

A Participatory Approach to Research with Migrant Working Adolescents

RITA BERTOZZI*

Abstract

Child-centred approaches focus on the children's perspective and on participation. Participatory action research can be a fruitful methodology for investigating delicate topics such as child labour in migrant communities. This article presents a peer research project conducted in Rome (Italy) which actively involved a group of foreign working young people over two years and employed a variety of methodologies. Research methods will be illustrated and critically discussed, with a particular focus on the benefits for the migrant youths involved and ethical questions arising from this type of research. A brief summary of the main findings will also be provided.

Keywords: research methods, participation, migrant young people, working adolescents, peer research

The increasing attention towards children's and adolescents' rights and the involvement of minors in issues directly concerning them have led to a gradual methodological shift from research carried out 'on' children to research carried out 'with' children, and most recently, research carried out 'by' children (Brownlie et al. 2006; Wilkinson 2000; Laws and Mann 2004; Liebel 2008; Kellett 2005). There are now many international studies on child-centred research that present empirical results and explore ethical and methodological issues (Laws and Mann 2004; Wilkinson 2000; Jones 2004; Kirby 2004; Boyden and Ennew 1997; The Concerned for Working Children 2002 and 2006; Liebel 2008; Kellett 2005; Brownlie et al. 2006; Bennett and Roberts 2004; Alderson and Morrow 2004).

In this article, I will present a participatory research project on working migrant young people in Rome.

Ethnic minorities are often included in the category of vulnerable persons, and they are often prevented from actively participating in research due to a variety of problems (Steel 2001). The same holds true for working children and adolescents who, especially in some cases, run the risk of social exclusion.

The topic of working migrant minors is an intricate one due, on the one hand, to their relative invisibility and, on the other, to their vulnerability. The picture is further complicated by the need to take a number of cultural, economic, social and legal variables into consideration, given that migration

* Rita Bertozzi is affiliated with the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy.
Email: rita.bertozzi@unimore.it.