

# Academic librarians and searchers: A new collaboration sets the path towards research project success

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## **Academic librarians and searchers: A new collaboration sets the path towards research project success**

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**Abstract.** Digital libraries develop more and more partnerships with research teams. In France, the study case of the research project "Childhood, Violence, and Exil" testifies to the fact that librarians play a new role in research investigation. We will focus our paper on the description of the different kind of resources of this project, which has allowed new kind of research collaboration between searchers and librarians.

**Keywords.** research project, resources description, librarian, searcher, description Tools, digital Library.

### **1. Introduction**

How digital librarians can collaborate with searchers regarding to the description of their resources? In the "Childhood, Violence and Exil" project, an international research project from the Blaise Pascal University, and sustained by the National Agency of Research (ANR), the digital librarians of BCU (Bibliothèque Clermont Université/ Clermont University Library) have played an active part in the constitution of digital collections and resource description. This collaboration work could be regarded in the frame of digital humanities studies. Rieger (2010).

This paper explains which tools were used in order to improve the corpus description by searchers, and how this literacy question of e-resources description joins the question of the research itself.

### **2. From the Brauner's collection to the EVE's project.**

How children feel war time? How they live the events, the conflicts itself, in their everyday lives, but also how they apprehend, understand and represent the war phenomenon, in short, what children have to say about the war ?

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These questions were asked by Françoise and Alfred Brauner when they began to commit themselves during the Spanish war at the school of the children's ward in the International Brigade hospital, in 1937.

It seemed to them that children's drawings were a true material to access children's experience in all its complexity.

If aesthetic productions by children have begun to draw attention since the beginning of the 20th century, the Brauners experienced the value of the graphic mode of expression and its reconstructive function.

Françoise Brauner (Vienna 1911 – Paris 2000), a pedopsychiatrist, first came in contact with children in wartime. Alfred Brauner (Saint-Mandé 1910 – Paris 2002) also left for Spain and dedicated himself to the centers for evacuated children.

All through their lives, they collected children's drawings made in wartime. To the Spanish drawings were added those from concentration camps, from Japan, Vietnam, Algeria, Lebanon, Cambodia, El Salvatore, Afghanistan, Palestine, Chechnya.

However, the drawings and the texts collected by them represent highly important documents for those interested in children in wartime. In respect of the great diversity of their experience, the Brauner's collection appears as a starting point to dress a larger investigation about child experience during war time.

At the occasion of the centenary of their birth, it was time to elaborate a larger research on the child's experience of war, with new scientific perspectives. The EVE project (the acronym for *Enfance Violence Exil*) (Childhood, Violence and Exile) responds to this aim.

In the continuity of the Brauner's initiative, the EVE project (Childhood Violence and Exile) (a program from the Research National Agency Children Childhood 2009) presents collections and studies dealing with children's experience of the war from the First World War to the dawn of the 21st century. From academic works conducted by the University Blaise Pascal in Clermont-Ferrand, directed by Catherine Milkovitch-Rioux, in partnership with the University of Amiens and the University of Regensburg, paths are proposed through collections of children's drawings, journals and albums, writers's testimonies... These children who have experience war, on all fronts of Europe and world, from world wars to Algeria, in Guatemala or in Ramallah, in Bosnia or in Rwanda, participate in the writing and the reading of the tragical history of 20th and 21st century.

This project consists in the collect, the exploitation in research and the valorization of different funds relating to the experience of war, of subsequent exile to civil violence, of violence experienced by children during or following the conflicts of 20th century, mainly in Europe (from the first World War to the dawn of the 21st century), from the Brauner's funds (children drawings), reviews, scholar and collectives diaries, and archival deposits.

This project is part of an interdisciplinary field of research that combines literary, civilization study, historical, psycholinguistic (including languages, psychoanalytic, and sociological approaches).

Through different forms of cultural funds, their integration in a research field, an historical period and a defined cultural area, the used documentation reconstitutes through the testimony on childhood in its greatest diversity, a true history of the 20th century, from “child’s height”, through the lived experiences of victim children, and the representation they’ve given. Children have been also subjects of many representations through the most varied and diverse medias, whether graphic, text, sound or audio-visual produced at a time of trauma or in a retrospective perception. All of these media may reflect the proper perception of the child, or of the adult he has become, or of the other adults with their perspective on childhood through the youth literature.

### **3. Digital humanities: From the corpus to the website.**

#### **First mission: collecting testimonies, building the corpus.**

The EVE project’s academic staff has constituted its own corpus. Each researcher has selected his own sources according to his own specialty.

I will give few examples of this corpus:

- Drawing of children in war: Françoise and Alfred Brauner’s collection, witnesses of the century. *Guy Baudon, Rose Duroux, Luca Gaboardi*
- Scholarly journals of Spanish children evacuated to France and Great-Britain.

*Célia Keren*

- Autobiography of Spanish children from La Rouvière : experiences of war and exile. *Célia Keren*
- Representation of wars in youth album. *Nelly Chabrol Gagne*
- Literature and children reviews during the First World War: Fillette.

*Laurence Messonier*

- Drawings of children from Montmartre. *Manon Pignot*
- Drawings of children from Ramallah. *Manon Pignot*
- Oral testimony of children of the First World War. Linguistic study. *Mylène*

*Blasco-Dulbecco*

- Drawing of displaced and exiled children (1982-2005) World refugee children fond. *Nicole Dagnino*

- Testimonies of writers of the war of Algeria. *Max Vega Ritter, Catherine Milkovitch Rioux*

- Drawings of Jewish children in France (1939-1945) Château de la Guette, zieu *Emilie Lochy, Annette Becker, Philippe Mesnard*

- Drawings of Jewish children of Theresienstadt and Auschwitz (1942-1945) *Emilie Lochy, Annette Becker, Philippe Mesnard*

- Drawings of children after 2001, September 11th. *Donatella Caprioglio*

The librarians of the BCU have played an active part in the corpus constitution.

Indeed, the librarians have digitalized a part of these collections, in order to put them online on the website dedicated to the project, but we will present here the important part played by the librarians in the resource description process.

In that study case, we see that the manner resources are described have a real impact on the research itself.

The description of these resources on childhood during war will be all the more decisive than it helps to understand these testimonies and to dress a parallel between all the studies of the project, in order to understand the reality of childhood in war time.

The main questions regarding the indexation of the resources allow us to propose a data structuration that corresponds to the web site arborescence. In that perspective, the first task was to find and build a common framework in order to describe all these resources.

The first difficulty came from the heterogeneous corpus. All these children's testimonies or these stories whose object is childhood take many forms: drawings, audio-visual interviews, youth albums, personal diaries. How to build a common framework calculated to describe such different types of resources?

Yet, it is not the same thing to describe a child's drawing and audio visual records, or a youth album. Each material has its own specificity. In the case of child drawing description, the interpretation starts with a close attention paid to « manifest » signs. According to the Brauner's, the reading of the drawing may also be helped by the commentaries or the speech inserted within them. Moreover, drawings reflect what children hear or see around them. « All these drawings show violence in action, different forms of war, the rise of fear, » but also plenty of details related to their everyday life. Looking at these drawings, we may ask: « How could children plunged in situations of emergency, of bombings, see so many details? » To dress a common framework of analysis of these drawings, we have chosen to use the nine main themes that the Brauner have selected in order to classify them.

- The search for security
- The houses and the ruins
- The sight of the enemy
- The weapons
- The certainties
- The wounded, the dead, the death
- The child who draws himself.
- Drawings from nuclear war
- Drawings of peace.

In a second level, the searchers have to use key-words to describe their resources.

These key-words have to reflect the specificities of these drawings, or others materials, and the meaning of what they express, regarding to these childhood testimonies.

The second difficulty came from the different perspectives of these resources. In the case of children's drawings, the child is subject and expresses his own point of views. But in case of childish literature, the child becomes object under the author's look. When an adult tells about his own childhood, it is still another point of view on childhood in war. If these different points of view lighten in an original way the history of conflicts, it appears as a necessity to distinguish in the corpus all these different focalizations.

That's the reason why we have operated a classification between those different looks:

- The child relates (transmitter). The adult observes (receiver)
- The child relates (transmitter)
- The child reads (recipient). Fiction relates the childhood.
- The adult relates his childhood. Retrospective testimony.

The corpus covers almost all the conflicts of the 20th century. To delimit the different conflicts, and to propose a correct chronological indexation, it was necessary to establish a normalized list of conflicts.

If the searchers describe the resource they have chosen in order to set their own studies, a particular attention should be added to the standardization of their description.

In order to describe the resources, we have chosen the Dublin Core format as a common description framework. The fifteen fields of the Dublin Core answer the basic requirements of resource description. But the difficulty we first met was to explain to the searchers the exigency of this standardization. It was really important that the searchers describe by themselves the resources of the project. Indeed, this description belongs to the research process itself.

Faced with this dual requirement of exhaustive description and standardization, the BCU has developed a collaborative tool allowing researchers to quickly appropriate Dublin Core Standards, used to describe online resources.

Google docs on line questionnaires have been used at this aim. Easy to use by researchers, they could fulfil the metadata for resource description in Dublin Core format.

The advantage of the form is that it allows librarians to give researchers all the details which allow them to describe the resources uniformly, particularly in terms of format, which is necessary for data interoperability.

Once researchers have completed the forms, the data are automatically imported into a spread sheet, within fifteen columns corresponding to the fifteen Dublin Core fields. They are ready to be imported via FTP to the project website.

The EVE website has been made by a consultant: Luca Gaboardi Interactive. But the library team has played an important part in the web site conception. Indeed, the different studies are accessible by conflict (chronological access), but also according to the looks on children on war : the child look when he draws, the adult's look on the child who draws, the adult's look on his own childhood, the look carried by the youth literature, when the child has become a reader.

The keywords used for the thematical indexation constitutes a tags cloud on the home page of the website, that lets the user sees all the e-resources related to a specific theme.

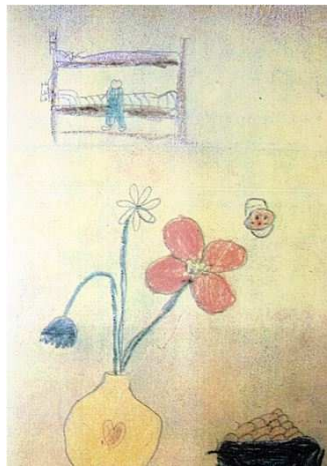
The library staff has also worked with the staff in charge of the multimedia scenarisation, called "Créatic". The goal was to add a pedagogical dimension in the website, with the purpose of catching in an original way the stories of those

children, victims of the war. It is yet possible to access the corpus by collection but also by scenarios, what we call the scripted resources.

To access the corpus by collection provides an overview of all the pictures or research materials related to a study, whereas the access by scenario provides access to resources by subject, and a pedagogical and historical progression through these aspects of children's lives. The scenarisation of these resources has been made in close connection with searchers.

The example of the scenarisation made with the documents related to the Spanish war gives an overview of the exodus of the Spanish children in France. All the searchers of the EVE project have used these collections as research materials. The EVE website draws perspectives through these collections and the research investigations. It exposes the materials, the primary sources, and the studies, the scientific discourses made from these materials. In that way, this project enters in the frame of digital humanities.

In the EVE project, we are well in the "intersection of technologies and humanity scholarship", as Oya Rieger[1] says. The EVE website constitutes a research tool for anybody who wants to seize the complexity of childhood in wartime, and gives another representation of the child, not only as a victim, but also, as an actor, who can oppose the hardness of the war, the richness of his imagination, as the famous flower in a vase and the fruit cup drawn by a child in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt shows.



The vase of flowers with butterfly. Author: Erika Tausikova, girl, 9 years old, gazed in 1944 October, at Auschwitz© 2010 Luca Gaboardi

#### **4. Conclusions**

During the website realization, librarians and searchers haven't ceased to work together. Numerous seminars between librarians and searchers have enhanced the project. The main librarian's contribution was to build a framework to describe and classify the resources. In this study case we see that

data structuration leads to conceive the structuration of the web site arborescence. With this common framework for resource description and data structuration, all the searchers of the project can explore the corpus with a common referential.

This project has given the librarian's staff the opportunity to develop new skills in project management, digital curation, understanding of digital issues related to research project.

That's the reason why we have been led progressively to develop by ourselves digital tools and websites to expose the sources of research. That's what we did with the project that followed, a very different one, conducted with an other research team: [The geological notebooks of Philippe Glangeaud](#).

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