

Book Review of Rätttilä, Tiina
and Honkatukia, Päivi (eds.)
2021. *Tutkien ja tarinoiden
kohti pakolaistaustaisten
nuorten hyvinvointia*
[Enhancing Refugee Youth's
Sustainable Well-being through
Co-research and Story-telling].
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BOOK REVIEW

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The book introduces studies carried out among youngsters with refugee or asylum-seeking background in Finland. Post-doctoral researcher Tiina Rätttilä and Professor Päivi Honkatukia, both affiliated with Tampere University, have edited this research publication. The publication is a part of ALL-YOUTH research project, a national and multidisciplinary project focusing on the capabilities, possibilities and restrictions of young people's societal participation. It offers the reader a multi-positioned view to some parts of the larger project: the chapters are authored not only by the researchers themselves but also by *co-researchers*, third sector associates and artists who have worked jointly in the project. Co-researching is one of the cross-cutting themes of the book. A second theme of this book is supporting the well-being of refugee background youth by artistic methods; the stories told by the co-researchers get visibility and wider audiences by the usage of photography, documentary movies and applied theatre (see [Lenette 2019: 36–38](#)).

The well-being of the youth intertwines with the chosen research approach; the research process starts from the interests and worries of the co-researchers and the methods are developed and the findings discussed jointly with the co-researchers, third sector actors and artists. Using art-based methods is a way to support the agency of the co-researchers and to dismantle the dominant paradigm of academics as the knowledge-holders ([Lenette 2019: 32–34](#)). As Rätttilä and Honkatukia state (Chapter 1), the researchers are always responsible, but they do not have supremacy over knowledge when compared to their co-researchers. They define co-research as a companionship between the researcher and the researched: co-research is choreographed, implemented and reported jointly (pp. 16–17). The idea of co-research has also affected the publishing of the findings. The results of the research have been published in accessible ways, so the produced knowledge is reachable for all participants. This book at hand is also evidence of inclusive publishing with an easily understandable writing style accessible for readers who are not accustomed to academic writing.

The main themes of the book are presented as follows: first, Rätttilä and Honkatukia introduce the starting points of co-research and the aims of the book (Chapter 1).

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The next chapter (Chapter 2) offers the reader viewpoints to a third sector activity in Tampere, which is focused on multicultural work with young boys, Kõlvi, of which the authors Suvi Autiosaari and Abdi Cisman are staff members. It provides views to how it feels to take part in a research project in a lively environment where not only daily, but also sensitive issues are dealt with. The multifaceted contradictions and the successes of co-research are openly dealt with in the chapter. For example, the challenges of information flows between the researchers, staff members and the youth, and the usage of quite limited space in Kõlvi are brought up. Autiosaari and Cisman see that one of the important achievements of the research project for the youth was the experience that they were treated as the experts of their own life and genuinely appreciated as co-researchers.

Rättilä, Olli Sillanpää, Honkatukia, Kaisla Koskelainen and Jarmo Rinne have jointly written Chapter 3, which opens the co-research process in the joint theatre project between the researchers from ALL-YOUTH project, participants from Valomo-project and the professionals from playback theatre Vox. This chapter provides information about how the project proceeded and the ways the well-being of the youth was measured during it.

Chapter 4 is authored by Minna Hokkanen, the director of the playback theatre Vox. Playback theatre is a form of applied drama where the actors and audience are in a continuous interaction; the actors are using different drama techniques to “play back” audiences’ feelings or the stories told by the audience. Hokkanen reflects the feelings of the actors and ponder the possibilities of playback theatre as a means of participatory research. The following chapter (Chapter 5) brings the reader back to the world of Valomo, which is a project focused on young refugee men with traumatic experiences. The author, Roosa Salminen, who has acted as the director of this self-portrait photography project, discusses the usage of self-portraits as means of art-based therapy and how it has served as a therapeutical tool for the young men involved.

In Chapter 6, Honkatukia, Rättilä and Rinne introduce the co-research project with the youngsters from Kõlvi. This subproject concentrated on the challenges that young refugee background men encounter when trying to enter the labour market, and the ways to overcome these challenges. Fath E. Mubeen and Nina Tokola reflect in the next chapter (Chapter 7) issues around agency and power within a subproject that considered how women who use veils are encountered in the Finnish labour market. The chapter relies on open communication between the co-researchers and introduces their joint journey, shared understandings and ethical questions. For example, one of the topics discussed is the empowering aspect of the research for the participating women, both in the roles of the interviewed and co-researcher, by the understanding that the jointly produced knowledge had some practical meaning in the lives of real people. Mubeen and Tokola also remind that the co-researchers must be provided with instructions that enable them to accomplish scientific research and that the expectations of their skills should be realistic.

The last chapter (Chapter 8) introduces one more method of doing participatory and art-based research: documentary movie making. The authors of the chapter, Henri Onodera, a researcher from Helsinki University, and Ahmed Zaidan, a journalist and a poet, discuss the questions and choices that are specific to documentary filming as a method, and touch upon the findings of the subproject considering the employment of youth with asylum-seeking background.

The book at hand can be positioned somewhere in the crossroads of methodological pondering and empirical findings. The book brings insight to some of the many

obstacles for youth with a refugee and asylum-seeking background when it comes to feeling as a part of Finnish society. Most of the difficulties and worries of the youth circulate around entering the workforce. Honkatukia, Rättilä and Rinne state that 'almost all the youth we encountered during the research thought that without work one cannot be accepted or appreciated in Finland' (p. 89). Feeling of belonging through acceptance and appreciation is one part of the well-being model that has been used in the research (p. 14), the other two parts consist in having a decent income and having abilities to impact things that affect one's own life. Studying and enhancing the well-being of the co-researchers was the starting point of the research and the research approach itself supported it, even though measuring the well-being turned out to be complicated.

The book gives an eye-opening introduction to the diverse field of art-based research and the people who are a part of it. The chapter by Hokkanen, the director in playback theatre Vox, brings to the fore the feelings of the actors when confronting sensitive and sometimes unfamiliar topics. The actors re-live through their bodies moments that are of most importance to their contemporary audience and acknowledging this brings pressure but also sensitivity to the work of the actors.

Co-research and peer interviews can be read as signs of intersectional research approaches that try to recognise and dismantle the distortions that unrecognised power relations bring to research. When considering this, the chapter by Mubeen and Tokola serves as an excellent example of reflecting the ongoing negotiations of power during the process of co-research with differing pathways behind and ahead of the co-researchers.

The fruitful approach of the book lies in its polyphony and the space given to the reflections and understandings of people who have been included in the research processes. On the other hand, this polyphony and the number of differing topics make the book less coherent, which perhaps could have been increased through more discussion between the chapters and a concluding chapter.

Reading the book was rewarding, but it also left me with multiple specific questions concerning the methods and analysis and with some uncertainty of the main take-away from it. In particular, the well-being of the co-researchers and their possibilities to actively participate in the Finnish society in relation to the differing artistic approaches could have been emphasised more. The book can be recommended to early stage students as an introduction to the concept of co-research and an example of inclusive qualitative research. It can be also recommended for advanced students and researchers as a reminder of the multiplicity of viewpoints that are attached to research projects by participating actors. I would warmly advocate this book also to third sector actors and artists that are pondering whether to take part in research projects or not.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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