



Whose School Is It Anyway? Photo-Voice as Method to Elicit Student Perceptions of One Free School's Curriculum and Learning Spaces

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Abstract

This study elicits student perceptions of their curriculum and experiences in their school. through photo-voice. Photo-voice is a child-friendly method to engage children and young people in participatory research (Abma, et al., 2022). Photo-voice gives children the opportunity to take pictures of what is important to them and select the most meaningful pictures to articulate their story. The pictures can then be shown to adults as co-researchers to articulate further responses. Photo-voice is child-friendly as it is less verbally oriented than traditional research methods and enables children to express their perspective and participate more fully in research. In this study children used digital cameras to take photos of spaces in their school that were important to them in terms of their curriculum and provision. This method is potentially powerful and empowering because children are in control of the camera rather than purely subject of the research (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). Photo-voice is part of the social justice agenda and gives children and young people the right to express their voice in an ethical and responsible way. Findings indicated that the space, place and extra-curricular activities of the school were of critical importance to the children's academic experience and journey. Spaces, places and extra-curricular aspects of school are often neglected areas of the educational debate in a climate of neo-liberal outcomes based upon curriculum – systems – and academic achievement. Children's voices in contrast to those of adult stakeholders are often unheard, and given it is their school and their academic journey, they are voices that need to be heard. Hearing children's voice using photo-voice as method could influence the development of future curriculum design.

Keywords: photo-voice, curriculum, social justice, voice, empowerment