Children’s ideas on the desirable future school yard. Using envisioning workshops as research method for complex conversations with children

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This paper report on a study of children’s ideas on the desirable future school yard, a study in which we have used the method envisioning workshops. In the paper, we use material from a study with eighty 6-7-year old’s in two schools in Sweden. Over the years, researchers have tried to attribute children a more active role in the research process. However, projects with children as “co-researchers” have been criticized. The paper highlight ways in which the method envisioning workshops are useful to handle some of the problems emphasized in childhood studies. The papers background are the debates on research on/with/by children. The paper emphasises how using the method vison workshops creates possibilities to critically scrutinize taken for granted presuppositions when it comes to children, children’s agency and competence.

Studies with a focus on envisioning workshops as method are scarce. Thus, what is presented is an introduction to a method that can be useful in other future studies. Using examples from our project, the paper highlight both possibilities and challenges with the method. We illuminate how the perceived risks for power asymmetry often assumed in adult’s research with children were challenged and reduced. The children often took charge of the situation and the adults become their co-workers, helping hands or their extension. Hence, participating children showed agency and competence, but agency and competence produced in interconnection with the adult researchers and the materiality. The used research method was however not only a methodological success, but generated interesting and often unexpected research findings.

At times, it is argued that children might have difficulties to talk in interviews on topics if the area of research is too abstract. Conversations on the future and sustainability might be such topics. Still, the results from this study show that the children through a combination of conversation and hands-on construction in a process steered by the children, by using envisioning workshops, can deliver information that give researchers new and often unexpected perspectives also when it comes to the kind of abstract and complex topics as the ones discussed in this study.

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