

Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning

Project Case Study

Using Participatory Image-Based Research to Inform Teaching and Learning about Inclusion in Education

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Abstract

The application of participatory photography approaches to teaching and learning on inclusion is in its infancy. Image-based methodologies are often overlooked, or little understood, within educational research. Yet images have the potential as part of research processes to 'represent, engage and influence', in a way that traditional research processes often fail to do. Making, taking and considering images can play an important role in developing critical reflection skills, the more so when situated within an enquiry-based approach. Recent government pressure for service providers to engage with the perspectives of service 'users' furnishes additional justification for introducing these methodologies on a range of courses. This case-study describes a multi-faceted intervention in teaching, learning and research in education: the background, the strands involved, the practical activities and the outcomes.

Background

This case-study describes the application of a new area of work in teaching and learning in education, focusing on a research method termed 'Participatory Photography'. Broadly speaking, participatory photography involves groups or individuals who would traditionally be the subjects of others' research in taking and interpreting their own photographs in order to address and share important aspects of their lives and experiences, and as such fits within an action research paradigm (Wang *et al.* 1996; Miles and Kaplan 2005). Participatory photography, sometimes referred to as 'Photovoice', 'photonovella' or 'photonarrative', seeks to alter the constructs of traditional qualitative research enquiry in which 'outsider' researchers investigate and assess the lives of 'insider' research subjects (Wang and Burris 1994; Karlsson 2001; Kaplan and Howes 2004).

There is evidence to suggest that some forms of participatory photography have been in use in the social sciences since at least the 1960s, particularly in community photography/darkroom projects, and in social-psychological 'autophotography' work (Emison and Smith 2000). Regardless of its origins, participatory photography, along with other image-based approaches to qualitative research inquiry, has gained increasing credibility within the social sciences since the early 1990s (Schratz and Walker 1995; Prosser 1998).

The project aimed to establish the use of enquiry-based, participatory photography in teaching and learning across the School of Education, building on the School's international reputation for teaching and research in inclusive education. The teaching methodology involved students being guided in the use of the research method to carry out their own research projects around the central theme of inclusion. Our objectives were:

1. To trial EBL image-based research methods with Masters students in Special and Inclusive Education and Educational Research;
2. To involve students in monitoring and evaluating the development of the course;

3. To further develop image-based approaches to pupil voice in six schools in North-West England. This work will be documented for use in the development of course material;
4. To develop online and face-to-face teaching and learning materials on EBL-focused image-based research for use in the School of Education.

For the purposes of this case study we have divided the activities into three distinct strands:

- Strand 1: the pilot course - a series of teaching sessions;
- Strand 2: developing resources for school-based enquiry;
- Strand 3: development of online research methods materials.

Strand 1: The Pilot Course

The main focus of this case study is Strand 1: the pilot teaching sessions, which were developed for a relatively small group of students opting for this course in addition to their core course units in Semester 2. Fourteen students attended parts of the course; nine of whom attended all of the sessions, of which six students chose to be fully assessed. The course was the subject of extensive participatory discussion and decision-making and it addressed this innovative research methodology for the first time in the School of Education. The case-study demonstrates the value of this piloting approach, although there is recognition that some of the procedures will need adapting for a larger cohort of students.

The three teaching sessions were offered primarily to students on the MEd in Special and Inclusive Education programme. Students were drawn from a diverse range of professional and cultural backgrounds, with a majority from countries of the South (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa, Indian subcontinent, parts of Asia and Latin America). Approximately two thirds were studying full time, and the majority were qualified teachers involved in some way in teaching students identified as having special needs or disabilities. Two PhD students, whose main research interest is in inclusive education, also attended the course. Altogether nine students completed the full pilot

course, with five others attending some of the sessions. A total of six students opted to be assessed on their participatory photography projects.

Taster Session

A two-hour taster session introduced key concepts in visual anthropology and visual ethnography and their relevance to inclusion in educational settings through active consideration of examples based on printed images. All MEd students in Special and Inclusive Education were required to attend this session and several PhD students chose to attend. The taster was followed by two whole-day sessions, which were optional, and during which participants were invited to engage actively in making sense of the notions of participatory photography for themselves.

Session 1

The Session began with a short input on participatory photography and visual literacy. This was followed by a *Diamond Sorting Exercise* (Ainscow *et al.* 1994), which involved participants working in groups to organise a set of images and statements related to inclusion in priority order, according to their perceptions.



Figure 1 Example of a Diamond Sorting Exercise.

Participant groups were then given a digital camera and asked to 'dramatize inclusion or exclusion' within 10 minutes by means of a single photographic image. The focus was on framing, timing, lighting and meaning. The single images were then presented to the whole group.

A plenary discussion on ethical considerations followed the showing of an excerpt from the film, *Born into Brothels*. This film raised a wide range of ethical issues pertinent to participatory photography. It was made in the slum communities in Bombay, India, and it showed the children of sex workers being given cameras by an English woman who asked them to document their lives.

The main activity in the afternoon involved pairs of students in an extended participatory photography activity. This was a two-hour, open-ended enquiry into the concept of 'inclusion', based on making and selecting a series of images through engagement with a local institution or other public resource. Prior to this fieldwork, participants were asked to identify up to six possible themes for their participatory photography project, from which they were required to prioritise one main theme. For one group, this translated into making portraits of couples in a large shopping centre; for another, a range of images reflecting physical access issues within the University buildings; while others pursued a more symbolic approach. In the photo below a canal lock was symbolic of a barrier to inclusion, but also an essential ingredient.



Figure 2 An example of a barrier to inclusion.

Finally, participants were engaged in an activity to develop criteria for the assessment of assignments and presentations. This was later adapted by the Project Team into the assessment guidelines used to grade the presentations.

Session 2

A presentation and discussion on ethical issues related to the use of images constituted the first part of the morning session. This was in direct response to student feedback. Examples from the case-study work in schools were

given to illustrate a range of ethical issues. Participants were given three different scenarios to provoke discussion on particular aspects of these issues, and these were discussed in plenary.

The main activity in this Session was the preparation of presentations which participants were asked to do within a one-hour period, based on the photographs they had taken during the extended participatory photography activity in Session 1. They were able to use PowerPoint, the Internet and/or old-fashioned posters.

Presentations were made in the afternoon session, lasting approximately 20 minutes per group, including questions. Each one highlighted a range of issues related to the study of inclusive practice and demonstrated a diverse range of experiences and opinions.

Evaluation

A series of three written questionnaires were completed anonymously by all participants at the end of each teaching session. Each questionnaire was slightly different, but they all required participants to complete sentences such as: 'The most useful learning experience was...'; 'The most unusual, most liked, and most difficult elements were...' and 'what I still don't understand is...'. This generated formatively useful comments which were fed into project-team planning meetings. Here are some examples of evaluation feedback following Session 1:

The most useful learning experience so far has been actually going out of the classroom to do some 'hands-on' practical learning.

What I still don't understand is that when you conduct research using this specific method, are you constrained following some academic rules, or is it better to use as an end to itself, a way of expression?

Can this approach promote changes in the long term, sustainable changes, further than reflection?

Students were also asked to write free reflections after the final session. They used this opportunity in various ways, some of them digesting the possible usefulness in their own ongoing research, for example:

It gave me a way to express my learning in the M.Ed. programme in a picturesque manner.

Many of the students reflected on the potential of the process as something quite different, and relevant to the kind of research they were hoping to do.

Project Team

A project team was constituted with two student members and the course facilitators. The students were briefed on their roles as learners and co-planners. After each session this team met and the students provided feedback, which was then used to formulate changes in subsequent sessions. For example, more input on ethics was provided in the third session.

The project team provided a second element of evaluation; student representatives raised a range of considered points in discussions held a couple of days after each session. For example, they noted some confusion over the approach to ethical issues after the first day event.

Feedback to the student members of the Project Team confirmed that the presentations in Session 2 had 'demonstrated the power of images in portraying the complex concept of inclusion and the wide range of interpretations of it in a very short time' (Minutes, 30 March 2006).

The pilot course was discussed and reviewed by the Course Development Team (CDT) for the MEd Programme, and it was agreed by this team that the participatory photography assignment could be submitted as the main assignment for the course unit entitled 'Understanding the Development of Inclusive Schools'. In the final CDT meeting, anonymous student feedback on the MEd programme as a whole was presented by the Student Representative and discussed. Those students who had opted for the participatory photography course had the following to say:

[The option of participatory photography] was very interesting and it would be nice if the following year students also have a chance to do it. It just adds more life and interest to one long conversation of 'inclusion'.

Image based research should be a compulsory subject.

Assessment

Students on the pilot course, who are studying for an MEd, were offered the opportunity of being assessed on their use and understanding of participatory photography, both through an individual or group presentation and a piece of individual written work. Six students took this option. The students on the Project Team were influential in guiding the form of the assessment. Together with their help, the criteria for the formal assessment of presentations were adapted from the criteria developed by students in Session 2 (Appendix 1).

The presentations were both peer and tutor assessed, and weighted as one-third of the total mark. Although the final marks were moderated by the tutors, the formative comments and marks assigned by students were taken into consideration. It was expected that the presentation be reflective of each group or individual's exploration of inclusion through the participatory photography exercise as well as the research process, and, where appropriate, collaborative team-work. The written assignment comprised the other two-thirds of the total mark and was expected to relate to each participant's engagement with the participatory photography methodology and the literature on inclusion and image-based research. Students were also expected to reflect on the potential for future use of participatory photography as a research methodology.

As a direct result of attending the course, several students have adopted related methodology as part of their dissertations. Most of these involve work in local schools, and one has raised significant issues around how schools deal with pupil perceptions when they are strongly and articulately expressed.

Further development

From September 2006/7, participatory photography will be introduced to Semester 1 MEd students (*Special and Inclusive Education*) in a half-day session as part of the course unit 'Understanding the Development of Inclusive Education' (formerly '*Schools*'). Students will be encouraged to use the methodology when carrying out their collaborative research projects in Manchester schools as part of the course unit 'School Based Inquiry and Development'. There will be a particular emphasis on ethical issues related to the use of images which will help to reinforce the ethical issues associated in working with children in schools. In addition the 5-credit online course (see below) will be made available through WebCT, as one of a range of possible research methodologies, as part of the course unit 'Developing Researcher Competence' in Semester 2.

A 10-credit course on image-based research methods will be adapted for teaching to the BA Language, Literacy and Communication students in the School of Education, and teaching will begin in Semester 2, 2007/8.

Strand 2: Work in Schools - Developing Resources for School-Based Enquiry

One of our aims was to promote synergy between teaching and learning in the university, research activities by students and tutors and practice in local schools. Further use of this methodology has been carried out this year by one of the course tutors, working in six Local Education Authorities (LEA) in the North-West. In a variety of high school settings, the tutor is working with young people, and their teachers and LEA officers, to promote concrete examples of the value of this methodology in action, in ways that link, for example, to the Government's 'Every Child Matters' agenda. This work has informed the course development and provided examples of practice for students' consideration. These examples will be used in the online materials and in developing future course material for MEd and BA students.

Building on the *Diamond Sorting Exercise* used in the pilot course, sets of images and statements related to 'learning' and 'participation' have been

developed for use in schools in order to shift the focus away from the somewhat contentious concept of 'inclusion'.

Strand 3: Development of Online Research Methods Materials

In parallel to the piloting of a 5-credit course unit on participatory photography, online learning material is being developed as part of a School of Education initiative on web-based research methods training materials. Based on our observations and reflections in piloting the participatory photography course, we are producing a 'facilitators' pack' to accompany the online course material for 'non-experts'.

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Appendix 1

Participatory Photography Criteria for Assessment of presentations 5 May 2006
Name of presenters: Title and theme of presentation, and reasons for taking photos (How well does the title relate to the theme?) Marks out of 10:
Quality and content of photos (power, clarity, art, framing, impact) Marks out of 10:
Insight into and meaning of photos How far do the images provoke and stimulate thinking about 'inclusion' and 'exclusion'? Marks out of 10:
Reflection, editing and analysis Reasons for selecting photos Marks out of 10:
Distinctive features Marks out of 10:
Additional comments What I enjoyed most What could be improved