Collaborative Ethnography as a Possibility of Developing Visible and Constructive Agency with Children in Displacement Conditions in Colombia

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Abstract. *The importance of researching children has been recognized by different disciplines; however, this does not necessarily lead researchers to incorporate children's perspectives and views into the research processes. Traditionally, the understanding of children's experiences has been conducted from the perspective of adults who are able to speak for them, while children have hardly been taken seriously on their own terms. However, during the 1980s, strategies to combat ways of silencing children expanded in social science research across different disciplinary traditions and paradigms. This paper attempts to delve into the question of active participation of children in the production of knowledge, and the possibilities it opens for both making visible and developing children´s agency. Drawing on a study that examines the ways children displaced by the armed conflict recreate the meanings of their physical and cultural worlds in a violent and impoverished area in Colombia, I will explore the implications of children's active participation in research. This paper demonstrates that collaborative research provides an opportunity for children to demonstrate their agency in shaping their worlds. Making visible the collaborative research contributions in the Colombian context has a potential of enhancing conceptualizations of research as a form of action that fosters social transformation.*

Keywords: *children, conflict displacement, agency, collaborative ethnography.*

Introduction

The concept of children and their role in the research process has transformed throughout history. While researchers from various disciplines noticed early the importance of researching children, this did not lead researchers to incorporate children's perspectives and views in their studies. Historically, children have been silenced and have not been considered "key informants" for the understanding of the social phenomena. Because of the notion that children cannot speak for themselves, they were hardly taken seriously on their own terms (Corsaro 2005). It is common to find studies in which the understanding of children's experiences is conducted from the perspective of adults who are able to speak for them.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), approved in 1989, is a benchmark that has influenced the transformation of the concept of childhood and also the place assigned to chil-

dren within the society, particularly in the development of child policies and in the research processes. The UNCRC redefined the status of children by acknowledging their civil and political rights through Article 12, on the right to express their views freely, and the right to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child. At the same time, strategies to combat ways of silencing children multiplied in social science research across disciplinary traditions and paradigms. Particularly, the fields of anthropology and sociology of childhood developed with the work of researchers such as Allison James, Alan Prout and Chris Jenks (2004).

Since the end of the 20th century, the UNCRC and some varied theoretical perspectives offered across the social sciences recognized children as social subjects with the agency and capacity to influence their own lives and their communities as well as with possibilities to create a critical reflection of the adult world. It means that children are acknowledged as complete human beings and not as miniature adults. Additionally, researchers have started to recognize that studying educational and social processes by incorporating children´s voices increases the chances of understanding these phenomena in deeper ways (Milstein 2006).

Ethnography, as a research approach, is particularly suitable to include children in the research process and to give them opportunities to share their voice and active participation in the same way as other participants or "informants." This paper demonstrates how a collaborative perspective can make visible and create opportunities for children's agency. I will delve into the question of active participation of children in the research process inherent in collaborative ethnography. I will also explore the possibilities that collaborative ethnography opens to understand children's perspectives while offering the children the opportunities to develop agency in contexts of social vulnerability, particularly in the Colombian context of armed post-conflict. The main aspects developed in this paper include:

1. A view of research relationships with children as consultancy and collaboration;

2. Ethnography as a way to show children's agency and an analysis of children's narratives as a way to reveal children's struggles against the stigmatizing discourses about their displacement experiences;

3. Collaborative ethnography as a way to create a sense of power and autonomy for children living in conditions of violence or social vulnerability;

4. Children's participation in research as a contribution to the understanding of the dynamics of war, particularly of the displacement experience, to create new possibilities in the reconstruction of communities and social networks.

The paper will show the potentials of collaborative ethnographic research to help children develop agency and transform their own social worlds while making these phenomena visible to broader research audiences.

The Context

The context of this paper is the Colombian armed conflict and particularly the displacement experience caused by a long

history of political violence and terrorism. The armed conflict refers to the violent confrontation between armed forces, guerrilla groups and paramilitary groups that affect the civilian population. Colombia has experienced more than five decades of war. Out of all Colombians 50 years old or younger, 4 in 5 people have never known what it means to live in peace (UNICEF 2016). In order to understand the magnitude of the armed conflict, it is necessary to recognize the different factors related to the conflict, including the persistence of the agrarian problem, the irruption and spread of drug trafficking, the limitations and possibilities of political participation, the influences and pressures of the international context and the institutional and territorial fragmentation of the state (National Centre for Historical Memory 2013). The seventh version of the United Nations' "Yearbook of Peace Processes 2012," a document that analyzes the negotiations processes to achieve peace agreements in the world, indicates that because of the history and permanence in time, the Colombian conflict had become the oldest non-negotiated armed conflict in the world.

The armed conflict has caused many people to flee their places of origin to escape the violence. The Norwegian Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2015), in the report titled "People Internally Displaced by Conflict and Violence. Global Overview 2015," states that Colombia is ranked as the second country with the highest number of a displaced population in the world with six million victims, approximately 12% of the total population of the country; the first place is held by Syria with 7.6 million displaced people. Further-

more, the drug-related violence continues to have a significant impact on the civilian population. In addition, Colombia has a strongly fragmented and unequal society, in which deep inequities leave rural, indigenous, and African-descent communities with few resources and options.

To face the conflict situation, the Colombian government has oscillated between pacifist and reformist positions, military and repressive alternatives: contention scenarios of guerrilla expansion; violations of human rights; attempts to open democracy (Reform of the National Political Constitution); the privatization of civil security (creation of the Convivir groups); peace negotiations (1998–2002); a return to the monopoly of force, which caused institutional powerlessness; finally, the current negotiation and peace agreements (2012–present). After four years of negotiation in Cuba, a peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia FARC–EP, the biggest guerrilla movement in Colombia, was finally signed on October 2, 2016.

Children have suffered directly and indirectly from the consequences of the Colombian armed conflict. According to the UNICEF report (2016), the statistics between 1985–2016 show that there are 7.6 million people registered in Colombia as victims of conflict; 2.5 million, or 1 in 3, are children. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian children have been especially vulnerable during the conflict, and they represent 12% of the displaced, 15% of the survivors of sexual violence and 17% of the tortured. One in five young people in Colombia are unemployed, not going to school or not receiving technical training (UNICEF 2016).

There are important differences in terms of violent actions affecting children and each of these actions has have different implications. The actions include sexual abuse in war, kidnapping, forced displacement, massacres, combatants' children, demobilized children, land mine casualties, orphaned or abandoned children, forced disappearance and illicit recruiting, among others. It is particularly worrying that the population of children from early childhood (0–5 years) and childhood (6–12 years) have faced situations of constant violation of their rights, which compromises their integral development and influences their identity construction as well as the relationships they establish within the territories they inhabit (Guerrero & Tinkler 2010).

Children in an armed conflict and currently in a post-agreement scenario have been notably absent in the discussions. Their voices are invisible, and their participation to transform their social networks is barely considered in social programs, public policy designs or research processes. Similarly, peace processes in other countries have addressed the issue of demobilized children while paying little attention to children who grew up and were socialized in the midst of war. In order to support war-affected children, it is necessary to understand how children have been affected by different actions and to use appropriate conceptual analyses to inform the design of interventions that suit the particular situations and contexts. This paper emphasizes children's voices as a key element to achieve a comprehensive understanding of children displaced by the armed conflict.

Collaborative Research with Children in Displacement Situations

Conflict creates a series of disruptions in the development of children, which has been explored in depth in the psychological and humanitarian agencies' literature on trauma. Much of this body of literature rests on a victim-based orientation toward refugees and internally displaced people. Wessells (2016) warns that research conducted to understand the way children are affected by armed conflict has privileged the use of Western models and measures that are presumed to be universal but that do not fit the social and historical conditions of particular contexts. The author asserts that the use of universalized instruments tends to marginalize local understandings and practices that comprise sustainable strengths that could be used to support war-affected children in that context. Given that displaced peoples are by definition victims of political violence, it is not surprising that this discourse is also prevalent in the academic and non-governmental organizations' (NGO) literature on displacement. Wessels (2016) asserts:

Research on PTSD in war-affected children has typically focused on the effects of exposure to horrendous, potentially overwhelming events such as attack, seeing people killed, seeing dead bodies, and so on. Yet some of the greatest sources of suffering for war-affected children are everyday sources of distress (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Wessells & Kostelny, 2012) that arise from the transformation of their social environment and the proliferation of risks at multiple levels. These risks include displacement, loss of loved ones, sepa-

ration from parents or caregivers, family violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, trafficking, living and working on the streets, HIV and AIDS, engagement in dangerous labor, recruitment by armed forces or armed groups, or trafficking, among many others (p. 199).

The drama of childhood and youth in the midst of the armed conflict in Colombia has motivated multiple investigators to take a different perspective and to concentrate not only on highlighting the magnitude of the problem politically, socially, culturally and economically, but also on providing the possibility for actors, who have historically been invisible, to express their experiences related to the armed conflict (Guerrero & Tinkler 2010; Mantilla et al. 2000; Riaño 2004; Venegas et al. 2011). These studies focus on making visible the children's and youngster's voices and the meanings they assign to their experiences. By drawing on a sociocultural perspective and using narrative and ethnographic perspectives, these studies have given voice to a population marginalized by their social and political conditions and also by their age. A benefit of this approach is that it enables a much more nuanced understanding of how children are affected by the armed conflict and, more specifically, by the displacement experience.

James and Prout (2000) and Christensen and Prout (2002) acknowledge that research focused on children has changed historically and that these changes are clearly influenced by the researchers' conceptions about children. Early studies considered children as objects of investigation; however, owing to the epistemological changes occurring in childhood stud-

ies, today there is research *with* children, in which children are considered authors or at least active participants. This does not mean that one type of research has replaced the other; there is a coexistence of different approaches and methodologies to investigate children and their experiences instead.

The nature of ethnography has proved to be particularly suitable to include children, giving them voice and active participation in research. By orienting research toward interpreting the ways in which children understand the world as active agents in the construction of their own relationships and culture, ethnography opens the possibility of creating new understandings that are unknown or overlooked by adults. This implies the recognition that both children and adults are part of the social domain. According to Nunes (1999), knowledge based on children's experiences is fundamental for the recognition of their rights as well as the construction of society that includes childhood as a social category.

From a collaborative perspective, Lassiter (2005) points out the importance of ethnographers assuming research relationships with participants as consultancy and collaboration. He also suggests that researchers incorporate and recognize their position as researchers in order to create space for dialogue with participants. Therefore, the role of the researcher involves questioning the beliefs and postulates that have been taken for granted. Specifically, in research with children, it implies examining power issues within research relationships between adults and children with a view to greater equality.

Finally, ethnography offers ways of creating a sense of power and autonomy for children living in conditions of violence or social vulnerability. Campbell and Lassiter (2010) remind researchers that besides an explicit collaboration in the different phases of the research process, the collaborative ethnographic perspective encourages more ethical and responsible practices, as well as a verification of findings through a reciprocal analysis. The authors add that "collaborative engagements" could destabilize academic discourses and have the potential to extend the purposes and processes of collaboration into context-based actions or activism. The ways children understand their social realities can illuminate the creation of new alternatives for building strategies in a process of transition toward peace. Moreover, collaborative ethnography, in a transition process from war to peace, facilitates the construction of knowledge *with* "the other" and not *on* "the other." It questions discourses that have been socially naturalized that might contribute to maintain practices of violence and inequality.

Collaborative Ethnography as a Possibility for Children's Agency

The concepts of child and childhood are always changing in a historical context. Particularly, in a war scenario, children are subject to complex social forces that threaten to diminish their voices. Corsaro (2005) warned that children often are not heard nor taken seriously on their own terms. In the context of an armed conflict, it is easy to dismiss interests, ideas, actions and interactions of children as "childish,"

unless strategies are developed and there is a willingness to closely look and see the value of children's understandings. The collaborative ethnographic perspective considers children as competent people, able to testify about their life experiences. Speaking of children's participation in research, it involves incorporating them as collaborators with agency capacity. The active participation of children in research allows researchers not only to learn about children's subjective experiences but also to expand theoretical understandings on different social phenomena (Milstein 2006). Engaging children as co-researchers provides a perspective into the children's and their community's life from their point of view. It allows exploring how children actively create complex identities and how they understand their social and physical landscapes.

Agency is a key aspect of the conceptualizations of identity construction (Holland et al. 1998). This perspective recognizes children as social actors, as active agents capable of action and relative autonomy, which includes capacity for reflection, interpretation and change, and also the capability of influencing events and life situations in which they participate. This means that children, like other individuals, have an array of possibilities as subjects, and that the construction of their identities is fluid, dynamic and negotiable (Holland et al. 1998).

While power structures, ideologies, and, in this particular case, the violence of the armed conflict constrain processes of identity construction, local agency and resistance practices intertwine in produc-

ing reconfigurations of individual and group identities. The data presented in the next section display children's practices of agency in their daily lives and how these practices contribute to the reconfiguration of their identities within the territory they inhabit after the experience of displacement.

Children Displaced by the Armed Conflict: Developing Agency in the Context of an Ethnographic Study

The data presented in this section are part of my work with internally displaced children in Colombia (Guerrero 2008; Guerrero & Tinkler 2010; Guerrero 2011). As a Colombian researcher, I have been inquiring about the impact of war in the lives of children since 2000. The data used in this paper is part of the ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2005–2006 for a larger research study. This study examined the ways children, displaced by the war in Colombia, created and recreated the meanings of their physical and cultural worlds through their participation in an educational, photography-based project.

The photography-based project was sponsored by a non-profit organization whose mission was to support displaced populations through multimedia education. The project took photography as the primary avenue for offering educational and mental health support to children who have experienced displacement. There were fifty-six children involved the program. All the children lived in the area of Altos de Cazuca, located in the southern suburbs of Bogotá. While I had contact with all the children attending the program, my closeness to them varied based on the regularity of the children's attendance. Photo-workshops took place at a small, one-story, rented house located in the midst of Altos de Cazucá.

Because some children had to work or help with house chores, attendance was not regular. From the fifty-six children that participated in the educational program, there were thirty-one girls and twenty-four boys. Participants ranged in age from nine to sixteen and came from diverse areas of Colombia, rural areas, small towns and other neighborhoods in Bogotá. Nearly all children attending the program were out of the formal educational system and for many of them the photography-based project was the only educational program in which they were ever involved.

In the project, children were encouraged to document their lives through photographs and narratives around different themes (e.g., memory, family, fear, old home, new home). As a participant observer, I had the opportunity of collaborating with children and the photography-based project staff in the final productions. The selection of themes was discussed with children who were involved in the whole process of creating the photo-narratives. Children used pinhole cameras to create the photographs. The pinhole cameras[1]

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[1] The photographic pinhole camera consists of a light-tight tin can with a pinhole in one side, and a piece of film or photographic paper wedged or taped inside the can. A piece of black tape can be used as a shutter. The pinhole is usually punched or drilled using a small diameter nail. This hole is then taped to avoid the entrance of light into the tin can. A baby formula container can be made into an excellent pinhole camera.

were handmade by children. As a researcher, I was involved in the all the activities, talking with children, helping them in the process of creating photographs, and walking on the field trips around the area for the children to take pictures of their surroundings. I also had the opportunity to visit some of their homes during the photo tours. While all of these happenings on a daily basis allowed me to get to know the children, there were many challenges related to the need to incorporate creative ways of interacting with children that validated their perspectives and their ability to act as interpreters and authors. It meant I was constantly searching for ways of strengthening their specific values as social actors and agents capable to develop practices aimed at producing political effects (Milstein 2010).

Drawing on the tradition of ethnography and particularly on a collaborative perspective, I took my own reflexivity and children's reflexivity as central to the analysis of the meanings constructed (Guber 2011). Although I collaborated with the photography-based project staff in the daily activities, it was clear for the children and the community that I was conducting my own research project and that I was not sponsored or formally worked for the photography-based project. As a Colombian-born female, I shared similar national heritage but a different economic background from the children participants. Being a Colombian and a native Spanish-speaker afforded me a general insider status; however, my education, social class and place of residence at that time (The United States) rendered me as an outsider to the social world of the children participants. Despite the power asymmetries, my role as a volunteer with the project and the daily contact with children and community members enabled me to establish a partnership with children who participated habitually in the program. Regular interaction allowed bringing together our communicative frames to create a trusting relationship in which it was possible to create meanings in a collaborative manner.

Children's construction of meanings was part of a symbolic system shared with adults. This study demonstrates children's agency in their capacity for symbolic production and in the organized constitution of their representations and beliefs. Particularly, photography and narratives produced within the photography-based program enabled children to develop their own accounts of their experiences and practices. Through these resources, children expressed their understanding on the armed conflict and explained how they had adapted to situations generated by the war. Photo-narratives also became possibilities to promote children's agency related to the limits placed by adults who care for them and the societies in which they lived. The following photo-narrative, created by Marina, addressed the complexity of children's identities being reworked within a hostile resettlement context.

[...] The parts of my body that I like the most are my hands and my lips. I like my hands because I can do many things with them; I love my lips, because through them I can express many things and my feelings. I like this photo a lot because on the mirror reflection one can see the things that were around and part of the city. In the city, I can see many things, like the domestic violence at homes and among all people, and I can see young children working in the streets, and many other things. Through the mirror, we can see ourselves and we can see our own reflections.

Figure No. 1. **Photo-narrative by Marina, 13 years old.**

This photo-narrative captures how children took available resources to create identities in an impoverished and violent surrounding (Guerrero 2008). While Marina's account describes the difficult conditions of the context she inhabits, it also makes visible her agency and perspective of doing things with her hands and to express things through her mouth. This artwork challenges the stereotypes of children living in displaced conditions as mere victims of violence. It offers an opportunity to establish a dialogue with children, to speak and be heard on issues that affect their daily lives. Wang (1999) states that the photo-voices allow giving voice to those who are not heard and enable to transmit their thoughts to positions of power, where decisions are made.

Likewise, the following photo-narrative shows Ester picturing a world and a life she would like to have.

Once upon a time, there was an old lady, but since she was old, she began to recall her youth; she opened a chest where she kept all memories of the time when she was the happiest girl in the world. But [she] had a little grandson, so she called him and told him, "I am going to show you something that I had never shown to anyone," and her little grandson said, "Grandma Ester, at what age did you take it?" And there begins the story...

Figure No. 2. **Photo-narrative by Ester, 12 years-old.**

This photo-narrative reveals, from the inside and in an intimate way, a perspective through which Ester looks at her world. In the photograph, Ester is sitting on a dirty road; the naked rubber hoses lying on the top of the dirt are in the front as reminders of her present location. In her narrative, Ester envisions herself as a grandmother, sharing her story with her grandson and

positioning herself as the happiest girl in the world in an imagined past. The fact that she positions herself as a grandmother is particularly meaningful within a context where people, particularly young people, are commonly threatened with death. She also ends her account telling, "and there begins this story," indicating the beginning of a new and promising life in which she will get old with her family.

Ester had been in the project since its beginning. At the time I conducted my fieldwork, she decided to drop out of school and started working in a little candy shop in the neighborhood. She shared with me that she wanted to leave her house due to the physical abuse of her father against her mother and herself. The photo-narrative above revealed how Ester was making sense of her life and her surroundings. In her self-portrait, she chose to talk about desirable moments, or moments that could happen in the future instead of the turbulent events of her present.

The above photo-narratives demonstrate the potentials of art strategies in a collaborative ethnographic research to help children develop agency for participating and transforming their positions in their own social worlds. Through photography and narratives, children explored their social and physical landscapes while constructing their own identities. Constructing narratives with children in a collaborative ethnography also enabled me as the researcher to understand the worlds they constructed and imagined and the meanings they attributed to their experiences.

Children Negotiating and Resisting Displacement Discourses

As described above, I went to Altos de Cazucá intending to explore the ways "internally displaced children," who participated in an educational photography project, constructed meanings about their lived experiences and their alternatives for the future. I knew that the educational program aimed to help children in displacement conditions, and I had learned from the demographics and from my previous research experiences that Altos de Cazucá was an area that emerged as product of the arrival of people displaced by the armed conflict from varied areas of Colombia. However, when I started my fieldwork, it seemed as if the displaced children had vanished from the area. It took me some time to realize that something else was going on, something that became crucial to understanding the displacement phenomenon as a socially constructed category. Unexpectedly, I found that although some kind of displacement had brought children's families to the area, most children did not define themselves as displaced. They had rejected this category of identification and supplanted it with alternative identities. The number of children who openly defined themselves as displaced was small.

There was a particular conversation with one girl and her mother that strongly impacted my understanding of the displacement condition and the construction of identity of children who had experienced displacement by the armed conflict. The dialogue described below encouraged me to question how displaced people had

been understood as a recognizable social type. A child, talking with me as the researcher in her mother's presence, led me to a new understanding of the local context, the external category of displacement, and the way the child made sense of her current situation.

> *Lorena's mother*: "We had to flee at night as if we were criminals, and we had to leave behind all we had accomplished."

> *Researcher (to Lorena)*: "I don´t understand, you told me that you were not displaced from anywhere."

> *Lorena*: "And it's true! We were displaced, but now here we have a house, so we are not displaced anymore… I don't even know how people live there [South of Bolivar], but I know how people live here."

Guerrero and Milstein (2017), through the analysis of this dialogue between the mother, the girl and the researcher, demonstrated the production of meaning as a collaborative process that occurs during fieldwork. During this conversation within an ethnographic study, Lorena expressed and displayed her agency, challenging my own understanding about the phenomenon of internal displacement in Colombia and its implications on the identity formations of her own and the other children's.

The conversation showed how the Internally Displaced Person (IDP) category, in addition to being a humanitarian label, develops into a social category constructed in the course of daily life. This conversation made visible how Lorena rejected and negotiated the IDP category. The situation also challenged the classification of IDPs that I had created from my experience in Colombia and from the academic and humanitarian agencies' literature. The event suggested that children, rather than being passive victims of circumstances, were actively involved in a continuous process on making and unmaking categorical identities.

My encounter with Lorena and her mother in the early stages of ethnographic fieldwork and, more particularly, the girl´s response within a collaborative perspective, changed my own understanding of the problem. The dialogue with Lorena and her mother led me to rethinking the IDP categories and to developing new perspectives about the situation and the people with whom I collaborated in an ethnographic study. By making sense of her experience and positioning herself in a situation that challenged the socially imposed label to her displacement situation, Lorena taught me that children created situated meanings that made sense only in a particular context. These meanings impacted children's identities and the relationships they established with the new territories they inhabited.

Conclusions: Possibilities and Challenges

The examples presented in this article illustrate the continuous process of renegotiation that children actively engage in to contest the hegemonic narratives that portray children either as helpless recipients of adult agency or as passive victims of the armed conflict (Guerrero & Tinkler 2010). The cases reveal the potential of active participation of children in specific studies in contexts of violence and social vulnerability in Colombia. The cases emphasize

the need for reflexivity as a fundamental component in the process of collaborative research, which provides possibilities for researchers and children to construct new understandings.

Based on my ethnographic fieldwork experiences, I identified some possibilities and challenges of ethnographic research with children during a period of armed post-conflict. First, ethnographic research with children can contribute to raising awareness and generating empathy for the victims of political violence and thus promoting an ethical commitment. Second, research with children can help to understand the effects of war, particularly the displacement from another perspective. This type of research generates a complex understanding of the war, promotes the debate and draws lessons from dialogues to identify new paths. Finally, research with children can help to repair. It allows dignifying, narrating and recognizing children's knowledge while resetting possibilities of their agency in projecting the future.

In conclusion, this paper proposes ethnography as a mode of production of social knowledge that makes children visible as agents capable of transforming their social positioning and, consequently, transforming their own social worlds. The logic of construction of ethnographic knowledge brings us as researchers closer to understanding the culture from the perspectives of children and gives us firsthand knowledge of individual and cultural understandings of the displacement experience. Documenting agency strategies and resistance in the daily lives of children and their communities provides a way to think of ethnography in its critical and emancipatory dimensions, its experiential and experimental side, and its value as a practice of agency in situations of violence and social vulnerability.

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BENDRADARBIAVIMO ETNOGRAFIJOS GALIMYBĖS ATSKLEISTI IR KURTI VAIKŲ PAJĖGUMĄ KONSTRUOJANT GILESNĮ SUPRATIMĄ APIE PERKELTŲJŲ VAIKŲ SITUACIJĄ KOLUMBIJOJE

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S a n t r a u k a

Tyrimų apie vaikus reikšmingumą pripažįsta daugelio skirtingų mokslų sričių atstovai, tačiau ne visada tiriamų vaikų požiūris įtraukiamas į tyrimus. Tradiciškai konkrečios vaikų patirties suvokimas buvo formuojamas remiantis suaugusiųjų, kalbančių už vaikus, požiūriu, didesnio dėmesio nekreipiant į tai, ką gali pasakyti patys vaikai. Vis dėlto praėjusio šimtmečio devintojo dešimtmečio socialiniuose tyrimuose pradėtos taikyti naujos strategijos, kurias lėmė įvairių mokslo šakų, filosofinių paradigmų kaitos bei pasaulinių organizacijų nuostatų pokyčiai. Šios strategijos skatino kovoti su vaikų sampratos ignoravimu ir siekė įtraukti pačius vaikus ir remtis jų požiūriu į mokslinių tyrimų kūrimą ir vykdymą.

Šiame straipsnyje pateikiama etnografinio tyrimo, atskleidžiančio vaikų dalyvavimo kuriant mokslo žinias svarbą, medžiaga. Tyrime nagrinėta, kaip ginkluoto konflikto metu perkeltieji vaikai kuria savo fizinio ir kultūrinio pasaulio prasmę smurto ir skurdo paveiktoje Kolumbijos srityje. Remiantis etnografiniais stebėjimais, interviu ir vaikų sukurtais fotonaratyvais, tyrime buvo plėtojama vaikų aktyvaus dalyvavimo moksliniame tyrime idėja. Šiame straipsnyje pabrėžiama, kad tyrimai bendradarbiaujant su vaikais suteikia jiems galimybę labiau dalyvauti formuojant juos supantį pasaulį. Tyrimų bendradarbiaujant koncepcijos aktualizavimas Kolumbijos kontekste taip pat galėtų stiprinti mokslinius tyrimus ir kaip konkrečią veiklą, skatinančią socialines transformacijas.