

EuSARF2025

TRANSFORMATION, TRANSITION AND INNOVATION IN CHILD WELFARE

Date

**8-12 September
2025**

Preconferences

**8-9 September
2025**

Main conference

**10-12 September
2025**

**University of Zagreb Faculty of Education
and Rehabilitation Sciences
Zagreb, Croatia**

Organizers: European Scientific Association on residential and Family Care for Children and Adolescents (EuSARF) and University of Zagreb Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences
EUSARF2025 is under the auspices of the University of Zagreb



 **EuSARF**
EUROPEAN SCIENTIFIC ASSOCIATION
ON RESIDENTIAL AND FAMILY CARE
FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS



 **ERF**

From rebel to researcher

**Structurally embedding experts-by-experience in research practice
In pursuit of a *knowledge ecology***

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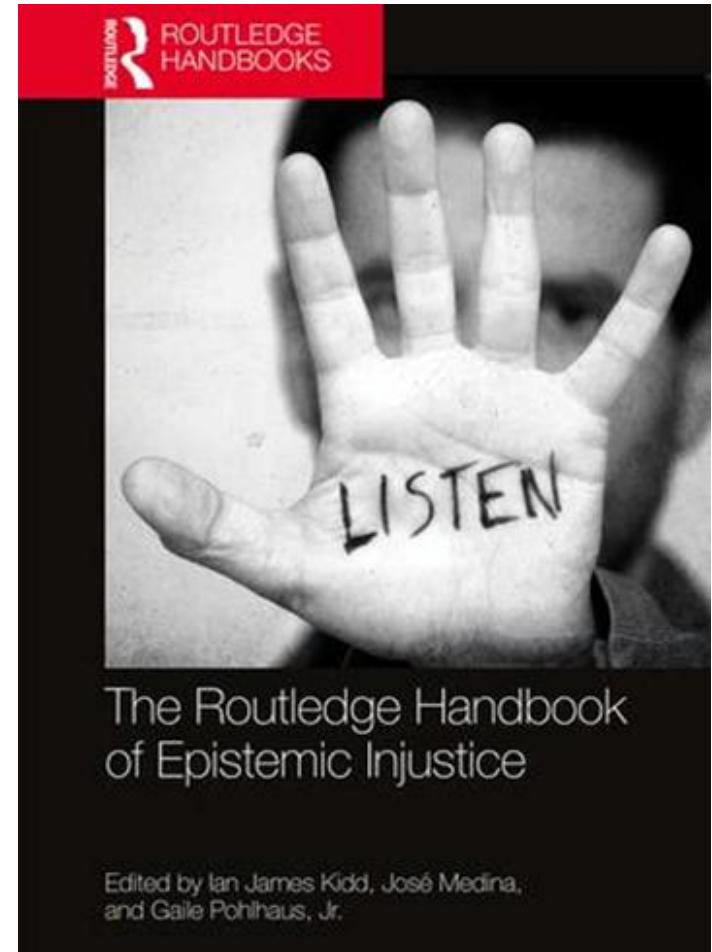
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Framing the context

- Child research falls into **3 categories** (Kellett, 2010):
 - on → with → by them
- **Participatory and collaborative research** have pushed the boundary
 - From **passive** informants to **active social agents**
- Our moral imperative: a **child-conscious society** (Savahl, 2025)
 - It's not about 'giving voice'
 - An act of resistance to '*epistemic injustice*' (Fricker, 2007)



Why and how are lived experiences enriching in research?

- **Individual:** “It helped me feel like a researcher” (Ferguson et al, 2025)
 - Self-esteem, meaning-making, ... Skill-development, taking on different roles, ...
- **Organizational:** education, research, policy and practice
 - Lifeworld orientation and alignment
 - Interpretative depth, different lens to themes, uncovering blind spots
 - Challenges our often traditional and taken-for-granted perspectives
- **Societal/relational**
 - Accessibility of knowledge
 - Bridge-building between academia, policy and communities

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From *knowledge and position hierarchy* to *knowledge ecology*

- “I’m not called a co-researcher, so why should she be?”
 - Co-research carries an implicit – often unspoken – assumption about **hierarchy and position** in research
- Everyone is doing research, but has different roots (**knowledge ecology**)
 - It frames both academic and ‘lived experience’ researchers as **human beings of equal (knowledge) value**, rather than one being an accessory to the other.
 - It **legitimizes fluidity**: roles can adapt, expand, and shift.
- **Critical shift**: Moving from project-level reflection to structural and institutional change

Critical reflections on our research practice and collaboration



- **Roles ambiguity**
 - **Twilight-zone & impostersyndrome:** “Who am I, where? In what role am I sitting here?” ; “Do I have the right to be here?”
 - Our position in the researcher/expert-by-experience continuum
- **Institutional friction:** Slow structures, contracts, short-term positions, different ideas of professionalization and knowledge construction, ...
- **What do (and can) we expect from ourselves and others?**
 - Need for mutual support
 - The ‘rythm of academic work’
- **Negotiating our language**
 - Implicit/explicit pressure to “translate” insights into academic terms?
 - Pushing back to ‘Masterklap’ ?
- **Dealing with the risk of emotional burden**
 - Distance to lived experiences (?)

A call to action: Create collective space and push back

- **Institutional transformation:** forcing higher education, policy and research to rethink hiring, recognition, support
- Mutual **capacity building:** exchange of experiential and academic knowledge
- **Genuine power-sharing**
- Relational **commitment**
- Creating a **safe space**
- Redefining what counts as **knowledge and expertise**

It is messy at times, but so what? It's needed.

Questions?

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