

CHILD MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES
International conference

**CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE METHOD AND CHALLENGES OF A CHILD-CENTRED
APPROACH TO THE COLLECTION OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL LIFE STORIES FROM
MIGRANT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

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STARTING POINTS

1. Choice of *methods, analysis, interpretation* of data are **not neutral** because they carry the **epistemological, ontological, and theoretical assumptions** of researchers who developed them (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000).
2. Selection of methods/data analysis/interpretation are **impacted by other personal, interpersonal, emotional, institutional, pragmatic** influences.
3. The **feminist researchers** were among the first that pointed out that characteristics such as **gender, race, class, and sexuality** affect the nature and structure of research relationships (Edwards, 1990; Finch, 1984; Ribbens, 1989; Song and Parker, 1995).

STARTING POINTS

CRITICAL REFLECTION on how we **transform individual subjective perceptions into social science ‘theory’** and how this is affected by our **positioning as a researcher** is crucial (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

STARTING POINTS

Filed work with **vulnerable groups**: the influence of **power differences** should be especially considered.

Reflexivity related to **ethics and ethical mindfulness** - awareness of the **relational** and **emotional** nature of research (Warin, 2011:812)

- researchers working with children/young adults should be exceptionally sensitive to **ethics** due to the potential for **exploitative relationships**.
- **Reflexivity is a tool** for achieving **ethical mindfulness**.
- A special attention: process of **receiving consent** in relation to **individual's participation** in the **study**.

AIMS

- 1) Reflection on how **successful a method of collection of auto/biographical life stories is in collecting data?**
- 2) How **child-centred the method** of collection of auto/biographical life stories is?
- 3) Personal **self-reflexion** on researcher's social location influence.

FIELD WORK AND METHODOLOGY

The reflexive observations are derived from the experiences of the **MiCreate - Migrant Children and Communities in a Transforming Europe project** (Horizon 2020) and more concretely from the fieldwork conducted in **SLOVENIAN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS** in the period November 2019- March 2021.

The field work was significantly prolonged due to the lock-down of the schools and other COVID-19 restriction.

- 2 age groups: 10-14 y/o and 15-19 y/o; male/female.
- children with **migratory experience** (newly arrived and long-term), **local children** (also 'second' and 'third' generation).
- Public schools, urban areas.
- Migrant children: prevailingly from the **area of former Yugoslavia**.
- The **prevailing languages** of migrant children are: Albanian, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Macedonian. Also: Russian, Ukrainian, Chinese, English, Persian language etc.
- **Combined methodological approach**: participant observation, survey, focus groups, art-based approach, collection of autobiographical stories.

1) USEFULNESS OF THE METHOD IN COLECTING DATA

- Children could openly discuss **various topics**.
- Researchers **learned more about them** in comparison with other methods (*observation, focus groups*); more in-depth understanding of **previously observed** classroom dynamics and peer relations.
- Method gave children the **space and time to express their thoughts/experiences**.
- The method proved to be **individualized**: gives space for **intimate, personal expressions**.
- Allows obtaining an **insight into subjective experience** of migration and integration, as well as **general well-being**.

USEFULNESS OF THE METHOD

MAIN LIMITATIONS:

- **Newly arrived migrant children: language constrains.**
- **Introvert children: difficulties** to express.
- **Online interviews:** children still (in most cases) spoke openly and shared information about their life, hopes, thoughts, plans, and subjective well-being.

USEFULNESS OF THE METHOD

RESPONSES FROM CHILDREN:

- **Interviews started:** 'lighter topics' such as free time activities, etc. and progressed to topics associated with migration and integration.
- *How you became the person you are now?* or *Tell me please the story of your life*. Researchers tried **not to interfere** the narrative **or lead** the narrative.
- However, most children prefer clear-cut questions. **Children asked researchers to lead the interview**. (researchers were bargaining between promoting open-narration and asking specific questions).
- Especially in the case of **younger** age group and **newly arrived** migrant children the additional questioning was needed.
- Some children relaxed and expand their narration, but for the **majority constant incentive was necessary** .
- **Primary school:** less self reflective, less rich and diverse information....
- **Secondary school children:** narrowly oriented in relation to specific topics – leisure activities, friends, school life, love

2. CHILD-CENTREDNESS?

How **child-centred the method** is? To which extent it is minimizing adult-centred perspective on migrant children integration during the research process and give enough **autonomous space** to children **to express**?

- Method is **potentially very child-centred** when **used properly** and with **enough time available**. (giving enough opportunity for expressing thoughts, observations, feelings; could expose topics important for them, regardless of the overall aim of the project).

-CHALLENGES: to **follow the children's perspective** sometimes difficult since **children expected direct questions** (less talkative, more introvert, newly arrived children or those less involved with the researcher from previous research stages).

Necessity: to **repeat interviews at least** two or three times in order to apply better CCA better.

3. PERSONAL REFLECTION

Reflexivity on **social** (gender, age etc.) and **emotional location** in relation to respondents.

How **researcher's social location** and the ways in which the **researcher's emotional responses** to the respondents can **influence the** interpretations the accounts.

Being **middle-age women** influenced the dynamic with children:

- Negatively.: perceived me as an adult/member of educational staff (expected answers and behavior)
- Positively: trust/confessions/search for adult support/figure

PERSONAL REFLECTION

OBSERVATIONS

- Interviews were **therapeutic** (children do not have possibilities to talk to the adults that are attentive and consider children's opinion as relevant).
- Many discussed **personal and family problems, hardships** that trouble them (the disease, absent parent, drug abuse in family, neglecting behaviour, physical abuse, etc.). Some took the opportunity to **promote and praise themselves**.
- **Emotional involvement:** hard to maintain emotional and psychological distance when listening about children's problems.
- Sometimes, researchers **have not record the conversation** but took some time and just talked/listened to children.
- Some children reported **risk events** that put researchers into position whether **to report the event** to authorities or not (researchers did not report any story).

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Girls: generally, more talkative, open, and **more informative**, more **expressive** and able to **reflect more** thoroughly on their personal lives, feelings, challenges, future aspirations etc.

Also, **long-term migrant children and local children** have advantage in oral expression, no language barriers.

For **newly arrived migrant children** severe **troubles** to express themselves in **Slovene language**. Given the possibility to speak in their **mother tongue, they rarely decide to do so**. (Why newly arrived migrant children do not want to speak in their mother tongue with the researcher? – shame?)

- **Ethical mindfulness & process of receiving consent in relation to individual's participation in the study:**

to what extent voluntire participation of children? Participation was related to absenteeism from class and the gift they received (speaker)... + expectations to pleased adults, teachers, researchers

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Collection of auto/biographical life stories is **potentially** very **child-centred approach** and **approach that allows to collect rich and informative data** but,

- should be *repeated* several times
- give *time and space* to express; a lot of *patience & ,silence* in between'
- Newly arrived migrant children (necessity of *combined methodological approach* – art-based approach, participant observation etc. or presence of *cultural mediator, translator*)
- The question of completely *,voluntary' participation remain ...*
- Constant self-reflection about unequal power relation is needed (are we truly as adults capable to give up our power?)

Thank you for your kind attention!