

Research, training and intervention in social work: in search of a methodology to promote the participation of children and young people

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Abstract

This contribution proposes to question the potential and the limits of a methodology, "My Voice into Pictures", developed with the aim of promoting and analysing the participation (Arnstein 1969; Hart 1992; Sen 1999) of children and youth (C&Y) in the construction of knowledge and social actions (Garcia Delahaye et al. 2022, Garcia Delahaye and Libois, 2021). This methodology, which is currently activated in an ongoing research project on child poverty¹ in Switzerland, is being carried out by a research team composed of C&Y co-researchers, artists, teachers and social work students. It is based on the capability approach (Sen 1999, Sarojini Hart & al. 2014, Biggeri & al. 2011, Percy-Smith & al. 2010) which enables to understand the conditions required to promote the effective (Arnstein 1969; Sen 2009) participation of C&Y in the processes of research, training and intervention in social work.

Based on a selection of photographs and videos recently produced by C&Y, as well as on the voices of C&Y co-researchers and students on these creations, this contribution will attempt to answer the following questions:

- What opportunities and limits of participation does the "My Voice into Pictures" methodology offer to C&Y?
- What conditions of participation can participatory artistic tools, developed through research projects and the training program of social workers, offer to professional practice?

¹ This research is sponsored by the Swiss National Fund (<https://www.hesge.ch/hets/recherche-developpement/projets-recherche/en-cours/participation-des-enfants-et-des-jeunes>).

The participation of children and youth (C&Y) (Arnstein 1969; Hart 1992), which constitutes one of the three fundamental pillars of current child and youth policies in Switzerland (Garcia Delahaye 2018), is often put forward as a democratic “reflex” to be adopted for inclusive construction of knowledge, public policies and social intervention. The existing means to promote such participation is at the center of the questioning of this article, which proposes to analyse the potential and the limits of a singular methodology, "My Voice into Pictures", developed within participatory researches in social work (Garcia Delahaye et al. 2022; Garcia Delahaye and Libois, 2021; Garcia Delahaye et al. 2019; Garcia Delahaye 2019). This methodology, which is currently activated in an ongoing research² project on child poverty in Switzerland, is being carried out by a research team composed of C&Y co-researchers, artists, teachers and social work students. It is based on the capability approach (Sen 1999, Sarojini Hart & al. 2014, Biggeri & al. 2011, Percy-Smith & al. 2010) which enables to understand the conditions required to promote the effective (Arnstein 1969; Sen 2009) participation of C&Y in the processes of research, training and intervention in social work (Garcia Delahaye et al 2022).

Supported by the tools of photography and video, used for artistic mediation and communication to the general public, the methodology integrates C&Y as participants and co-researchers, as well as contributors to social work training programs through multiple spaces of experimentation (e.g., creative workshops in community centers, teachings at the Haute École de Travail Social de Genève (HETS), conferences, public events, and digital platforms).

In reference to child and youth policies in Switzerland, which encompasses C&Y up to the age of 25 (Garcia Delahaye 2018), "My Voice into Pictures" also involves young students from the HETS in Geneva who, for the duration of a training module, develop a progressive position from participant to co-researcher. The C&Y co-researchers and the teachers involved in the whole research process (two consecutive years) support this progression.

All the photographs and videos produced by the C&Y and the students are now available on a website³ created to promote the artistic productions, support communication to the general public and convey the participants' messages to the targeted bodies, in particular social institutions and public authorities.

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³ www.mavoixenimages.ch

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