

Working with Syrian Refugee Children to Document their Memories

TITLE OF RESEARCH: Syrian Refugee Children's Representations of their Memories of Syria, a Transition Country, and Early Days in Canada

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SUMMARY: This study looked at Syrian refugee children's memories of Syria, Jordan/ Lebanon, and early days in Canada through autobiographical drawings and writings, resulting in a short video documentary. Researchers also reflected on the ethical and methodological dimensions of working with refugee children.

LINK: Click [here](#) to read the executive summary and [here](#) to read the publication

Key Findings



Although there were several ethical concerns surrounding working with such a “vulnerable” group as refugee children, the research team attended to participants’ cultural and contextual factors to address issues of privacy versus transparency and monetary compensation.

The researcher assistants – two Arabic-speaking women – were reflexive of the roles they occupied while collecting data. The children seemed to view them as teachers, which may have affected the data as children chose to speak to them primarily in English and would discard work that they thought was not good enough.



Children represented their memories in fragments, which did not easily yield coherent meanings. They also decorated their work in ways that did not represent their memories ‘accurately’.

The multiple forms of data collected (drawing, talking, video recording) yielded multiple layers of meaning, which would not have been accessed through a single form of data.



Children were highly sensitive to their parents’ emotional states and were keenly aware of the injustices, fears, and distress their parents had encountered.

For the most part, children in this study did not show residual signs of trauma.

Children (and their parents) highly valued English. Children wanted to avoid situations where Arabic was the language of communication. In school, they were punished for conversing in Arabic.



Recommendations:

- Consider contextual and cultural factors when working with populations deemed vulnerable by Research Ethics Boards.
- School boards need to ensure that teachers respect and value the first languages of children.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition.

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