

# Intergenerational and Intercultural Civic Learning Through Storied Child-led Walks of Chiang Mai

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## Abstract

Recent times have witnessed global trends of increased protection toward children in public spaces. The participatory arts project *The Walking Neighbourhood hosted by Children* renegotiates child agency in public spaces by inviting primary school aged children to curate and lead adult audiences on walks of local neighbourhoods. Multiple cities across Australia, Asia and Europe have hosted *The Walking Neighbourhood* since 2012. This article focuses on one aspect of that initiative: the Australian-Thai research collaboration for the Chiang Mai child-hosted walks. Through storytelling, the Australian and Thai authors share their sensorial ethno- graphic encounters of two child-led walks in Chiang Mai to provide lived sensorial affective accounts of children's perceptions and engagement with public spaces. These stories demonstrate how the project provides education for children's independently mobile engagement with their neighbourhoods and public spaces, in that the children competently managed responsibility for their adult audiences, and embraced responsibility for sharing their emplaced connections with a neighbourhood locale. Through participatory arts practice, artists, child hosts, and adult audience members co-construct and interpret exploratory walks of local neighbourhoods to enable enhanced independent mobilities for children, challenging the norms that assert controlled childhoods. Such interdisciplinary, intergenerational and intercultural experiences can enable reconceptualisation of children and public spaces and new realities for civic engagement and learning for all.

KEY WORDS *children; public spaces; storytelling; sensory ethnography; participatory arts; walking*

## **Children and public spaces**

Children's participation in public spaces is highly contested. Many contemporary urban children inhabit an adult-constructed world, which excludes them from public spaces unless accompanied by a supervising adult and confines them to specially designated institutions, such as schools and kindergartens (Roche, 1999; Elsley, 2004). Increased traffic transforms perceptions of the street from a neighbourhood play space to a place of danger (e.g. Tandy, 1999). And increased anxiety about diverse forms of harm that strangers or others might cause our young dominate the public imagination; these are what Valentine (2004) refers to as geographies of fear manifested through terror talk despite contradicting evidence (e.g. Gleeson, 2006; Cairns, 2008). Such widespread concerns produce both controlled childhoods and passionate advocates who call for change to such constraints, such as American mother Lenore Skenazy (2009), play expert Tim Gill (2007), and writer Warwick Cairns (2008), passionately advocating for the rectification of children's loss of freedom.

Children's independent mobilities have significantly dropped in recent decades (e.g. O'Brien *et al.*, 2000; Hillman *et al.*, 1990). A recent comparative study in England and Australia found that the most significant finding was the low level of such mobilities in children's local neighbourhoods (Carver *et al.*, 2013). In both countries, only about a fifth of children made neighbourhood trips independently, highlighting the need for interventions to target active and independent neighbourhood travel, broadening scope beyond typical walk to school strategies (e.g. VicHealth's walk to school month and Brisbane City Council's Active School Travel programme). We concur with Hillman (2006) that emphasis on walk to school programmes is an oversimplified response to the dilemma of children's constrained mobilities as it constructs a school-centred view of children's lives, denying children's independently mobile engagement with their neighbourhoods, other places, and public spaces.

Further, children do not have the same access to universally recognised liberties and freedoms as adults through their reduced access to rights and resources, as children are typically economically dependent on adult protectors, with largely tokenistic avenues for civic institutions to hear their opinions (Kulynych, 2001; Lister, 2007). Children are rarely consulted with, only recently has there been some interest in consultation with children on public spaces, for example, *The ACT Children's Plan 2004–2014* (Australian

Capital Territory Government, 2004) and *Creating a Child-friendly Port Philip: 2012–2015* (Family Youth and Children Department, City of Port Philip, 2011). Yet, such consultation is still perceived as novel.

Collectively, the aforementioned concerns about children's limited opportunities to independently participate in activities and events in public spaces (or even to learn how to) motivated the creation of the arts-research collaboration titled *The Walking Neighbourhood hosted by Children*.<sup>1</sup> This participatory arts project reverses the current widespread trend of persistent chaperoning of children so that children lead adults they have only just met on curated walks of local neighbourhoods. Lenine Bourke and colleagues in the Australian community cultural development organisation, Contact Inc,<sup>2</sup> developed the concept from 2010. The everyday nature of walking offered an accessible mode for children to assume leadership roles (Phillips, 2005). The creation of a social shift in child to adult power relations highlights how walking as an arts practice can 'produce new social relationships and thus new social realities' (Springgay, 2008, no pagination). The project enacts participatory art in that the artists are collaborators and producers of situations, as opposed to producers of works of commodifiable art; instead, art is re-envisaged as an ongoing project for constructive change and audience members as participants (Bishop, 2012). By means of a series of workshops, *The Walking Neighbourhood* arts workers collaborated with local children, service providers, and residents to develop child-led walks for adult participants, based on the children's neighbourhood interests and connections. First piloted in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley in August 2012 (Hickey and Phillips, 2013; Phillips and Hickey, 2013), *The Walking Neighbourhood* explicitly aims to invite participants to rethink the metanarrative of risk adverse childhood(s) and cultivate civic learning for both children (as independent leaders and negotiators) and adults (as listeners and followers) by cooperatively negotiating public spaces.

### **The Walking Neighbourhood hosted by Children in Chiang Mai, Thailand**

Interest in *The Walking Neighbourhood* developed in Chiang Mai as a means to include children's contributions in the cultural heritage revitalisation of Old Chiang Mai City led by Khon Jai Bann (a collective of architects and historians). Australian arts workers in Chiang Mai introduced the concept to Khon Jai Bann, and Laoon Cool, and Gabfi

(children's arts and theatre groups), who saw great potential in the project. Funding was sought from the Australia–Thailand Institute by Contact Inc and successfully awarded.

The provocation for the project to counter children's limited opportunities to independently participate in public spaces is also relevant in Thailand, as Thai children have become more vigilantly protected. Kidnapping and human trafficking for the sex industry are embedded practice in Thailand's tourist-based economy (Kamler, 2014), so parents train their children not to speak to strangers and not to go anywhere by themselves. Recently, there have been numerous postings on social media of missing children (e.g. Saiyasombut and Voices, 2013), further inciting widespread panic, so parents anxiously avoid leaving their children alone.

Although concern for children's protection in Thailand matches trends in Australia, UK, and the USA discussed earlier, the recent trend to advocate for children's participation in English speaking nations, grounded in sociology of childhood theory (e.g. James and Prout, 1995), is not so prevalent in Thailand. Wajuppa surmises that limited advocacy for children's participation in Thailand is due to the strength of the cultural value of respect for elders, enacted through the cultural norm of children not being permitted to join in adult conversations. Consultation in any matter of importance with Thai children is rare, even when that matter involves the children themselves.

A group of 24 children aged between 6 and 12 years were recruited via local schools and Laoon Cool and Gabfi's children's theatre workshops. They participated in the project<sup>3</sup> with artists from Contact Inc, Laoon Cool, Gabfi, and Khon Jai Bann in April–May 2013. The project involved one week of daily three-hour workshops for the children to navigate, map, document, and further develop personal connections with the neighbourhood of Chiang Mai Arts and Cultural Centre. In these workshops the children curated seven group walks through the neighbourhood (which they entitled *Yummy music walk*, *Young tour guides in the old city walk*, *Mong Mong walk*, *Superb Spicy walk*, *Delicious Imagination walk*, *Knowledge walk*, and *Sticky Duang Dee walk*) (Figure 1). Two to five child hosts led each walk to various self-chosen sites. The walk stories that we consider below were to places that most of the children had only some prior experience through visits with family members.

The culminating public events of two sessions of child-led walks were held on 5 May 2013 attracting 80 audience members. In both sessions, each small group of children

led a group of four to ten audience members on a 45 minute curated walk. Young adult volunteers (most of whom were students from the local University)



Figure 1 Walk menu poster with children's symbols for their walks.

accompanied the walk, to assist with time keeping and group management. Volunteer assistance was only drawn on by children if needed; the foregrounded premise was for the child hosts to lead the walk.

Following on from prior study of *The Walking Neighbourhood* in Brisbane, Louise Phillips sought to continue investigating how the child- curated neighbourhood walks may cultivate (re) thinking of children's participation in the public sphere, and remains interested in how this form of participation may differ within a vastly different socio-cultural and geographical context. Conducting research in another country with language and cultural differences added another layer of complexity to the study and its focus on how to negotiate and make meaning of these differences with Thai children, co-researchers, and arts workers. Acutely aware of her outsider position, Louise shared the re- search proposal with her storytelling colleague Wajuppa Tossa from Mahasarakam University to seek her interest in research collaboration. Wajuppa willingly agreed and invited two colleagues (Prasong Saihong and Wantana Sukna) to accompany her. Collaborating with Thai research colleagues was invaluable for cultural insight, ethical practice, translations, and multiplying data gathering capacity.

### **Storytelling and walking: embodied sensorial meaning-making**

Interest in storytelling in human geography has grown in recent decades, from considering personal authentic expression, to understanding the production of cultural,

economic, political, and social power, to reflecting on the moral and ethical possibilities performed by stories, and exploring the relational and material elements of human engagement with space (e.g. Cameron, 2012; De Jong, 2015). However, we bring a different approach to such studies, as storytellers with an interest in children's geographies. Wajuppa has been actively working to revitalise the disappearing languages and culture of North-East Thailand (Isan) for more than 30 years through a storytelling re- search project (Tossa, 1990; 1996; 2008; 2012). For more than 20 years, Louise has been sharing the art of storytelling with young children and in the last decade has been researching storytelling as pedagogy (Phillips, 2000; 2010; 2012). The capacity of stories to yield deep reflective cultural, social, political, and environmental meaning- making fuels our passion for them. Our claims to the title of storyteller is in the tradition of oral performance of folktales; an embodied communication of stories that are collectively owned and shared through the ages to activate many possible meanings that multiply significance yet resists closure. As Hannah Arendt (1970, 105) famously declared: 'storytelling reveals meaning without the error of defining it'.

We endeavoured to bring storytelling sensibilities into our retellings of our embodied experiences of child-led walks of Chiang Mai. Like live storytelling, walking is an embodied experience, especially if we alert our senses and other forms of corporeality to encounters with the unexpected and unknown, rather than just use our legs as the means to get from A to B. Ingold (2011, 64) pro- poses that by engaging with movement we draw from animism and embrace openness to form an ontology of being 'alive and open to a world in continuous birth'. Such a way of being is curious and welcomes the new and unknown. It could be argued that many children readily embrace such ontology. After experiencing years and years of cannons of western thought conditioning (of de- fining and classifying schema and setting parameters of how to know the world), adults are 'sealed by an outer boundary or shell that protects their inner constitution from the traffic of interactions with their surroundings' (Ingold, 2011, 68). Not- withstanding this conditioning, through a more open (animic) way of being, we endeavoured to welcome all that the children wanted to share with us to experience new ways of sensorially being in neighbourhoods with others.

In our walking storytelling experiences with children, enhanced sensorial awareness fed in data from all directions exciting anticipation of a fuller, deeper, and

richer story of participant experience. We attended to the sensorial by applying principles of *perception, place, knowing, memory, and imagination* in sensory ethnography (Pink, 2009). Sensory data gathered while walking were read as interconnected with socially, culturally, and biographically specified meanings. Through interconnected *perceptions*, we came to know much more about children's experiences of public spaces. We walked through spaces that became *places* of meaning (Creswell, 2004). Our sensory *memories* were embodied and continually reconstituted through storied ethnographic work of body and place. In storytelling sociology, writing research as stories is an integral part of the process of creating meaning (Berger and Quinney, 2005), so that our sensory memories were not merely reported but rather reactivated, imagined, mused over, and linguistically played with. The creation and sharing of stories of our walks with child walk hosts generated insights (*knowings*). Our stories wove *imagination* into everyday place-making practices, not just visual imagining but multisensory imagining. By employing walking as an arts practice, we imagined other people's experiences, and considered what happened in place before and after, both as participants and as ethnographers. The aforementioned principles guided our attendance to sensoriality and materiality in the child walk hosts' ways of being in the world. By aligning our bodies and rhythms and ways of seeing and listening to child hosts' bodies, rhythms, and ways of perceiving, that is to become similarly emplaced, we gleaned insight into what they experience and imagine as possibilities in public spaces.

When we accompanied the children on their walks, we gathered video recordings and recorded embodied memories in journals. With limited knowledge of Thai language, Louise let go of words and actively heightened her sensory awareness to make meaning through visual, auditory, tactile, gestural, and olfactory modes. Thai arts workers, translators, and researchers working on the project were willing to translate conversations for her, but this process often interrupted the flow of experiences, and so translations were only asked for at puzzling or other necessary moments. After experiencing the child-led walks, we recorded interviews with parents and audience members, asking about their experience of the walks, learning that they are rich multi-layered experiences that awaken (re)sensing, (re)thinking, and (re)imagining of children, childhood, and space. To enable one to sense, conceptualise, and imagine the experience of what interests children in public spaces and to learn how they negotiate urban public

spaces for adults without having actually been there, we have crafted stories that accord with Turner (1983), who asserted that social performances enact powerful stories; with Cronon (1992, 1374), who proposed that narrative is 'our best and most compelling tool for searching out meaning in a conflicted and contradictory world'; and with Cameron (2012, 575), who suggested that telling stories 'can move, affect, and produce collectivities'. Children's voices could have been foregrounded in transcripts of their narrations of their walks, although such data would not offer insights about the affects of these walks, when the purpose of the project is provoking (re)thinking of children, childhood, and public spaces. Through a storied approach to inquiry (Denzin, 1997), we seek meaning in the stories and encourage active reader engagement with the stories. We hope, as Haraway (2008) proposed, for these stories to awaken readers, so that different relations are inherited and different histories lived; and as Gibson-Graham (2006) proposed – alternative worlds and new realities provoked.

### **Walk stories**

By sharing stories of our lived experiences accompanying children on their curated neighbourhood walks, we endeavour to provoke the vividness of lived experience (Denzin, 1997). As performative storytellers, we acutely feel communication through written words is a significant reduction in dimensionality of the lived experience of the walks.

Louise and Wajuppa arrived at the Chiang Mai City Arts and Cultural Centre on the Thursday morning. The team of Australian and Thai arts workers had been facilitating the arts project with the children for three days by then, so groups were formed and walk destinations chosen. The children were now ready to test-drive leading a group of unknown others on their walks. Pang Pound and Khwan led Wajuppa on their *Delicious Imagination* walk, and Bright, Dang, and JJ led Louise on their *Knowledge* walk. Three days later, on the Sunday public performance walks, Bright, Dang, and JJ led Wajuppa and accompanying audience members, and Isra, Pang Pound, and Khwan led Louise and accompanying audience members. First, Wajuppa shares her sensory memory of the rehearsal, the *Delicious Imagination* walk, followed by Louise's sensory memory of the public walk. Then, Louise shares her sensory memory of the rehearsal, the *Knowledge* walk, followed by Wajuppa's memory of the public walk.

*Delicious imagination walk (by Wajuppa)*

When we set off, Pang Pound (9) and Khwan (10)<sup>4</sup> seemed a bit uncertain of what to do because one of their teammates was absent. Then, Khwan decided that she would present Isra's (7) walk destination. As the walk started, we needed to cross the street at the intersection. It was surprising that the children took care to check for passing vehicles and warn me to look around before we all crossed.

As we walked near a massage place, there was a deep green tree. Khwan explained that Isra talks about this: 'that if you shake the leaves they look like the waves'. This, I thought, is real imagination. As we walked down the road, the children disapprovingly pointed at a sign on a tree that said, 'Smoking is allowed' in Thai. Pang Pound explained that the sign actually said, 'No Smoking,' but someone came and erased some of the letters to alter the meaning.

The next stop was the women's prison (Figure 2), where Pang Pound and Khwan explained in great detail about the prison cells for different crimes committed by women.



Figure 2 Pang Pound explaining training programme for women's prisoners.

They did not look at their notes. I was surprised how they could remember all the details. They explained that they had been to the exhibit inside the prison.

Before we left the prison, they came across many round seeds on the footpath that

had fallen from an overhanging tree. They imagined that it was like a skateboard and like a foot massage when stepping on them. As they joyfully played with sliding on the seeds, Pang Pound announced, 'I don't want to leave this place. It's so much fun'.

Then they took us to the town hall. On arrival, they paid homage to the statue of 'Phya Mangrai' who first established the town hall. Then they explained that this place was where people come to have their identification cards made. Pang Pound then alerted us to 'Yellow India' flowers, because she really wanted to know why the trees were called that name, as well as find out who planted the trees, when, and why? She wanted to ask someone working inside the town hall, but no one was around. The children said, 'we don't dare go in and ask anyone this question.' Anne (from Gabfi) told them to come back the next day during lunchtime. Just then a male government official was heading our way. The children were delighted and hopeful that the official would answer their questions. When he came near, they greeted him: 'Wai'. But the man took no notice of the children and walked away quickly. The official's lack of attention towards the children was disappointing, yet I was not surprised as such disregard of children is typical of adults of high ranking.

I could see the disappointment on the children's faces. Perhaps, the officials in the building were not informed of project in the Chiang Mai City Arts and Cultural Centre. Perhaps, they thought they were high-ranking officials and had no time to talk to children. The children were not disappointed for long though, as they found many 'Yellow India' seeds. They threw them in the air and asked me what they looked like. Pang Pound and Khwan loved throwing them in the air and exclaiming that the seeds looked like rain or butterflies falling from the sky. They told me they enjoyed throwing the seeds because when they were younger, they used to come and play on these grounds with their parents, as one of their fathers used to work there.

#### *Delicious imagination walk (by Louise)*

Three days later, Isra, Pang Pound, and Khwan led a walking audience of ten people (of which I was one) down Ratvithi road. I noticed a sign in English that read 'Thai women's prison mas- sage'. I was puzzled about its meaning, so I asked Ohm, a Kon Jai Bahn arts worker. She explained it was about training for women prisoners so they had a skill on release, because across the road was a women's prison. Surprised, I turned my gaze to

the right, and there was a large white concrete building framed with barb-wire. There were two large leafy trees on the footpath in front of the prison. At this point, Isra stopped the group and invited us to look at the tree on the left and say what we imagined it looked like (Figure 3).

'It looks like an elephant, doesn't it?' ... 'I think it looks like a shoe' ... 'it looks like a teapot' ... 'it looks like gloves' offered audience members. Then Isra declared it looked like a duck. Audience members were puzzled and demanded 'why?'

'You can see that some parts of the tree look like a duck's tail and head. Okay. Shall we move to the second tree [on the right hand side]? What does it look like?' Some of the audience demanded an answer immediately; others wanted time to guess. Then Isra explained 'It looks like "Wai"' (Thai for Hello).



Figure 3 Tree for imaginings in front of the women's prison.

One boy looks at his wristband tag with walk name and announced: 'now I know why it is called the imagination walk!'<sup>5</sup>

We then walked further down Ratvithi road, until they asked us to stop and notice golf ball-sized seedpods on the ground, and demonstrated walking on them so you rolled like on roller skates. We all then experimented with sliding on seedpods, and as we turned the corner to Khang Ruan Jum Road, they warned us with nose blocking gestures of open rubbish bins.

Pang Pound then led us to the Muang Chiang Mai District Office. In the open space to the left of the office building, Pang Pound pointed to a statue of a dignitary. She then invited us up the front steps of the office building to collect leaves from the ground and throw them in the air. The leaves were like feathers with an embedded seed at one end.

'It falls like rain,' exclaimed Pang Pound. No government officials were to be seen. The grounds were quiet aside from our group playing with leaves on the front steps. It was Saturday. There was much laughter and chatter.

*Sensorial learnings from children in public spaces: part 1*

Our engagement with children's sensoria enabled us to see leaf movement as waves, a tree as a duck (teapot, glove, human...), seedpods as wheels of skateboards or roller skates, and leaves as rain or butterflies. We also *felt* the sliding movement of seedpods underfoot, and *wrinkled our noses* at the pungent odour of rotting rubbish. And Wajuppa witnessed the visible disregard for children from a government official. Invitations to experience children's sensoria nudged us to 'be of two sensoria about matter' (after Howes and Classen, 1991), that is, to be aware of and operate with two perceptual systems – the sensory order of our adult system and the sensory order experienced by Isra, Pang Pound, and Khwan. Although Howes and Classen referred to different sensory order between one's own culture and the culture being studied, we argue that childhood and adulthood can be read as comprising (at very least) two different cultures.

By sharing language with the children, Wajuppa experienced more of the breadth of children's knowledge of sites (e.g. their detailed explanation about the women's prison), local cultural references (e.g. 'Phya Mangrai'), public rules (e.g. no smoking signage), and sharing of childhood memories (e.g. seedpod throwing). The walk enabled Louise to gain insight of children's playful engagement with public spaces. Wajuppa experienced further insight as to who children can be in public spaces: knowledgeable, socially responsible, yet invisible to government officials.

Both Isra and Pang Pound invited us to see institutional spaces differently, by not permitting the oppressive nature of those spaces to affect aesthetic sensory pleasures. Isra could have chosen trees for imagining anywhere, but it was not just anywhere, it was right in front of a women's prison framed with barbed wire. The juxtaposition was stark and resonant to our adult sensoria. Pang Pound could have asked us to throw leaves in the air at any site, but this was not any site; this was a government building (and accompanying parking lot), a space of power and authority. Yet Pang Pound invited us to contrast this space with the carefree action of throwing leaves in the air; for her, this was as an open play space. There are no playgrounds in Chiang Mai so the car park and

forecourt of the government offices were to Pang Pound a space to move and explore.

As storytellers, we strongly appreciate metaphors as poignant conveyors of meaning, so we were struck by the powerful contrast of the children's choice of actions against backdrops of punitive and governmental spaces. We reconciled that the children seemed to accept the prison as part of the urban landscape, as they talked matter-of-factly about that place with Wajuppa and playfully imagined with trees on the footpath with Louise. Perhaps, only we as adults 'being of two sensoria' had the sombre perceptual knowing of prisons (as rights violating institutions) collide with the pure sensory knowing of the matter that made up the prison and its surrounds. The contrast was also felt with the government building; we relished the playfulness (and irony) of throwing leaves in the air in front of the austerity of a government building. The invisibility of the children to the Government official, that Wajuppa noticed, replicated the case for the walks in the first place – that children are not included in the public sphere (Kulynych, 2001; Lister, 2007) inciting our passion to further advocate for children's participation in the public sphere. Pang Pound, Khwan and Isra's walk provided new ways of seeing and experiencing these spaces, cultivating open, and exploratory intergenerational coexistence in the public sphere.

#### *Knowledge walk (by Louise)*

Bright, a confident and playful 9 year old girl chose me as her companion for the walk that she, Dang, and JJ curated. The first destination was a toyshop, selected by Dang because he disclosed that he had never owned a toy. Bright took my hand and playfully wove me in and out of trees and pole-obstructed footpaths to the toyshop. When we arrived, the shop was closed, so we stood outside looking through the window at the shelves of popular culture figures. As the children perused the figures, they animatedly named those they recognised. As I could not understand what was being spoken, I too perused the figures to see what I could recognise. I identified Batman, Stars Wars characters, Toy Story characters, and even Psy from the infamous 2012 hit – Gangnam style. Then I noticed a female figurine on all fours with large breasts bursting out of a black leather bikini on the top left-hand shelf, and I wondered how the children would react. I imagined that they might laugh and snigger. No one, however, seemed to notice, so I chose not to draw attention to the figure, so as not to foreground a reaction. The boys

continued to talk about many of the figures, recalling movies and television programmes. Then Bright noticed the female figure on all fours and she looked at me with a disapproving face of disgust and gestured a thumbs down whilst saying: 'not beautiful'. I strongly agreed with her by reciprocating the thumbs down gesture and affirmed: 'yes, not beautiful'.

We then walked on hand in hand playfully circumnavigating footpath obstructions and smelling flowers as Bright led us to a place she affectionately referred to as grandma and grandpa's house.

When we arrived, only the elderly man was there. He opened his gate and welcomed us in to sit in his back garden – a few square metres in size. Bright had a page with questions she had thought of to ask him. She conscientiously took notes. We then said goodbye and walked back along the lane passing upturned baskets that contained chickens. Bright and I mutually pointed at the chickens, smiling and chanting: 'gai'.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Knowledge walk (by Wajuppa)*

The walk hosts were Dang (10), Bright (9), and JJ (10). They introduced themselves and told us (their walk audience) where each of them would lead us. Dang took charge. He made sure that everyone followed him out of the Chiang Mai City Arts and Cultural Centre (Figure 4).

Every so often, Dang stopped to check every one was following. He seemed to enjoy being the leader. He even pointed to the flower 'the Pea- cock's Tails'. Everyone broke out laughing because the flowers are well known to all, although, the laughter did not discourage Dang from his leadership role. When we arrived at the toyshop, it was closed, but Dang took the time to explain the toys visible in the shop window.

The audience asked him why he chose to lead the walk there. Dang said, 'because I want to know what toys are sold in the shop. I have never played with any toys since I was little.' Then, the walk continued to 'grandpa and grandma's house' (Figure 5). It was a wooden house with trees and herbs in front. Unfortunately, the owners of the house were not in. Bright explained that she chose the house because it looked so nice and cool. As she spoke, we were all sweating. She pointed at the trees and herbs in the garden that she liked.



Figure 4 Dang leading the walk.



Figure 5 Bright explaining to walk audience about grandma and grandpa's house and garden.

Then it was JJ's turn; he led us on to the three kings monument. We all stopped under the frangipani trees where he named the three kings: King Ramkhamhaeng, King Mangrai, and King Ngammuang and explained that they established Chiang Mai City. JJ really liked this place because he and his brothers liked to come and play 'heli- copter' around the statue when he passed through the square with his family. An audience member asked to read the legend at the statue. Dang said, 'please don't take long.' I figured that he wanted the group to stay together.

#### *Sensorial learnings from children in public spaces: part 2*

Our experiences of the Knowledge walk surprised us with playful walking, scorn of overt sexualisation of a female body, and dedication to responsibility for others. Thai footpaths are much more cluttered with obstacles than footpaths in Australia. Such differences often bother foreigners. Bright showed Louise a whole new way to circumambulate with brisk ease the various poles, bins, trees, food carts, and so on. Popular culture references were shared – mutually recognisable because of media globalisation. Sweltering tropical heat was felt, with imaginings of the refuge that a cool shaded house may offer. And Dang, Bright, and JJ's interests in toys, friendly older people, gardens, and open spaces were imparted.

The most resonant moment for Louise was the shared discomfort with Bright at the highly sexualised female figurine, realised through Bright's pointed yet aptly selected shared words and gestures. Louise would have cherished the opportunity to talk more with Bright about her reasons for offering this critique, and what informed her assessment, but in the moment, she appreciated the connection for what it was and was thrilled that she found an ally for the

disapproval of such objectified representation of women. Bright initiated the sharing of recognition of sexism, evidence of cultural politics, and politics of recognition that O'Neill (2008) noted can be cultivated in the in-between spaces of art and ethnography, that arts and research projects such as *The Walking Neighbourhood* can produce. Politics of recognition counters the misrecognition of Other. Children are typically assumed to be apolitical beings. Through these two words 'not beautiful', Louise and Bright shared political concerns pertaining to their shared gender identities. This moment strengthened their relationship cultivating solidarity to enhance the embodied relational experience of walking together and place-making through the streets of Chiang Mai. According to Desjarlais (2003, 243), sensory intersubjectivity occurs through the researcher being aware of her own sensory subjectivities and how her actions and the meanings of these are also 'shaped by local perspectives on sensory perception'. Louise reflected on her own sensory subjectivity to female representation and initially was deliberately silent so as to not influence others. Her actions were shaped by consideration of a young audience, and also an uncertainty of local cultural mores. Then Louise's silence was broken by Bright's discrete gestural and verbal commentary that she readily agreed with but had not anticipated. A new level of personal ethnographic awareness and knowing was arrived at; that gender politics can be initiated and affinities generated intergenerationally and interculturally with minimal words and gesture.

Dang's diligent attention to careful leadership of the group surprised Wajuppa. During the workshops to prepare for the walks, Dang presented as uninterested by rolling around on the floor and gazing at the ceiling, so that many involved were concerned about Dang's capacity to lead a walk. Yet during the walks, Wajuppa observed Dang's careful attention to leadership. Another example of the politics of recognition is with Dang's disengaged workshop behaviour being misrecognised as incompetence, a common narrative in schooling especially for boys (Keddie and Mills, 2009). The opportunity to negotiate and lead a neighbourhood walk developed children's skills and confidence in participation in the public sphere. Every audience member interviewed noted how the project built children's confidence in speaking with adults and road safety. Significant potential lies in this project to build children's capacity for independent mobilities in their local neighbourhoods; to shift the focus on children as vulnerable to children as active contributors in the public sphere.

Through our *Knowledge* walks with Bright, Dang, and JJ, we had our expectations of children altered to remind us not to make assumptions, but rather to be open to the constant

unfolding of new beginnings – new possibilities for who children can be in the public sphere – in intergenerational political coexistence. Thus, we have come to experience *The Walking Neighbourhood* as a response to Gibson-Graham's (2008) call for scholars to collaborate with others to bring alternative worlds and new realities into being.

### **Further comments**

We chose here to share crafted stories of our experiences of the walks so that the affect of child-led walks could be communicated. Interviews with audience members also demonstrated the affect of the walks.

They talked about some of the local paintings just on the walls, and I had never seen them before, I've passed by there 20 times, 30 times, but I had never actually stopped to look at them. (Ex-pat teacher from USA)

After participating in this project, the children pay more attention to those valuable places and try to expand useful information to adults like me. (Grandparent of walk host)

I was very impressed by the children, who suggested me to see birds because they showed me their sympathy for the birds. I really appreciated that. (Father of walk host)

Every audience member we interviewed spoke with delight of the experience and described how it invoked in them a desire to understand children and the neighbourhood differently, cultivating adult (re)thinking and (re)imagining of children, childhood, and public spaces, effectively offering what Sandlin *et al.* (2010) refer to as public pedagogy.

We recognise that the project provides education for children's independent mobile engagement with their neighbourhoods and public spaces, as a dominant theme from interviews with children, guardians, and audience members highlighted significant enhancement of children's confidence in independently communicating with adults and negotiating traffic as a pedestrian. Such necessary urban citizenship skills have been noticeably lacking in programmes to address children's independent mobilities (e.g. typically Walk to School programmes) (e.g. Hillman, 2006). Creative thinking (as Gibson-Graham, 2008 called for) instigated the swapping of adult and child roles in public spaces. Together with performance these produced affect on multiple circles of influence: children, their families, arts workers, audience members, and all those that each of these groups share their experience with.

By being open to child-led neighbourhood walks, we experienced public spaces in different

ways and witnessed capabilities of children that are rarely recognised. The two groups of children worked well together, supporting each other's presentations. Typically, adults are responsible for children; when roles were flipped, the children competently managed responsibility for their audiences, ensuring everyone stayed together and crossed the roads safely. The children also embraced responsibility for locating, finding out about, and explaining places of interest. When the main imperative is to protect children, adults expect less of children and reduce opportunities for engagement with the public sphere.

The collaboration between Thai and Australian arts workers and researchers produced cross-cultural dialogue on the politics of recognition for children in the public sphere. Children's inclusion and participation in public spaces is restricted in both Thailand and Australia, largely based on fear for children's safety. However, if adults continue to carry sole or chief responsibility for children's protection based on an assumption of children's vulnerability, their vulnerability is perpetuated. The introduction of child-curated and child-led walks of local neighbourhoods to the members of a Thai urban community provoked local interest and dialogue about children's civic capabilities and inclusion in public spaces. Observations of child-led walks provided delightful encounters with children's sensoria, and enabled us to recognise children's interests, concerns, and leadership, while accessing our own sensorial realms. We both see tremendous potential to shift social and cultural practices in intergenerational civic engagement in schools and community services if adults remove judgement and assumption and engage with children and young people with openness; to listen, see, and feel children's perspectives and capabilities. Through intergenerational and intercultural walks that intersect art and research, we propose that openness to difference and possibility can be cultivated to produce different relations between adults and children and begin new realities for children in public spaces.

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## NOTES

1. *The Walking Neighbourhood hosted by Children* (thewalkingneighbourhood.com.au) (led by artist Lenine Bourke) has taken place at multiple sites; to date, these have included Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, Australia; Old Chiang Mai City, Chiang Mai, Thailand; Bagot, Darwin, Australia; Seoul, Korea; Redfern & Kings Cross, Australia; and Kuopio, Finland.
2. In April 2014, after 25 years of relational arts practice based on social justice and peace-building principles, Contact Inc ceased operation because of discontinued public funding.
3. Verbal and written consent for participation in the study was sought in Thai and obtained from all children and their families. Permission to publish their images in this journal was approved verbally with families.
4. The names for the children are parent-provided nick- names, which they consented for use in the article, or pseudonyms determined by researchers as per participation in study consent agreement, when parental contact was not provided for follow-up communication for publications.
5. These comments were translated to Louise.
6. Gai is Thai for chicken.

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