



“My Mind is not in my Brain”! Exploring consciousness & extra sensory experiences with children

Dr Donna M Thomas

ICREATES@UCLan

International Research Unit

University of Central Lancashire

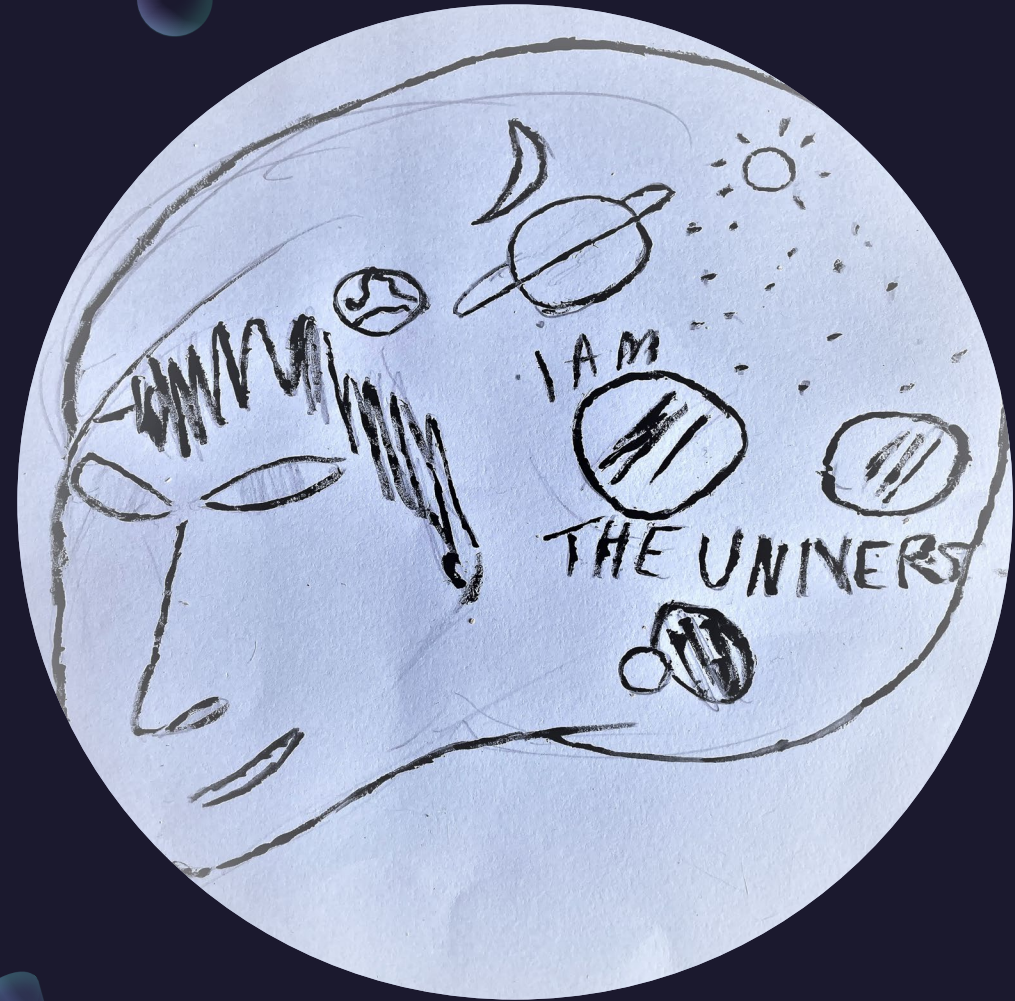


Talk

Ask why it may be important to explore consciousness and extra sensory experiences with children

Examine emergence of extra sensory experiences in children related to health and activities

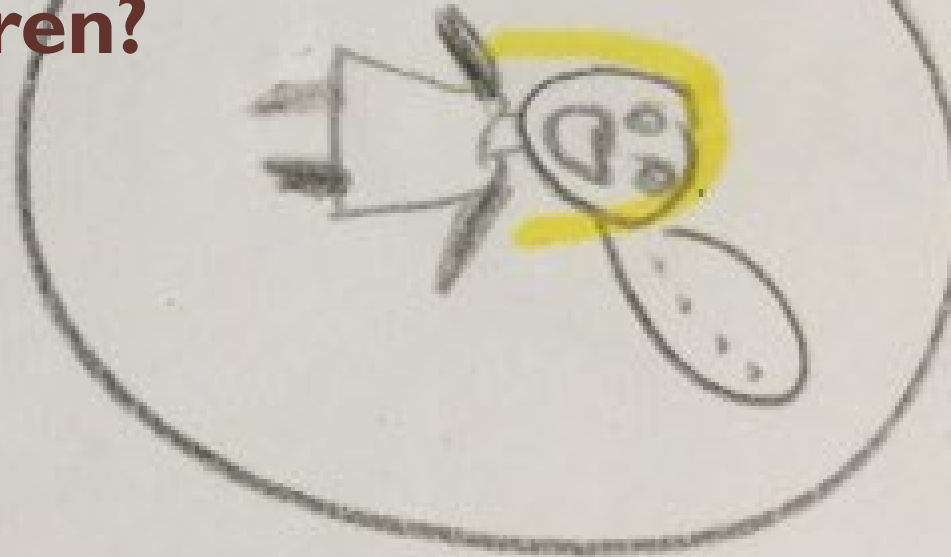
Interrogating Brain-based Ideas of the world through children's extra sensory experiences



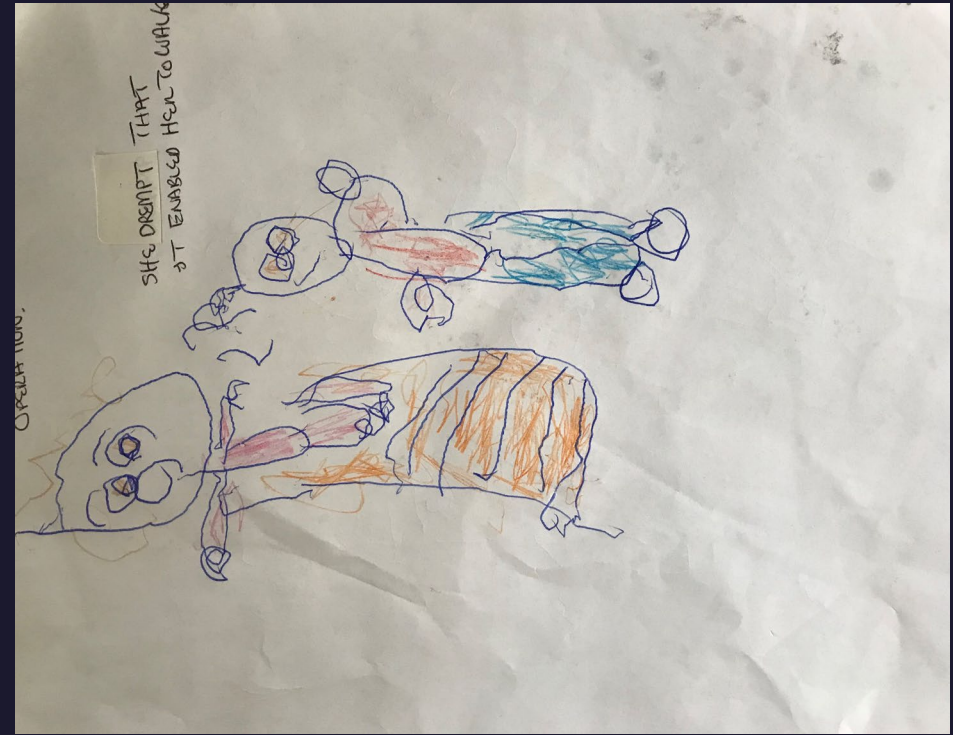
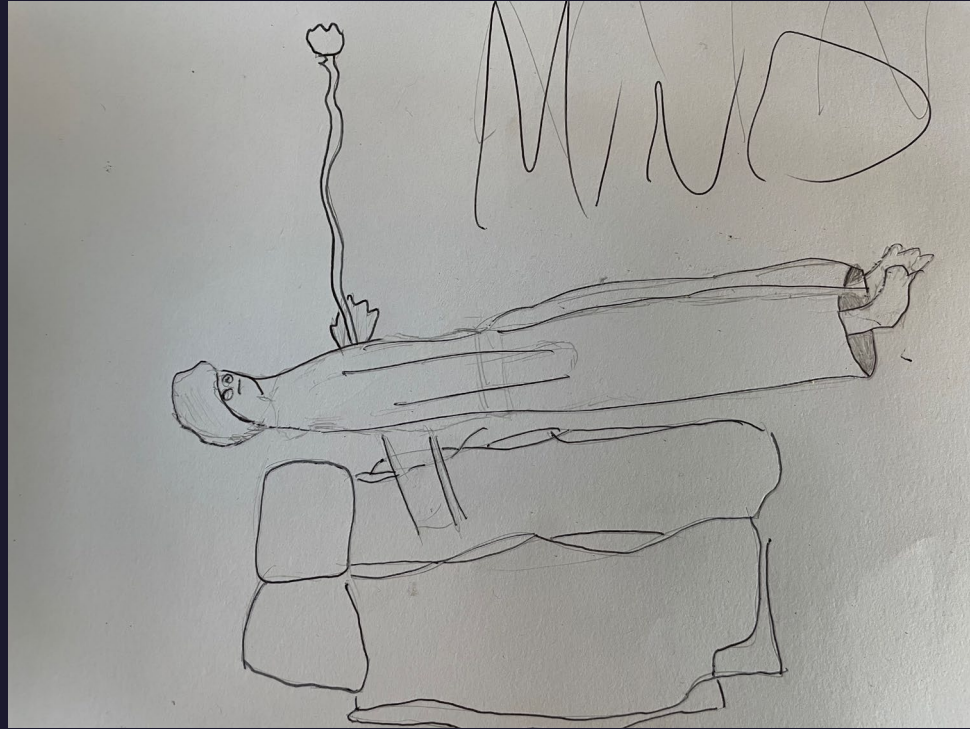
Age 8 years, "The world is a dream"

What do we mean by exploring consciousness with children?

- Aspects of phenomenal consciousness (awareness, thoughts, feelings, perceptions)
- Self (feeling of what it is like to be 'me' or 'I')
- States of consciousness and extra sensory experiences



Falling through dreams, age 7 years



Children's Out of Body Experiences



Layers of reality, aged 13 years



Age 5 Meeting deceased teacher on rainbow bridge



Age 10 years: Shared death experience – the afterlife

They're just kids why bother?

How do you know it's real?

How do you know it's not **just** imagination?

Kids always make things up?

What do we mean by is it real?

- Children's experiences viewed as subjectively genuine
- Objective reality sits within larger ontological debate which remains

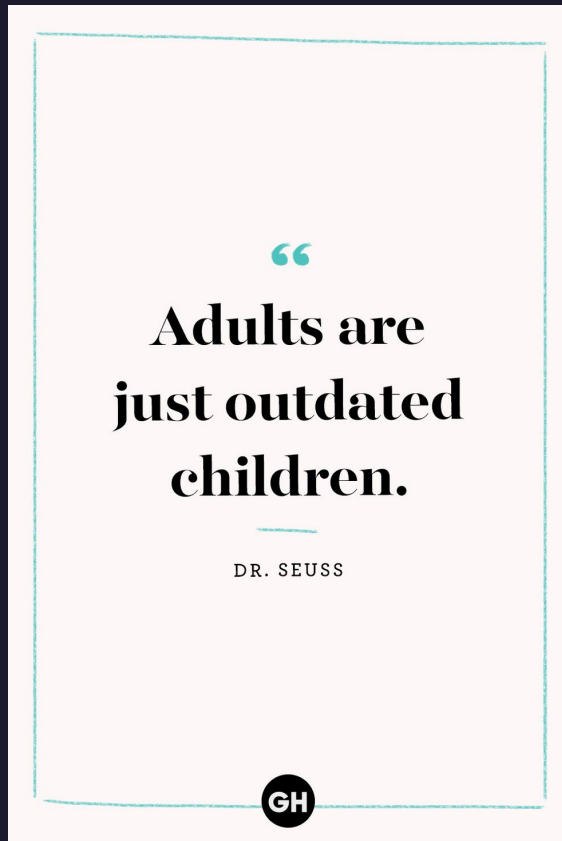
“wide open”

“what is the furniture of the social world, what is their mode of existence?” (Lohse, 2016)

When you're trying to have a conversation with another adult and your **kid is** behind you like:



Research *with* Children



- Qualitative research; post-qualitative
- Experiential authority; knowers & knowing
- Subjectivity and Objectivity (reflexivity)
- Validity (transactional; presence across large numbers of children etc; absence of conditioned knowledge i.e NDE's)
- **Children's Logic?**
- Children as Active and Capable agents in research

Logical Children?

Probing: the claim of the Zombie in the bathroom

Critical Questioning: when claims are exaggerated or untrue

Logic: logical explanations to counter-act false claims

Replication: of the claimed Zombie noise for testability

C = Child (Group of children aged 8 years)

C1: I heard a zombie noise in my bathroom this morning it was like this blarghh

C2: hang on what if someone was on the toilet (children laughing)

C3: Maybe it was the water in the pipe outside

C2: Like blarghheee like that

C1: Yeah it was exactly like that

Thomas, D. (2022). *Rethinking Methodologies in Parapsychology Research with Children*, *Journal of Anomalistic, Special Issue, Women and Parapsychology*

Are we missing an important research population?

	Context	Participants	Methods	Snapshot Findings
Who am I 2019-2020 *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - exploring nature of self and unusual experiences - take a selfie and art methods - homes, outside, online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -18 children and young people ages 4-18 years -Children with and without medical conditions 	-individual interviews using drawing and painting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 senses of self - corresponded with experiences
Our Unusual Experiences 2021-22 *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identifying types of experiences children have -states of consciousness with activities, ways of being, circumstances etc. -schools, online, community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 30 children ages 4-16 years - medical and non-medical conditions i.e. Epilepsy, Pans, Narcolepsy, Autism, Cerebral Palsy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - interviews and research groups -arts-based methods (arts; i-pads; play) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - children report a range of extra sensory experiences -high incidence of seeing beings; OBEs and Lucid/exceptional dreams -may correspond with states of consciousness
Children's Near Death Experiences 2021 – 2025 *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exploring experiences typically viewed as “delirium” - Post ICU wards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 7 children ages 6-15 years (to date) - severely ill; near death; resuscitate, heart conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - bedside interviews - bedside creation stations -small world play; art; i-pads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NDE's reported -similarities and differences with adults - bedside visions and communications
Children's Extra Sensory Experiences across Various Cultural Contexts 2023-2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Identifying children's experiences; types, forms, frequency; meanings; cultural influences -Identifying adults childhood & adult experiences; attitudes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 200 children+ ages 4-18 years -200 adults+ parents & professionals -national study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -interviews and research groups younger children -online questionnaires older children -online questionnaires adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -children reporting wide range of experiences -parents report more experiences than professionals -older children aware of stereotyping
Self & Development 2022-2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -UK & Netherlands -inside and outside spaces -to inform self-development and MH 	- 15 to date (ongoing) ages 4-18ys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - research groups and interviews -colour cross -arts; instruments; play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - children experience a sense of I-ness/self beyond ego/narrative - differences and similarities older and younger children
Semiotics and Consciousness - ongoing	Analysing abstract images produced by children in consciousness research	ongoing	Linguistics, CDA, semiotics database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -geometrical patterns -mandalas -systems, cultural cosmologies



Children's States of Consciousness and ESEs

Playing

Resting

Creating (singing)

Crisis

Illness

Death

Conditions

Children Death & Extra Sensory Experiences

- Participatory & Creative Pilot Study UK Post ICU ward
- 8 children ages 6-16ys
- Cardiac arrest, sepsis, lung transplant, heart transplant
- Experiences often labelled 'delirium'
- Small world play, art, i-pads

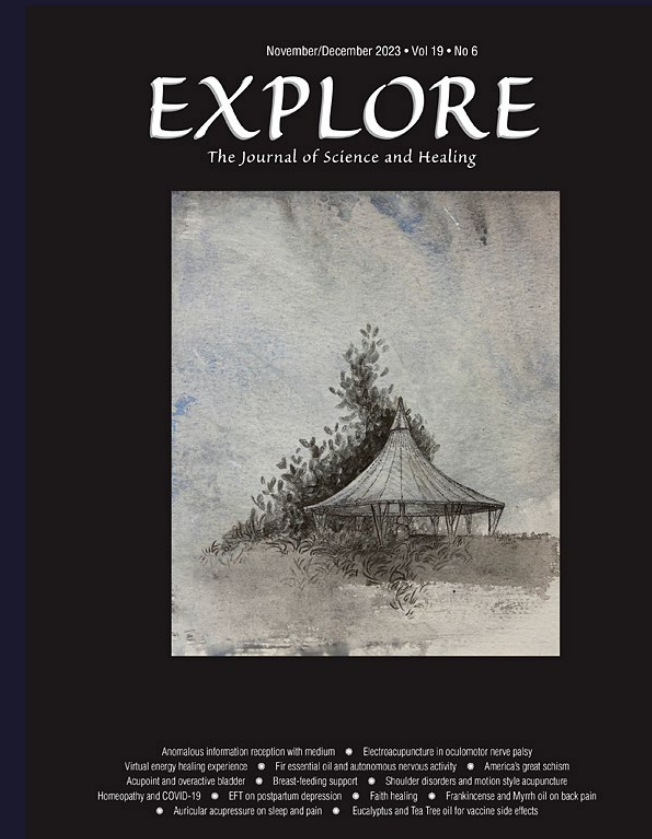
What happened before you fell asleep/lost consciousness?
What happened when you woke up/came around?
What happened in between?



Highlights

- Children report experiences synchronous with near death experiences in post intensive care.
- Children report other extra sensory experiences such as bedside visions.
- Children's NDE's carry features of transcendental experiences.
- Younger children use a visual NDE semiosis that warrants further investigation.

Thomas, D., & O'Connor, G. (2023). Exploring near death experiences with children post intensive care: A case series. *EXPLORE*.



Male White Irish

Age 13 years

Interstitial lung disease requiring lung transplant:
respiratory arrest leading to cardiac arrest (3 times
down)

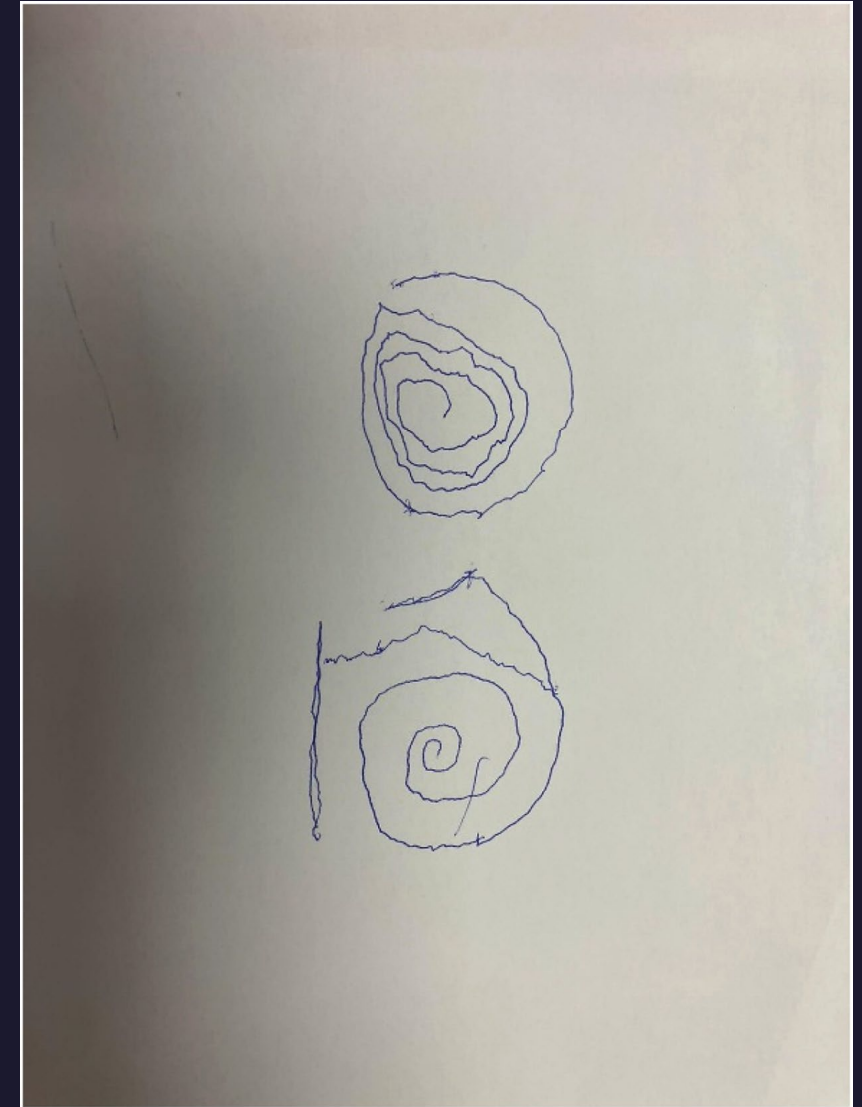
24 days in ICU

Talking Art: Drawing

Unsolicited reports of NDEs ...also....


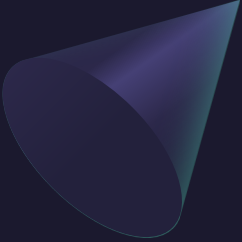
bedside visions, different worlds, bi-location

'felt like a long time...
but no time.'




Age 12 years, Ischaemic Cardiomyopathy leading to cardiac arrest: heart transplant

*“They put me to sleep for an operation but I was lying there paralysed and I could hear everything the doctors and nurses were saying like “is everyone ready to stop this” It's like I had this knowing what they were doing. It was like I'd been taken up to a bird's eye view but I couldn't see only hear and **know**. I was above just listening to everything. Even though it happened four years ago, I remember everything like it only happened yesterday, **like a flashback**”*



Do children with medical conditions report more extra sensory experiences than children without medical conditions?



Children with Autism & Epilepsy

"I see orbs and spirits, as people and as outlines. I can sense illness with my hand and I can see people's auras...most of the time I don't mind (when I see people) because they don't mean any harm towards me. I can get a bit scared when they stare at me but most of them disappear after a while'

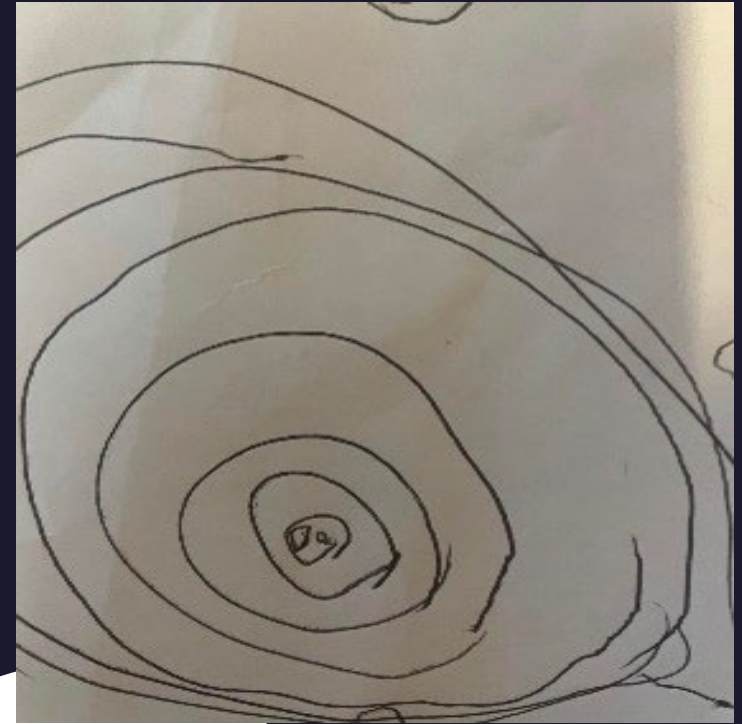
Child Aged 13 Years, Sri Lanka

'I cannot speak to people but I can speak with spirits'

Child, Aged 9 years, Sweden

'I can see them with my physical eyes (dead people) I can speak to them and hear their response'

Child aged 12 years, USA



Portals, age 5 years;

Friendly Voices, age 17 years

Children with Narcolepsy and Pans



“There’s a weird man in my room”, aged 10 years

“I saw a weird tall man in my room. I was shouting for my mum to come and help”

Age 10 years

“Sometimes when I’m watching TV with my Mum, I see a man standing behind the TV.... He just watches us”

Age 8 years

Children without Diagnosed Conditions



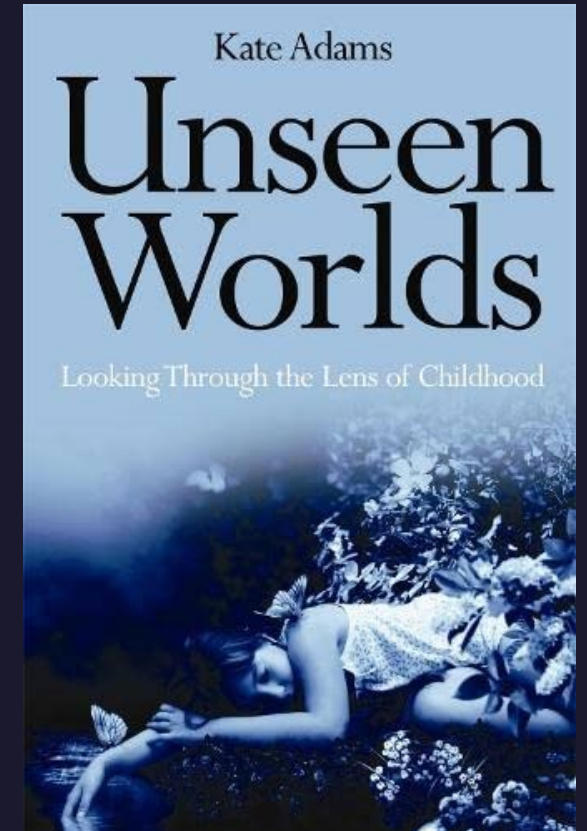
“When I’m singing I see a lady stood behind my teacher dressed in old fashioned clothes” aged 10 years

“Once when I was playing out, I could hear someone calling my name but no one was there” aged 8 years

“Sometimes when I’m on my Xbox I start to see things or hear noises in my room” aged 9 years

“At night when I’m scared to go to sleep, an invisible hand will come and hold mine and it helps me go to sleep” aged 7 years

Younger children report more intense and engaging experiences than teenagers



Brain as producer or filter?

Professor Alison Gopnik



- “Explore – Exploit” sequence
- Children’s brains and adult psychedelic studies

Gopnik, A. (2023). Exploration vs. Exploitation: Adults Are Learning (Once Again) From Children. *APS Observer*, 36.

Professor Sarah Durston



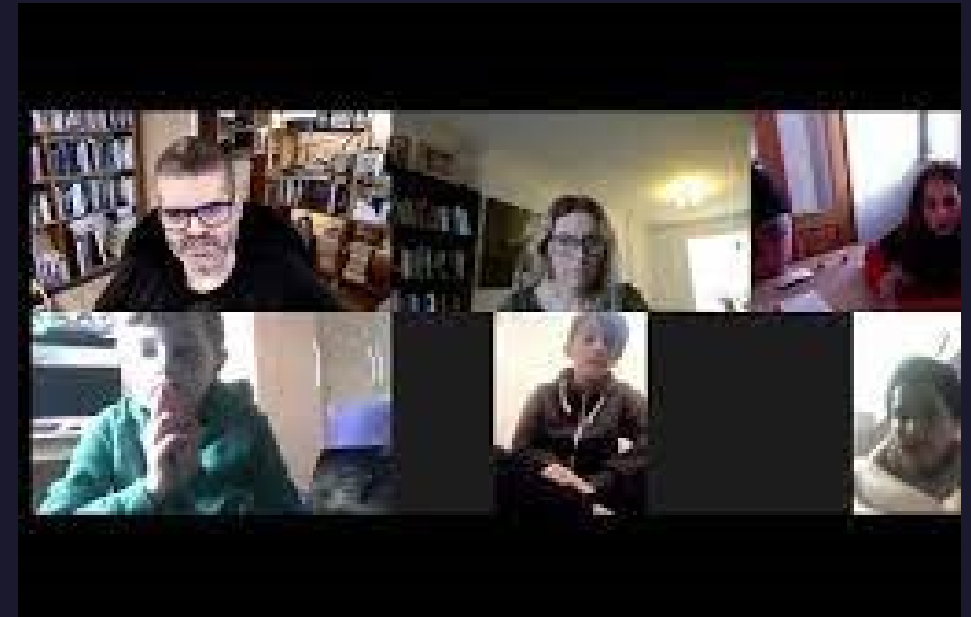
- Disorders and labels implies common causal structures suggesting we understand the problem
- Problem viewed as within the individual
- No biological imprint for these disorders

Hulst, B, Wekhoven S & Durston, S (2021) We need to rename ADHD, *Scientific American*

“My Mind is not in my Brain!”

Ideas of the World and Children’s Experiences

- Universe extra dimensions, psycho-physical spaces that may account for wide spectrum of human experience
- Experiences understood in relation to space and states of consciousness
- Child as alter – analytical Idealism
- Children’s Ideas of the world





Social transformation?

- Rethinking children and their experiences
- Learning from children in explorations of consciousness and ESEs
- Interrogating and informing dominant brain-based science and services for children



Children's Unexplained Experiences in a Post Materialist World

What children can teach us about
the mystery of being human

Donna Maria Thomas
Foreword by Bernardo Kastrup

“Children are still close, in time and experience, to the source of life and reality. They can still feel through their roots, which are sunk deep into the warm and moist ground of being”

Bernardo Kastrup, Foreword, 2023

Thank You

Dr Donna MThomas

E: dthomas15@uclan.ac.uk

