

Second call: for posters only

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Transmission and learning. How do children engage in ritualised daily practices and rituals?

17 & 18 November 2025

University of Liège, Belgium

Abstract

This interdisciplinary conference addresses the processes and experiences of transmission and learning of knowledge and competences to and by children, without presuming a priori the limits of childhood. The central question that will guide the discussions concerns the ways in which ritualised contexts – secular or religious – provide a vehicle for the integration and transformation of knowledge, ways of thinking, norms and values, skills and attitudes within various socialising frameworks. The conference will therefore contribute to the debates on the conditions for the perpetuation and change of social practices in general, and (co)educational practices in particular, in different regions of the world and in different eras. A transversal focus will be placed on agency -in both the “emic” and “etic” senses (Razy, 2019)- while acknowledging critiques of the concept (Lancy, 2012; Garnier, 2015), and to children's gender, as well as their role in the social changes taking place. This conference will bring together researchers from a range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences (anthropology, history, education sciences, sociology, psychology, philosophy, etc.). The posters will focus on: 1) the various contexts in which social practices are passed on and changes of status take place: political, religious, school, children's services, leisure, care, family, between children, in the midst of ordinary everyday life or subject to profound changes linked, for example, to war, migration, poverty or climate change; 2) differentiation between institutionalised, formal or informal, tacit or involuntary forms of knowledge transmission; 3) the actors and modes of interaction involved in modes of learning (transmission from adults to children, from children to adults, between children, between children and living or non-living entities); 4) the phenomena of reproduction, renewal and disappearance of knowledge and competences; 5) the emotions, sensations and affects that intervene in transmission and learning; 6) distinctions between fields of learning and ways of transferring skills according to social category, race, gender, age or generation.

Description

This interdisciplinary conference examines the processes and experiences associated with the transmission and learning of knowledge and competences to and by children in secular or religious ritualised contexts, which are vehicles for the integration and transformation of knowledge, ways of thinking, norms and values, skills and attitudes. The conference will therefore contribute to the debates on the conditions for perpetuating and changing social practices in general, and on (co-)educational practices in particular, in different regions of the world and in different eras. A transversal focus will be placed on agency -in both the “emic” and “etic” senses (Razy, 2019)- taking into account critiques of the concept (Lancy, 2012, Garnier, 2015), and on children's gender, as well as their role in the social changes taking place.

This conference follows the organisation of five editions of the “Children and Rites” workshop at the University of Liège (FaSS, IRSS-LASC), in collaboration with El Colegio de San Luis A. C (Mexico) and UMR 208 PALOC (Local Heritage, Environment & Globalisation Joint Research Unit, IRD/MNHN/CNRS). The aim of this workshop is to promote a field of research that examines the ways in which children participate in ritualised activities - daily, cyclical or occasional- that are embedded in individual or collective temporalities and spaces (Daugey et al., 2020). The discussions focus on an initial, exploratory question: are children the subjects, actors or objects of the rituals in which they take part?¹ Rituals as we interpret them include both religious and secular practices, such as republican baptisms (Mandret-Degeilh, 2013). This is consistent with Isaac Joseph (1998, p. 42)² who, adopting an interactionist approach, considers rituals to be “the intermediate forms of socialisation that lie between the two extremes of the ordinary routines of social ties and the frenzy of crowds wavering between unison and anomie”. While drawing on the seminal work of Arnold Van Gennep (1981[1909]) on rites of passage and Pierre Bourdieu (1982) on “institutional rites”, we also consider it beneficial to build on Martine Segalen's proposal that activities which can be described as “ritual” are “repeated” and “involve a form of imposition”, with “the mediator of the ritual [taking] the form of a collective action” (Segalen, 2017, p. 32). Finally, we also draw on the work of Michael Houseman who, adopting a relational approach, suggests that ritual is “a distinctive mode of cultural transmission (...) that facilitates the ongoing relevance of certain cultural values and ideas by packaging them in the form of highly memorable relational enactments” (Houseman, 2006, p. 426).

For the purposes of this conference on children's forms of learning and transmission, we consider that the transmission of social and cultural practices, and (co-)educational practices in particular, always occurs in specific contexts that need to be studied, assuming that “the context is truly constitutive of the knowledge produced (it is not merely the framework)” (Adell, 2011, p. 282). The wide range of social, cultural and (co-)educational contexts that give rise to potentially ritualised forms of knowledge transmission includes political, religious, family, school, childcare, leisure, care and family settings, which are part of ordinary everyday life (Goffman, 1973a [1956] & 1973b [1959]), and are subject to inequalities or changes that may be profound and linked, for example, to war, migration, poverty or climate change.

The expected posters will reflect this diversity and address both institutionalised forms of knowledge transmission (particularly those of the school or extracurricular

¹ The first two editions of the workshop were general in nature, the third focused on “childhood rites”, the fourth on the ways in which children participated in rites in Mesoamerica, and the fifth was a round-table discussion on children's relationships with objects and materiality.

² Quoted by Segalen (2017, p. 38).

type), whether formal or informal, and the tacit, sometimes involuntary, processes of transmission often observed in a familial or friendship setting, or in the “education of attention” mode (Ingold, 2018). Indeed, the knowledge acquired in childhood is often the result of a co-integration of aptitudes from formal and informal education, potentially based on different categories of rationality (Carrin et al., 2016, p. 11). Competences are transmitted through different registers of ritualisation, ranging from rites of passage to the impregnation or “contagion” (Sperber, 1996) of “ignored knowledge”, “encompassing [...] all the gestures, actions and attitudes that elude explanation and thought, and which can appear in many aspects: a way of speaking, working, acting, or walking, and which therefore join the set of ‘techniques of the body’ highlighted by Marcel Mauss” (Adell, 2011, p. 127). Non-reflective or non-deliberate incorporation, through repeated observation and mimicry, or even through play – for example, using a rattle (Dasen, 2017) or creating performances (Alvarado Solís, 2018) – is one form of this “practical knowledge”. To paraphrase the title of Gilles Brougère and Anne-Lise Ulmann's book (2009), we also learn from everyday life.

The relational context of the learning situation deserves particular attention (Lave & Wenger, 1991), not least to highlight the possibilities of children's forms of agency in each situation.³ For while transmission may consist in reproducing observed acts – sometimes during care (Bonnet & Pourchez, 2007) or initially through play (Duchesne, 2007) where the boundary with ritual is often blurred (Razy & Suremain, 2020)- and in accepting the representations accompanying a practice, at other times it involves derision (Gable, 2002; Ottenberg & Binkley 2006, p. 6; Anderson, 2011) and reinterpretations come into play (Corsaro, 1993; Argenti, 2001; Razy, 2023), reflecting a process of co-construction of teachings, ways of thinking and rites (Ridgely, 2012). These phenomena can occur between children and adults, between children themselves, or between children and entities from the living or non-living world. Despite being embedded in relations of domination (Pierrot et al., 2017), children can initiate negotiations about the ways of performing a ritual (Suremain, 2010; Zotian, 2012; Pedersen, 2017), inspire changes in pedagogical procedures aimed at them (Campigotto, 2012) or reinvent ritualised writing methods (Chicharro, 2017). Children's ritual creations are also sometimes passed on to adults when, according to a rationale that varies according to the sociocultural group, they are considered competent in this field (Le Moal, 1981; Kermani, 2013). Thus, as children take part in the reflexive practices (negotiation, criticism, evaluation) on which the organisation of rituals is partly based (Højbjerg, 2002; Gobin & Vanhoenacker, 2016), more attention should be paid to how they participate in the perpetuation (Morin, 2010), modification or disappearance (Berliner, 2010) of ritualised social practices. We will also consider that the diversions, reappropriations, adaptations, tests, trials and errors that children make or contribute to, result in a form of “enskilment” (Ingold, 2000, p. 55-56) that emerge from a pragmatic relationship with the material and immaterial environment that make up a ritual frame.

The study of children's relationships with their environment -everyday or otherwise- in relation to ritualised practices, leads us to consider the sensory perceptions mobilised in the learning and transmission processes. All learning involves the body and the senses, which are rarely verbalised (Battesti & Candau, 2023, p. 43). Thus, certain senses may be developed in childhood through the repetition of situations that bring them into play (Legrain, 2010; Geffroy, 2023; Travési, 2023), and children's appreciation of ritualised situations may depend on how their senses are mobilised in them (Daugey,

³ Houseman has also stressed the importance of considering the relational aspects of ritual practices (2012).

2019). Indeed, the material settings of transmission situations induce a wide range of possible emotions and affective states linked to cognitive processes (Tasia, 2016). It is recognised that the expression of emotions or feelings in a ritual context is based on specific social codes (Mauss, 1921) and that this is a constitutive part of ritual interactions (Berthomé & Houseman, 2010). As participants in rituals, children are thus subject to the integration of “appropriate inner attitudes” (Hérault, 1997), and we would like to better understand how children are led to conform to or transgress them. We might also ask whether the development during childhood of a liking or an aversion for a ritualised practice (through the appreciation of the performances that accompany it, the gifts received and the difficulty of the ordeals involved) contributes to the future of this ritual (its continuation, evolution or disappearance). In addition, ordinary displays of emotions can also result from ritualised daily learning (Pasqueron de Fommervault, 2014), the study of which is still underdeveloped.

Finally, given that distinctions based on age, generation, social class, “race” or gender are routinely confirmed by ritual practices and actualised in repeated everyday use, we are particularly interested in studies examining the ways in which children integrate or challenge these differentiation criteria. More generally, we will consider how the fact of belonging to these different social categories influences processes of competence and knowledge transfer.

Posters from the humanities and social sciences (anthropology, history, education sciences, sociology, psychology, philosophy, etc.) may focus in particular on the following aspects: 1) the varied contexts – political, religious, school, children's services, leisure, care, family, between children, associated with ordinary everyday life or subject to profound changes linked, for example, to war, migration, poverty or climate change – in which social practices are passed on and changes of status take place; 2) differentiation between institutionalised, formal or informal, tacit or involuntary forms of knowledge transmission; 3) the actors and modes of interaction involved in modes of learning (transmission from adults to children, from children to adults, between children, between children and living or non-living entities); 4) the phenomena of reproduction, renewal and disappearance of knowledge and competences; 5) the emotions, sensations and affects that intervene in transmission and learning; 6) the distinctions between fields of learning and ways of transferring skills according to social category, race, gender, age or generation.

Submission guidelines

Proposals for posters (in English, French or Spanish) must be sent by 9 June 2025 at the latest to elodie.razy@uliege.be :

- abstract of no more than 600 words (including the title, bibliographical references and five keywords);
- Please indicate your status/function, your institution and your e-mail address;
- In the “comments” section of the platform, please state the main discipline(s) and thematic focus of your proposal.

The expected abstracts must indicate the data, materials, sources, archives, corpus, results, etc. on which the proposed analysis is based, as well as the preferred methodology, and specify whether the contribution is methodological and/or theoretical.

Selection of proposals by the Scientific Committee: decision to be communicated on 30 June 2025 at the latest.

There is no registration fee for this conference. Transportation, accommodation, and meals are at your own expense.

If you have any questions about the submission process, please contact us at elodie.razy@uliege.be

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