

COOP  
DESIGN  
RESEARCH

—  
M.S.C.  
PROGRAM

# LEARNING TO LISTEN

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## ABSTRACT

Children are often seen but not heard in the design process. Their participation as users occurs either at the beginning or towards the end. There are varied reasons for the same like existing power gaps, biases, pre-made assumptions etc. The thesis aims to include children and listen to their voices through playful inquiry and participatory activities. As opposed to the capitalist perspective of involving children as consumers or users, the research engages with them as co-creators and co-researchers. It contributes to the field of 'child-participatory design' with 7-13-year-old children from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in Berlin. The key research question explores '**In what ways can co-design intervention aid to listen actively and empower children through play?**'

'Co-creation' and 'co-design' are often loosely used across various disciplines since they became buzzwords in participatory design practices. The objective is to understand and consider the children's needs as top priority rather than focusing on forming solutions for them. The practice-based methodology moves away from binaries and rigid outsets of quantitative and qualitative research. Rather than starting to prove a hypothesis or problem statement my approach started with my hunch to dive in the field of participatory design with children. I build my own workshop framework by reflecting on my experiences and learnings with practitioners tacit-knowing from the field of child-centered design. Co-design workshops is a method adapted to collect research outputs and claims to knowing through the symbolic language and meaning making through two workshops in Berlin. Speculative design only acts as topic for the workshop to challenge self-expression and creativity through means comfortable to them.

The target group are children from multi-cultural backgrounds because of my own positionality as an immigrant. Playful and visual inquiry becomes an imperative need especially when language plays minimal role in generating participation. I will be generating resources to put everyone on the same playing field. The data will be documented and collected through semi structured interviews, case study, journal entries from workshops, observation methods, practice trails, and expert and peer review methods to complement and enrich thesis. Rather than claiming how the futures should be the thesis aims to start a dialogue on involving children in design process and critically questioning the present.

**Keywords:** Co-design, Child-centred design, Participatory design, Practice-led, Playful inquiry, Generative Design Research, Design Thinking