

Book Review of Denov, Myriam, Mitchell, Claudia, and Rabiau, Marjorie (eds.) 2023. *Global Child. Children and Families Affected by War, Displacement, and Migration*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 300 pp.



BOOK REVIEW

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Children are the best informants concerning their own life, as Charlotte Hardman (2001 [1973]: 502) notes. This idea has been worded already in the 1970s, and the ideas of situated knowledge and the importance of children's own understandings and views as a crucial part of knowledge production have been a part of contemporary childhood studies (Olwig & Gulløv 2003; James & Prout 2015). Art-based methods have been a notable part of this development—by artistic means, children can describe things that would be too hard or difficult to describe verbally. These participatory and artistic ways of working might be interesting, meaningful, and already familiar to many children. Art can also serve as a unifying force between the researcher and the research participants offering new ways of communication in situations where there might not be a shared language. Participatory art-based methods are often used while doing research with vulnerable groups, such as refugees and asylum seekers (Lenette 2019; Vacchelli 2018).

Global Child: Children and Families Affected by War, Displacement, and Migration is edited by Myriam Denov, Claudia Mitchell, and Marjorie Rabiau, it brings the reader to the intersection of childhood studies, migration studies, and participatory methods. The editors are distinguished professors from McGill University; Dr. Denov is a full professor in the School of Social Work, and she holds the Canada Research Chair in Children, Families, and Armed Conflict; Dr. Mitchell is a professor in the Department of Integrated Studies in the Faculty of Education; Dr. Rabiau is an associate professor in the School of Social Work.

The edited volume is an exemplary case of participatory art-based methods and collective research from a research group called 'Global Child McGill' that brings together researchers from seven disciplines: social work, psychiatry, law, education, communications, psychology, and applied human sciences. This collective knowledge production of these disciplines is the new element that this book brings to the literature.

In the introductory chapter (Chapter 1, pp. 2–3), the editors present some shortcomings in the earlier literature considering children affected by war and displacement.

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The main concerns are: (a) children's possibilities to actively participate in the research, (b) the tendency to exclude the sociocultural environment of the children from the scope of the research, and (c) the methods used and the ethical questions that are attached to those methods in the research.

The aim of this book is to answer the challenges identified in the earlier literature with a tri-pillared approach utilizing the multifaceted talent of the research group. The three pillars are socio-ecological approaches, participatory approaches, and art-based approaches (pp. 4–7). The book itself is divided into three parts based on the above-mentioned division. As the editors mention, all the approaches are interrelated and hence there is overlapping within the book sections (p. 7).

Part 1 introduces socio-ecological approaches. Chapter 2 by Rabiau, Denov, and Karen Paul demonstrates the state of the art and underlines the need for a holistic, culturally informed, and intersectional approach when the well-being of children and families is the aim of the research. Nagui Demian and Mitchell reflect in Chapter 3 on their work with war-affected children. They argue that there is a lack in the teacher's preparation to work with these children, and this should be noted already in the teaching education programs (p. 53). In Chapter 4, Paul, Inka Weissbecker, Katie Mullins, and Andrew Jones bring up the importance of social cohesion as one part of well-being during an armed conflict. They argue that during insecure times, intergenerational activities that involve children, young people, and older adults can strengthen the social fabric of the community (p. 63). Chapter 5 by Sharon Bond and Jaswant Guzder concludes the first part of the book. The authors present a culturally informed, strength-based family therapy model that can be used in post-conflict settings.

The Second Part of the book introduces participatory approaches. Chapter 6 by Neil Bilotta, Maya Fennig, Denov, Alusine Bah, and Ines Marchand demonstrates how and why participatory approaches can be used with children affected by war. They also bring to the front some of the challenges and ethical questions that are attached to these methods. Neil Bilotta and Denov (Chapter 7) dive into the ethical considerations of participatory research with the research participants. This chapter provides a fresh viewpoint for considering research ethics and gives concrete examples of how to make research practices anti-oppressive and transparent—the interviewees highlight the importance of trust and honesty between them and the researchers (pp. 143–144). In Chapter 8, the authors Ej Milne, Churnjeet Mahn, Mayra Guzman, Farhio Ahmed, and anonymous members of RX describe the process of creating a code of ethics in a participatory method within a community-based research project. RX is a pseudonym for a UK-based organization that supports youth with refugee and migration background. The authors conclude that even though the process was long and there was only a little resolution in the end, it would be beneficial for different actors to cocreate ethical codes; this can bring out the hidden power structures and help to rebuild a more equal environment for all participants (p. 170).

The final chapter of the Second Part, Chapter 9, is about justice, inequality, and transformation when doing art-based participatory research. The authors Glynis Clacherty and Thea Shahrokh bring to the front five positive features of this kind of research when working with children affected by war. The authors argue that art-based approaches support choice and emotional safety (pp. 179–182), they can help to build relationships in new and sometimes hostile environments

(pp. 182–185), they can facilitate the development and deepening of identity (pp. 185–187), and they give tools to reclaim the right to name the world (pp. 187–188). The authors conclude the chapter with a list of five principles and practices that enable transformative work with youth and children affected by war and migration (pp. 189–190).

In the Third Part, Chapter 10 by Warren Linds, Miranda D’Amico, Denov, Mitchell, and Meaghan Shevell introduces art-based research with war-affected children. They give a historical contextualization to the state of art and continue by presenting varying art forms that have been used. Chapter 11 by D’Amico dives deeper into art therapy interventions that can be used in educational environments. In Chapter 12, Fatima Khan analyzes drawings from three different refugee camps. Khan notes that child-friendly spaces can offer opportunities for children to communicate their thoughts and fears, and this kind of opportunities are highly important especially for girls, whose possibilities to bring out their thoughts are often restricted (pp. 240–241; 244–246). The finishing chapter of the book, Chapter 13, is authored by April Mandrona, Ej Milne, Shahrokh, Michaelina Jakala, Mateja Celestina, Leesa Hamilton, and Mitchell. The authors introduce a participatory research project of picture book production done by young people with refugee backgrounds.

Global Child is a thought provoking and enjoyable book. Because of the wide palette of knowledge and skills that is behind this edited volume, there is something for everyone. The views from different disciplines support and enrich each other. In the introductory chapter (Chapter 1), the authors claim that in the earlier literature, the sociocultural context of the children, such as their families and communities they belong to, is overlooked. This might be true in some fields, but if studies from more holistic disciplines such as anthropology (Chatty, Crivello & Hundt 2005) would have been included, it could have enriched the picture. One thing missing was early childhood: the youngest children were not present in the chapters provided. It seems that there is an age-related gap in the research on war-affected children and in research that utilizes participatory art-based methods.

The main contribution of *Global Child* is the ethical discussion that goes through all the chapters. I would warmly recommend this book to all ethical board members worldwide. The ethical questions that are raised within these kinds of contexts are much more complicated and time evolving. The institutional ethical codes are not that easily integrated into art-based participatory research with vulnerable groups. Another contribution of *Global Child* to all researchers working with these or related issues are the concrete and approachable lists of practices, guidelines, and considerations in some of the chapters.

The last thing I want to highlight from *Global Child* is the presence of the participating children and youth in the texts—some of the chapters were written in such a way that I could imagine the children there drawing, talking, and playing right next to me. The authors and editors have done a great job with this volume, and I do recommend it to all interested in the questions of participatory research, art-based methods, migration studies, and finally to everyone in the field of childhood studies.

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