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Lived Experiences and Visual Storytelling in Rural Korean students

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of rural students in Korea in words and visual images using Photovoice. Three sessions were conducted over one month in 2014 with six elementary students. Data was collected by student photovoice in their life. Spiral data analysis was used for analyzing the data. The following results were obtained. First, conducting an expression activity class using photo voice involves a process of practicing, reflecting, and observing class, and learned knowledge that comes into one's life through the completion and organization of photovoice. Exploration through questions led students to make creative expressions through movement. Photovoice, which was made as the class was organized, made students "review" those photos that were not seen in the context. As a result, the expression activity design of the narrative curriculum allowed movement-oriented expression activities to promote intellectual growth and enable students to make diverse and creative self-expressions. Second, students learned this through practice and the experience of using photo voice. As they sought knowledge in everyday life on their own by talking with other people and discussing the developed photos, they began to derive meaning from them. Photovoice proved to be an activity through which one can realize an expression activity through the quest for knowledge in daily life. Thus, the narrative curriculum's expression activity established a link between the knowledge learned in school and students' lives.

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Keywords: Photovoice, Korea, photo voice

1. Introduction

Small school is defined as the elementary or middle school with less than 120 students and less than six classes in terms of school size. However recently, based on the economic principle to estimate the cost of education put in for a student, a school with no more than 60 students is regarded as a small school (Ministry of Education, 2013). Currently, rural schools account for approximately 40% (1,896 schools) of all schools in Korea (Jeong, 2014), and

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small schools are operating in a difficult conditions including the lack of peer learning and limitations in after-school program operations. One feature of rural schools is a long commute to school, for which schools with school buses give school rides to all the students in elementary and middle schools in the vicinity, and students in the schools without school buses commute to school by their parents' cars. The schools in farming, fishing, and mountain villages are losing competitiveness due to small number of students, and integrated into other schools in the vicinity, and marginalized. This is because of the attempts to apply general curriculum to small schools by force without taking into account their special characteristics, which is interfering with the education to take advantage of the strengths of small schools (Kim and Lee, 2013).

This study aims to enable students express themselves by photographing themselves inside class and outside school, in a case of a small elementary school with a total of 12 students. As a research instrument to achieve the study purpose, photovoice, a participant-centered action research method, was utilized. It is a research method, through which individuals perceive the phenomenon they experience through the tool of photograph and gain insight for the future, and which is used in a wide range of academic fields including social work, education, and physical education. In this study, photovoice has two goals. The first goal is that individuals record and show the strengths and the problems of the groups they belong to. The images in the photos describe how we see ourselves, how we define the world, and how we relate to the world. Through the process, new lessons can also be learned from how people interpret the images in addition to surface structure of description.

The second goal is to facilitate critical dialogue and knowledge on the issues of individuals and the group they belong to by having a group discussion using the photos. Participants gain clear perspectives on the feelings they experience and the ways to express them through such opportunities.

The photos of photovoice is not a simple data collection, but inform on the communication between participants and a researcher, and the feedback and evaluation on study results as well as the data to show the entire research process (Kim et al., 2015). This study is believed to allow students in a small elementary school to present their own lived experiences in class with images that capture their movement expressions. Everyday social and environmental lives of students in a small school were expressed through the photos the participants took themselves. This study process is designed to explore what the students currently living in small farming and fishing villages in Korea are like, what the description reveals, and accordingly, what is important in the continuity between school education and personal life.

2. Research Questions

Research questions are as follows. First, how students in a small elementary school perceive class content and their lives? Second, does the expressive activity class link the knowledge learned from school and students' lives? If so, what specific aspects are expressed in the images of photos? This study utilizes photovoice in the expressive activity class to address these research questions. This is attempted to find the evidence that provides the opportunity to examine the knowledge obtained from school in students' personal lives.

3. Methods

3.1. Participant

Jeungwon Elementary School (pseudonym) is a small school with a total of 54 students. The participants of this study consist of 12 sixth graders (6 boys and 6 girls). The researcher of this study is a lecturer who visits them for the expressive activity class once a week. The participant characteristics are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants

School Name	Grade	Number of Students			Location	Characteristics
Jeungwon	6	Boy	Girl	Total	Classroom	Both boys and girls are outgoing and proactive
		6	6	12		

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