



## **Researching with children and adolescents as co-researchers: methodological strategies, ethical considerations, and main findings**

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### **Map monographic theme**

All children and adolescents (CA) have the right to be heard, express their points of view, and considered in decision-making processes that affect their lives (ONU, 1989). These rights cannot be excluded from the field of scientific research and knowledge creation (Aguirre *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, recent evidence has shown that in the context of Covid-19, research that actively engages with children and adolescents has acquired greater relevance (Cuevas-Parra, 2020) and this will continue in subsequent periods.

Participatory research with CA is an umbrella term that encompasses children's participation in decision-making related to the research process. The active participation of children and adolescents in scientific research as co-researchers has evolved significantly in recent decades (Saracostti *et al.*, 2015) which has shown a movement in the focus of social science research and research processes involving children and adolescents. This shift reflects a change of focus in social science research, from viewing children and adolescents as subjects-objects of studies, to acknowledging them as subjects capable of participating in the co-construction of knowledge (James & Prout, 2010). In turn, this approach to intergenerational



research between adult researchers and children can enable the construction of more democratic knowledge about their lives and the recognition of children and adolescents as agents of change and capable researchers (Marinkovic *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, Liebel (2007) argued that research carried out with children and adolescents can generate significant and helpful knowledge to learn about their ways of thinking, opinions, and points of view.

The specialized literature in this topic shows that CA are willing and able to participate in the different stages of research and that research benefits from their incorporation in the various stages (Davis, 2000; Davis *et al.*, 2003; Jones, 2004; Kirby, 1999; Mannay, 2017; Shier, 2015). Additionally, adult researchers' commitment to actively involve CA as co-researchers transforms both the process and outcomes of the research. In this way, the experience of being a young co-researcher itself holds the potential to become a significant learning tool for children and adolescents (Reimer & McLean, 2015).

Lundy and McEvoy (2011) attributed importance to CA actively participating in research question formulation, method suitability, data collection instrument design or application, analysis, and interpretation of results and/or dissemination materials and methodology design. To achieve this, flexible and creative methodologies are becoming increasingly popular in social research with children (Mannay, 2017; Tisdall *et al.*, 2010). The scientific literature on the topic shows a variety of strategies for involving children in the research process, including focus groups, research capacity-building training sessions or workshops, photography, and filming. Many participation strategies use a variety of data collection methods where children and adolescents are the subjects and we seek here to better differentiate between children's participation as subjects in studies that use participatory methods (e.g., focus groups to collect data) and children's participation within participatory research processes (e.g., focus groups used to involve children in decision making related to the research process).

It is necessary to consider that participatory research with CA poses important ethical challenges for adult researchers, particularly in relation power-sharing during the process of knowledge co-construction (Rodríguez-Pascual, 2007). Adult



researchers require addressing these considerations to actively involve children in the research process and avoid tokenistic participation. Lundy, McEvoy and Byrne (2011) pointed out that this approach to doing research with CA implies a deep ethical commitment on the part of adult researchers to carefully design methodologies that make it possible to co-construct valid knowledge with CA about their views and experiences. In this context, participatory researchers have developed strategies and techniques to balance power dynamics in the research setting and facilitate children's freedom expression. For example, actively involving children in research from the outset of a project can help negotiate with them how they want to participate in the production of knowledge (if they wish to do so).

This monograph will be guided by three central questions:

- (1) What methodological strategies have been used to involve children and adolescents in research processes as co-researchers in different contexts of Latin America and the world?
- (2) What are the implicit or explicit ethical considerations in participatory research studies conducted with child and adolescent co - researchers?
- (3) What are children and adolescents' own views and experiences of being co-researchers?

In this monograph, we are concerned with providing space for the main results arising from research in which children and adolescents have participated as co-researchers, including thematic findings and an analysis of the methodological strategies and/or ethical dimensions at play.

Articles from any country or region of the world will be accepted.

Articles should follow the Guidelines of the authors of the journal.

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