

Participatory methodologies in research with children: creative and innovative approaches

Metodologias participativas em pesquisa com crianças: abordagens criativas e inovadoras

Metodologías de investigación participativa con niños: enfoques creativos e innovadores



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ABSTRACT

Objective: To describe the use of participatory methodologies in research with children.

Methods: Experience report with a qualitative approach, conducted with children between six and eleven years of age, from a municipal school in Pelotas and in the Psychosocial Children and Youth Care Center, in São Lourenço do Sul, both municipalities of the Rio Grande do Sul State. Data collection was based on records made in field and observation diaries, held from April to July 2016.

Results: The report pointed out that the *Photovoice* promoted motivation in the group, in addition to increasing the self-esteem and self-confidence of children. The Five Field Map made it possible to help children express feelings through the game.

Conclusion: *Photovoice* and the Five Field Map are seen as tools that enable new methodological approaches in research with children, facilitating the construction of the proposed activities aimed at innovative and creative research processes in health/nursing.

Keywords: Child health. Pediatric nursing. Nursing Research.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Relatar a experiência da utilização de metodologias participativas em pesquisa com crianças.

Métodos: Relato de experiência com abordagem qualitativa, realizado com crianças entre seis e onze anos de uma escola municipal, em Pelotas, e do Centro de Atenção Psicossocial Infantojuvenil, em São Lourenço do Sul, ambos municípios do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul. A coleta de dados foi baseada em registros feitos em diários de campo e observação, realizada de abril a julho de 2016.

Resultados: O relato apontou que o *Photovoice* promoveu a motivação entre o grupo e elevou a autoestima e a autoconfiança das crianças. O Mapa dos Cinco Campos possibilitou às crianças expressar sentimentos por intermédio do jogo.

Conclusão: Compreende-se que o *Photovoice* e o Mapa dos Cinco Campos são instrumentos que viabilizam novas abordagens metodológicas nas pesquisas com crianças, facilitando a construção das propostas de atividades que visam processos inovadores e criativos de pesquisa em saúde/enfermagem.

Palavras-chave: Saúde da criança. Enfermagem pediátrica. Pesquisa em enfermagem.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Presentar la experiencia de usar enfoques participativos en la investigación con niños.

Métodos: Informe de experiencia con un enfoque cualitativo, realizado con niños de entre seis y once años, de una escuela municipal en Pelotas y en el Cuidado de Niños y Jóvenes Centro Psicossocial, en São Lourenço do Sul, ambos municipios de Rio Grande do Sul. La recogida de datos se basa en los registros realizados en diarios de campo y observación, de abril a julio de 2016.

Resultados: el informe señaló que la *Fotovoz* promueve la motivación entre el grupo, el aumento de la autoestima, autoconfianza de los niños. El Mapa de cinco campos y ayudan a los niños a expresar sus sentimientos por medio del juego.

Conclusión: Se entiende que el *Fotovoz* y mapa de cinco campos son herramientas que permiten los nuevos enfoques metodológicos de la investigación con los niños, lo que facilita la construcción de las actividades propuestas dirigidas a los procesos creativos e innovadores de la investigación en salud/enfermería.

Palabras clave: Salud del niño. Enfermería pediátrica. Investigación en enfermería.

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■ INTRODUCTION

Understanding the childhood universe is a challenge to researchers. This challenge becomes greater when the objective is to “grant a voice” to children involved in the research to investigate the social reality in which they operate, making them agents of change and putting them at the center of the research process⁽¹⁾. This leading role provides children means that facilitate the expression of feelings and views on issues related to the environment in which they live, their life, their wishes and desires⁽²⁾, which requires researchers to have the sensitivity to look at the context that permeates the children, as they approach what children think, feel and seek to build in their world of meanings⁽¹⁾.

It is known that there are several possibilities of research with this audience, such as the use of the Sensitive Creative Method, through dynamic creativity and sensitivity to data collection, enabling the child to express what they think through their artistic production, or by using instruments that assess coping strategies in situations of violence, demonstrates the importance given to the child's social and emotional support network as a significant asset in confronting this process⁽³⁻⁴⁾.

However, participatory methodologies are considered important tools in data collection, as they position the child as an investigator, as it is understood that they have the ability to produce knowledge and transformation in their social worlds, acting as representatives of their realities and not simply objects of study⁽⁵⁾, which requires a considerable amount of sensitivity from the researcher to strengthen trust, creativity and engage children, making this step more dynamic, fun and profitable for both parties.

Photovoice is a method of participatory action research, developed by researchers inserted in educational processes in poor communities, and promotes critical thinking and insertion of these educational processes in processes of change through photographic records⁽⁶⁾. The method enables participants to record and reflect on their images, pointing out the resources and needs of their communities, promoting a space for dialog and sharing experiences between the group and at the same time, enables their participation in processes of change through their visual representations⁽⁷⁾. This methodological approach is mainly influenced by the educational philosophy of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire⁽⁸⁾ on education to vulnerable populations and the development of a critical consciousness, and differs from traditional forms of

research, understanding that the community is a place of social and cultural changes, and not just a place to conduct investigations. Moreover, it is based on the principles of documentary photography⁽⁸⁻⁹⁾.

The development of critical consciousness enables the empowerment of individuals, granting them the ability to break away from vulnerable situations, thus allowing dynamic participation as agents of change within their social contexts, helping to transform the health reality of these communities⁽⁹⁾. *Photovoice*, in turn, is considered an important and effective tool in this process, where the study participants can recount their perceptions⁽⁸⁾ through photography.

The Five Field Map (MCC) is a ludic research tool designed to facilitate the oral expression of children to evaluate their social and affective support network based on five fields: family, friends, relatives, school and formal contacts⁽¹⁰⁾.

To achieve this objective, the tool was adapted, replacing “formal contact”, for Centro de Atenção Psicossocial Infantojuvenil (CAPSi – Children and Youth Center for Psychosocial Care, in English), since the participating children were selected from this service. The other fields were kept the same. To build the map, a hand painted, felt cloth was used to obtain circles. The dolls, which represent the adults, children and adolescents were created from models and made of EVA.

It is noteworthy that the participating children were consulted beforehand, upon the signing of Consent Forms and the family members were also informed, consenting authorization through the Free and Informed Consent Form. Choice was made to carry out the activities in accordance with the possibilities of access to CAPSi, and at times, there was displacement so that some children could complete the activity in their homes.

The MCC has concentric circles, the smaller circle, located in the middle, corresponds to the child, and the others, to their social network. Each child added the dolls representing their family, friends, professionals, teachers and/or school colleagues, and others who they considered important, according to their will. Strong bonds are located closer to the central circle, and the adjacent circles measure the quality of the bond, and, the closer to the central circle, the more qualitative and satisfactory the relationships⁽¹⁰⁾, as described in Figure 1.

Thus, the main question was: How will the use of participatory methodologies in research enable the researcher to know the world of meanings constructed by children? Given the above, the objective of this study is to

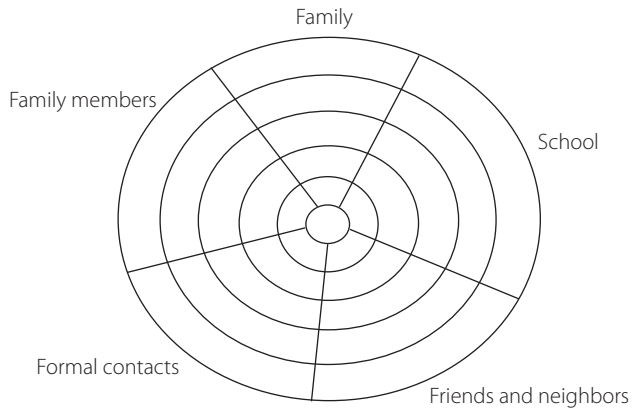


Figure 1 – Five Field Map, in accordance with Hoppe’s adaptation (1998).

Source: ⁽¹¹⁾

report the use of participatory methodologies in research with children.

■ METHODS

This is an experience report on the use of participatory methodologies such as *Photovoice* and Five Field Map, derived from a master’s research, based on records made in field and observation diaries. Both are based on qualitative approach, carried out in different scenarios, but both with similar audience, i.e. children aged 6-11 years old, immersed in contexts of social vulnerability. The studies were carried out, respectively, in a municipal school of Pelotas/Rio Grande do Sul and the Centro de Atenção Psicossocial Infanto-juvenil (CAPSi), in São Lourenço do Sul/Rio Grande do Sul, in the period from April to July 2016.

Procedure for collecting data using *Photovoice*

Five children participated in this study ⁽¹²⁾, with ages between 6 and 9 years old, students of a municipal elementary school, selected by the school itself. The children had difficulties in interpersonal relationships, concentration problems and deficits in learning, probably related to unfavorable socioeconomic conditions, severe family and social problems ⁽¹³⁾, stressing that, participating in the research would help in addressing these adverse situations.

Meetings were held previously with the children to present the research proposal. To begin data collection,

digital cameras were distributed to the participants of the study, involving ludic activities with therapy dogs, which are part of the Pet Therapy Project, in a partnership with this research (Registered in COCEPE under number 527020-26 – Veterinary School – UFPel). The visits with the dogs occurred weekly for a six-week period, in which games involving taking the dogs for walks – photographic documentation – on leash, memory games with the figure of the dogs, touching, fondling and brushing, and at the end of each activity, the children would offer snacks and water to the dogs. Children were instructed to register the most important moments of playful interaction with the dogs, from their perceptions. For better organization of the activities, the children were divided into two groups (G1 and G2). The first group had fun with the dogs while the other group made the photographic record of these moments, with a period of fifteen minutes stipulated for each group, after which they exchanged positions with their colleagues.

After the ludic encounter with the dogs, the children could choose the most significant photos recorded by them, by viewing all the photos displayed on a *laptop*. Later, with the photos printed out, a group was formed with the children to discuss each selected photo. The researcher was only a mediator in this scenario and organizer of the debate. This provided an important approach to establish trust between the researcher and participants.

Procedure for data collection in the Five Field Map

Five children aged between 8 and 11 years old, all CAPSi users, participated in the survey ⁽¹⁴⁾. Data collection was carried out in one of the service’s rooms. The records of the activity with the MCC were performed in a field journal, as the children verbalized their impressions of each of the fields, the degree of satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction, conflict and disruptions in relationships were described, as well as stories related to the people represented on the map.

Parents and guardians were asked to sign the Free and Informed Consent Forms (TCLE) and the children were asked to sign the Consent Agreement. The research projects were approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculdade de Enfermagem of the Universidade de Pelotas (UFPel – School of Nursing of the Federal University of Pelotas, in English) under opinions: No. 1.558.671 and No. 1.485.727.

■ RESULTS OF THE EXPERIENCES

The use of the *Photovoice* method enabled the understanding actions, gestures and multiple languages of the child, in addition to their perception of the world. It promoted a sense of excitement among the children because they were playing a key role at school, and it positively influenced learning and behavior, verified by the observation, field journal records, as well as the reports from teachers and the school director. In addition, this method allowed the children to externalize wishes and concerns, through participatory photography, as well as providing the development of skills and abilities, previously imperceptible ⁽⁷⁾, strongly contributing to the transformation of health practices, providing opportunities for the expansion of research in the field of nursing.

In research that employed the MCC, it can be observed that the use of this methodology favored the interaction of the researcher with participating children, expressing feelings through the game. It highlighted the importance of developing activities that focused perceptions of what was and is experienced, and that the inclusion of these activities, whether with family, school, CAPSi, relatives and friends, offer a space for the child to describe their experiences through ludic games and activities ⁽¹⁵⁾. Some of them told stories, others wanted to mention them, number them ⁽¹⁰⁾.

Please note that the school stood out in the voice of the children, based on the relationships represented by the figures of the teachers and colleagues, which demonstrated the need for interdisciplinary projects between health and education, showing the potential for group work ⁽¹⁰⁻¹¹⁾ and innovative and transformative experiences to face the difficulties of life of these subjects, as shown in the study of child victims of sexual violence ⁽⁴⁾, in which the MCC assisted in the choice of treatment plans based on protective factors identified by the instrument. For this reason, the MCC is in an important methodological approach that enables knowledge of social and affective networks, through the narrative of each child, in addition to pointing out new paths both for nursing practice, as for the scientific community ⁽¹¹⁾.

■ FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The use of participatory methodologies contributed significantly to building bonds between researchers and participants, facilitating the construction of the

proposed activities aimed at innovative and creative research processes in health and nursing. It is understood that children are the subjects of their stories, able to produce cultures, and it is up to adults to provide the opportunity for spaces and experiences so that they can express desires, wishes, dreams and expectations in a playful and fun way.

Thus, it is believed that the researcher's perspective needs to be disconnected from pre-established social models, so that in the observations, the stories prevail, the contexts and the child's life. Thus, nursing plays a vital role not only in academic research with children, but also in professional practice, focused on meeting the child's needs and that of their family, taking ownership of different methodologies, enables the professional to promote and highlight the value and empowerment, compared to unfavorable contexts in which they live. Thus, the Five Field Map and *Photovoice* are research tools that enable new methodological approaches in research with children.

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