



Sharing seeing: Exploring photo-elicitation with children in two different cultural contexts[☆]



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H I G H L I G H T S

- Young children can be meaningfully involved in image-based projects.
- Image-based research can provide access to understanding children's lifeworlds.
- Interpreting images encourages children to a questioning critical consciousness.
- Children who are involved in analyzing images can act as knowledge producers.

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A B S T R A C T

This work uses text and photos to explore research into visual methods with children in Pakistan and Luxembourg. Children are typically positioned as unable to participate as actors in the knowledge economy. Their insights and voices are seldom heard in educational spaces. Using image-based research the authors solicited the voices of children by encouraging them to speak to adults through multiple mediums. The children in this research responded by creating and analyzing images and communicating to adults across difference in new ways. In addition they were able to use images as a base from which to re-see their worlds.

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1. Purpose: new voices in old worlds

1.1. Introduction

The value of allowing children to have a “voice” in research and teaching is well documented in educational literature, in particular in the area of research methods (e.g., Catts, Allan, & Smyth, 2007; McTavish, Strelasky, & Coles, 2012). This focus supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which emphasizes that those who work with children respect their views,

and that children have the right to express their perspectives freely on matters that concern them (UNICEF, 2009). Including children in research can lead to new relationships between adults and children (Schiller & Einarsdottir, 2009) as well as increased power and authority for children as participants in the process of research (Coad & Evans, 2008). Literature on engaging children as co-researchers has highlighted the value of repositioning children so that they are not simply involved in gathering knowledge, but are active participants in knowledge production (Veale, 2005), including data analysis (Coad & Evans, 2008). In this paper, we explore the value of researching children's voices as they generate knowledge through photo-elicitation projects as we examine the complexities and possibilities of using photo-elicitation with children. We position *images* as viable discourse in education (Piper & Frankham, 2007) as we highlight how photographic images created by children can encourage them to new understandings, and how image-based projects in international contexts can facilitate moving through multiple boundaries to communicate across differences. This work

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is intended to guide those working in the field of teacher education to consider approaches to increase the use of image-based methods to elicit, listen to, share, and respond to children's voices, pedagogically as well as methodologically.

Our data are drawn from two visual research projects in elementary schools: one in Luxembourg (Fig. 1); the other in Pakistan (Fig. 2). Combined, our projects offer insights on how the use of photo-elicitation can provide space for children to move beyond the worlds of print and text, by speaking across differences through the use of images. We bring our research projects together in this paper to consider similar outcomes and shared conclusions, as well as to highlight ways that image-based methods and photo-elicitation can be valuable tools for educators and researchers. We suggest that this type of research contributes to democratic knowledge production and offers pedagogical and methodological insights for teachers, teacher educators, and researchers who seek to deepen their understanding of the lifeworlds and experiences of students (Fig. 3 and 4).

1.2. New voices: aims and rationale

Our research is based in visual methodologies (Banks, 2001; Harper, 1998; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Pink, 2001; Prosser, 1998). Specifically, we utilized photo-elicitation techniques (Downing, 2006; Harper, 2002; Rose, 2007; Wang & Burris, 1994; Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell, & Pestronk, 2004) to access the understandings and lived worlds of children. In photo-elicitation projects, research participants are given cameras to document their environments and experiences in order to provide them with their own visual referent as a starting point for conversations about their perceptions. These techniques have been successfully used with children to reveal their insights as they contribute meaningfully to the process of research (Downing, 2006; Ewald & Lightfoot, 2001). Research in the health field has employed these techniques as a way to be sensitive to and capture the experiences and understandings of populations through visual, rather than purely verbal, self-reporting (Baker & Wang, 2006; Keller, Fleury, Perez, et al., 2008; Lightfoot et al., 2012; Lopez, Eng, Randall-David, & Robinson, 2005). These methods have been argued to support the democratizing goal of critical pedagogy (e.g. Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006) and have served to empower children (usually adolescents) to speak about their lives (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003; Hubbard, 1991).

Although arts-based methodologies, including photo-elicitation, can be particularly valuable in teacher education (Jevic & Springgay, 2008), little research exists specifically documenting



Fig. 2. Pakistan.

the value of photo-elicitation projects in encouraging children to speak across multiple differences. We seek to work towards addressing this gap in the literature by:

- 1) Providing an analysis of the ways that children embraced and/or resisted opportunities to use visual mediums to create their own stories, produce and share knowledge about their understandings of the world.
- 2) Exploring the ways that images help facilitate the creation of meaning and allowed for new insights to emerge and be expressed.
- 3) Offering examples of image creation by children that could provide a platform for teachers and teacher educators to better understand children's perceptions of the worlds they frame.

As critical pedagogues, we conceptualize 'learning' as a co-constructed endeavor through which teachers seek to work *with*, rather than *for* students. We utilize Shor's (1993) Freirean notion of education as something that students *do*, rather than something that is *done to them*. Freire argued for "conscientization" – a developing of critical consciousness gained through reflection and action (1970). To this end, he used images to teach literacy and social justice awareness. Using this idea as a guide, we used photo-elicitation with children to encourage them to shift from expressing themselves as knowledge consumers, to expressing themselves as knowledge producers. In previous research (Siry & Ali-Khan, 2011), we illustrated how providing space for students to challenge traditional knowledge production hierarchies (such as teacher-



Fig. 1. Luxembourg.



Fig. 3. Documenting an investigation.

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