



---

**REVIEW OF “GOOD QUESTION: ARTS-BASED APPROACHES TO COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH” EDITED BY MICHAEL J. EMME AND ANNA KIROVA (2017)**

---

**Heather McLeod**  
Memorial University  
[hmcleod@mun.ca](mailto:hmcleod@mun.ca)

**Dr. Heather McLeod:** is an Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Memorial University, and Editor-in-Chief of the *Canadian Review of Art Education*, and has won awards for curriculum development and teaching. Her funded research projects include: an art hive with immigrant and refugee youth; an examination of academic identities; and an exploration of parents and poetry.

**Abstract:** In this edited volume published as an e-book, *Good Question: Arts-based Approaches to Collaborative Research With Children and Youth*, Michael Emme and Anna Kirova wonder whether communities of adult researchers, artists, educators, and youth working in collaborative and playful ways can co-construct inquiry practices which support young people to lead their own research investigations. The collection is composed of three parts. The first part, “Comics,” focuses on research methods designed for children and youth. The second and third parts, entitled “Collaborations” and “Theory” respectively, include chapters written by new and experienced researchers/scholars who elaborate examples of collaborative arts-based research with children and youth. The design of Emme and Kirova’s contribution to the literature is highly imaginative. In a time of burgeoning interest in arts-based research approaches, the volume has earned a key place. It will no doubt become an essential work for those interested in such innovative research with children and youth.

**Keywords:** review; collaborative research; arts-based research; research with children and youth

Start with the comic book. As a child that was often my approach to reading, and in their recent edited volume published as an e-book, *Good Question: Arts-based Approaches to Collaborative Research With Children and Youth*, Michael Emme and Anna Kirova open with images which are followed by text. Thus, the writing illustrates the images – a playful disruption to our expectation of a typical scholarly publication. Wondering whether communities of adult researchers, artists, educators, and youth working in collaborative and playful ways can co-construct inquiry practices which support young people to lead their own research investigations, the editors have divided the collection into three parts. The first part, “Comics,” focuses on research methods designed for children and youth. The second and third parts, entitled “Collaborations” and “Theory” respectively, include chapters written by new and experienced researchers/scholars who elaborate examples of collaborative arts-based research with children and youth.

Emme and Kirova (2017) argue for an analogy between play and research practice in that both involve a creative re-working of reality from which new meanings emerge: “play can provide a conceptual framework where the overarching metaphor of play-ful-ness can guide our exploring and communicating children’s artful engagement in acquiring knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Such engagement is creative, joyful and satisfying” (pp. 75-76). Additionally they note what adult researchers might gain from working with children and youth: “adult researchers need to commit... to rediscover wonder in their understanding of research through play. This means that our imaginations must be opened to the playful reinvention of tools and purposes, guided by children’s insight” (pp. 238-239). Further, they propose that adult researchers will benefit from re-capturing children’s imaginative interpretation of reality as well as re-learning meaning-making and understanding through forms beyond and other than language and numbers.

Emme and Kirova (2017) identify a gap in the current literature involving young people as co-researchers and full participants in the research process. Thus their volume considers “playful ways of involving children in learning the ‘ins and outs’ of the research process in a community of (epistemological) practice, as well as learning to ‘play with’ research tools and means of addressing questions about the world around them” (p. 239). Working within Vygotsky’s (1978, cited in Emme & Kirova, 2017) framework of a socio-cultural historical theory of learning, Lave and Wenger’s (1991, cited in Emme & Kirova, 2017) concept of communities of practice helps explain the movement by individuals toward “becoming full, legitimate participants as they participate in the community’s activities and gain access to its sources for understanding” (p. 233). Emme and Kirova utilize the notion of collaborative apprenticeship, which is a purposeful, playful exploration.

Participants or researchers bring to the research studio their life-skills, experience, and cultural knowing. As apprentices they learn through active engagement with other research participants in relation to a local, shared, and meaningful project. Emme and Kirova (2017) suggest a process of hypothesizing. Given a recent focus on welcoming refugees in Canada, a particularly relevant contemporary example is that “imagining a successful school experience for a child recently immigrated... can be explored through art, drama, fantasy, fiction, biography, observation, policy, and statistics... each built around similar or divergent hypotheses created by children or adult researchers separately or in collaboration” (p. 238).

## Comics

Emme and Kirova (2017) argue that “the layered literacies and disrupted readings possible in the comic book form that juxtaposes image, dialogue, narrator and different kinds of time, celebrates the literacy of each reader while inviting (and requiring) all readers to actively negotiate/play/invent meaning” (p. 6). Part One “Comics” was authored by Emme and Kirova and scripted and storyboarded by Emme, while Andrew Jackson Obol was responsible for character development, ink, and color. In a story focused on a group of middle-school students exploring arts-based research, the images are polished and attention has been paid to diversity and school culture (bullies, ingenuity, kindness, wheelchair accessibility, kids with an interest in growing things, and more). Gender and race identities are ethically and sensitively depicted. One gets the sense that the authors have recently and regularly worked in schools and the neighborhoods in which they are situated. Further, the dialogue helps make the research concepts accessible, as is revealed in the following excerpt between a teacher and some students on the topic of data and data collection:



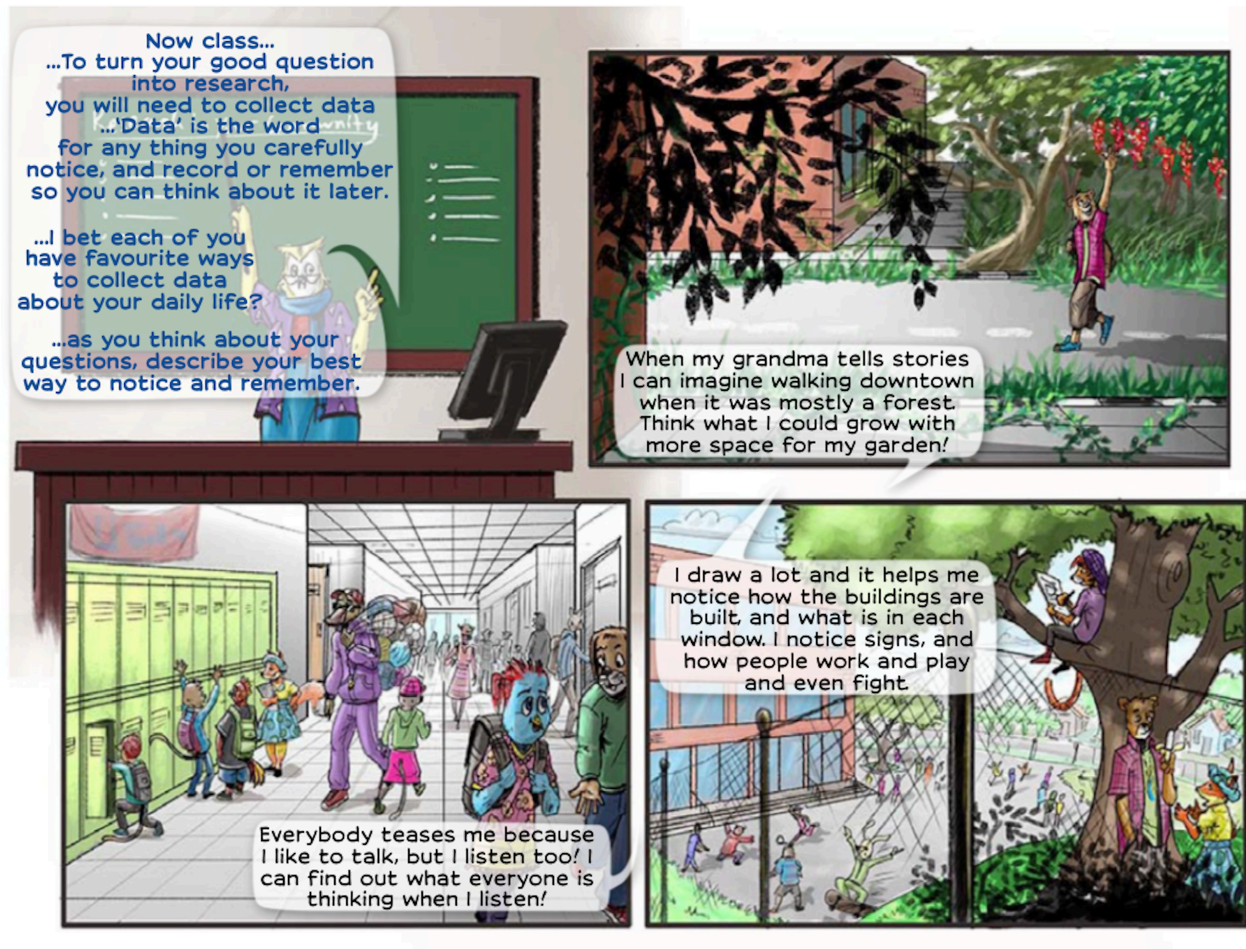


Figure 1. Excerpt from “*Good Question*” (Emme & Kirova, 2017), reprinted with permission.

## Collaborations and Theory

Parts Two and Three consist of examples of research conducted by young people and adult researchers. This reviewer wondered why some chapters have abstracts and some do not. Further, four of the ten chapters in Part Two have been previously published in peer reviewed publications ten or more years ago, yet the editors do not explain why this work is included. I am guessing that because little scholarly research in the area has been available, Emme and Kirova believe that despite their age, the articles stand as exemplars and thus the volume serves as a collection of excellent research done so far, but further clarification would be helpful.

All the same, the chapters focusing on examples of collaborative arts-based research with children and youth are valuable. Two chapters of note include an artful piece. The first is: “More Than One Street: Stories, Art, Photographs, Poetry and More,”

authored by Isha Matous-Gibbs, Lisa Mitchell, Marion Selfridge, Meagan Gabriel, Meghan Ignatescue, and Michaela Planomania, members of a collaborative research group focusing on the experiences of current and formerly street-involved youth. The work arose from a project in which members interpreted and shared experiences of the street—a collaboration between youth, grad students and a university professor in Victoria, Canada. Meeting regularly for over a year, they explored beliefs, death and grief, friendships, health and healing, self-esteem, the routes individuals take into and out of the street, stigma, and trauma. A second chapter of interest is Laura Trafi-Prats “What Do Walmart, Grandma’s House, Church, a Motel or the School Library Have in Common? Investigating Video Self-portraits of Place With Elementary Children.” Here Trafi-Prats unpacks the collaboration between Latino children attending public school in Milwaukee, their third-grade teacher, and visual arts researchers to explore art-based processes, spatial imagination, and creative manipulations of space. The author argues that visual arts-based research and video engaged the children in “acts of imagination that transcend their taken-for-granted everyday realities, offering possibilities for more personal sense of emplacement in space and time” (p. 179).

The audience for this volume is potentially quite broad. The first part, “Comics” will be of interest for youth, educators, graduate students, and academics as an introduction and overview of arts-based research approaches. Meanwhile, Parts Two and Three are relevant for the latter three groups. Nevertheless, the publication of the various parts in an e-book is not without complications. On the one hand, an electronic format is appropriate for the comic book in that the images and text/dialogue can be either easily read on an electronic device or computer screen or they could equally well be projected on a large screen to accompany group presentations. On the other hand, I am not completely convinced an e-book is an appropriate fit for Parts Two and Three. While I appreciated having a drop-down Table of Contents and a search function which serves as an index at the top of the page, and the ability to copy and paste text into a word document is also helpful, reading more than 200 pages of dense prose on screen was tough. Additionally, the copy I received for review purposes would not allow me to highlight passages which is my normal practice when digesting academic material. Indeed, at this point there is varied opinion on how well e-books are suited for academe. As Lettie Conrad (2017) opines in the online article, “The Ebook R/Evolution: Not As Easy as it Seems” the market is still sorting itself out. Therefore, while the trend to e-publication no doubt holds promise this example at this point is not as user friendly as it might be.

As is often the case with edited collections the writing is variable. Some authors deliver clear and accessible prose, as found in Joanna Black’s chapter, “Young Adults Collaborative Research: A Digital Video Research Model,” while other pieces are in need of closer editing. Additionally, a more thorough copy-editing would give the text

increased authority. This reviewer found a sprinkling of errors throughout (spacing, missing references, repetition of sentences, and spelling.)

Nevertheless, despite these details, the larger design of Emme and Kirova's contribution to the literature is highly imaginative. In a time of burgeoning interest in arts-based research approaches the volume has earned a key place. It will no doubt become an essential work for those interested in such innovative research with children and youth.

## REFERENCES

---

Conrad, L. (2017, April). The ebook *r/evolution: Not as easy as it seems*. *The Scholarly Kitchen*. Retrieved from <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2017/04/24/ebook-revolution-not-easy-seems/>

Emme, M., & Kirova, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Good question: Arts-based approaches to collaborative research with children and youth*. Victoria, BC: The Canadian Society of Education through Art. <http://csea-scea.ca/publications/ebooks/>