) People. Most children are skilled in navigating and mediating between different social networks ranging from school to the home.
As argued by Molinsky, ‘cultural intelligence’ (Earley & Ang, 2003 in Molinsky, 2007:622) is critical for the effectiveness of a code-switch.

We aim to trace the impact of cultural schemata and social-economic circumstances by better tracking children's networks and interactions with the educational system. We hypothesize that while a lack of cultural blending of migrant children at an early age is a strong predictor of later educational challenges, a cross-cultural schemata also produces ‘cultural navigators’ skilled in mediating divergent cultural landscapes.
Children who unhinge

The key to our research and its originality resides in a process we refer to as enhancement/unhinging. Enhancement is the strengthening of the migrant children’s roles and perceived value within society. Unhinging is the process of detachment and development of parallel strategies which may be inconsistent with those of society. Migrant children experience is often typified by collision of ideational environments. Much of the work to date has focused on the results appearing during puberty years when the disparity of environments becomes untenable, and children become unhinged, and pursue goals deemed to be ‘anti-social’.

While we will also examine and measure such ‘detachment’ factors, we will specifically focus on certain migrant children - the cultural navigators – who succeed in merging cultural grids in order to come up with new molds of cultural transmission.
Our aim (based on the pilot studies) for the research programme

The aim is to produce a typology barometer of children ranging from those who succeed (and why) in mediating cultural anchorings of home, school and wider society ('cultural navigators') to those who experience difficulties in merging various cultural paradigms. The results will be used for policy and educational practices, e.g. proposals for school curricula.
Learning Outcomes

- Children's pervasive roles in cultural innovating and cementing social networks;
- Children's resilience and adaption capacities;
- Migrant children have tools that will benefit them in their navigation of multi-cultural environments;
- Children are cultural innovators in terms of "blending & mixing" varied cultural schemata;
- Adults can be inspired by children's perspectives and practices in this regard.
Thank you

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