

Using Photovoice to engage refugee communities

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Writing Culture

- “A conceptual shift, “tectonic” in its implications, has taken place. We ground things, now, on a moving earth. There is no longer any place of over-view (mountaintop) from which to map human ways of life, no Archimedian point from which to represent the world” (Clifford, 1986, pg 22)

Table 1.1 Alternative Knowledge Claim Positions

Postpositivism

Determination
Reductionism
Empirical observation
and measurement
Theory verification

Constructivism

Understanding
Multiple participant meanings
Social and historical construction
Theory generation

Advocacy/Participatory

Political
Empowerment issue-oriented
Collaborative
Change-oriented

Pragmatism

Consequences of actions
Problem-centered
Pluralistic
Real-world practice oriented

Dual imperative

- Hugman, R., Pittaway, E., & Bartolomei, L. (2011). When 'do no harm' is not enough: The ethics of research with refugees and other vulnerable groups. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(7): 1271-1287.
- 'research into human suffering ought only to be justifiable if it contributes to the ending of that suffering' (Hugman et al, p1272)
- Jacobsen and Landau (2003) – the dual imperative – research with vulnerable communities should be both academically sound and policy relevant



Photovoice

- *“Photographs are a means of making ‘real’ (or ‘more real’) matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore” (Sontag 2003:72)*
- Community-based research tool
- Balances research and action
- People identify, represent, and enhance their community.
- Gives a voice to research subjects through giving them a say in how their experiences are represented, with the eventual aim of not only individually empowering the research participants, but also enabling them to influence the outcomes of policy decisions (Wang and Burris, 1997; Palibroda, Krieg and Havelock, 2009).

- It moves away from traditional text-centric western approaches to knowledge, expanding worldviews through incorporating the experiences of people from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, in order to create a sense of agency through documentation (Singhal and Rattine-Flaherty, 2006).
- Potential to empower those often overlooked by policy-makers, or marginalised in some way.
- Photovoice nurtures self-advocacy, providing people with the opportunity to present evidence of their motivations and insights, and mitigating researcher bias (Molloy, 2007).
- As such the photovoice method highlights the participant's emic view (insider perspective). This is opposed to the etic view (outsider perspective) where the researcher interprets the social phenomenon (Wilkin and Liamputtong, 2010).

Critiques/limits

- Barthes (1981) argues that photography is not necessarily representative of the reality of either the creator of the photograph or of the viewer, but constitutes a 'third reality' that arises almost accidentally, and creates its own symbolic world.
- It can be voyeuristic (Sontag, 1978), and in the worst cases could become a medium that fosters an attitude of anti-intervention, for the act of recording contradicts the act of intervening in a situation's politics.
- There are also “limits to what is observable ... access to that which was not photographed is denied and subsequently not discussed in the photovoice interview”. (Castleden, and Garvin, 2008).
- Stuff

Benefits

- Get away from interview and text based methods (Singhal and Rattine-Flaherty, 2006);
- Flexible and adaptable (Wang and Burris, 1997);
- Fun (useful for children and youth);
- Enables needs-assessment through community participation, addressing 'theory failure' (Wang and Burris, 1997);
- A means to integrate marginalised knowledge into both theory and practice by voicing participants' viewpoints; facilitates development of knowledge transfer strategies that reflect the viewpoints of participants (Racine and Petrucka, 2011);
- Reduces isolation and increases community connections amongst participants (Yoshihama and Carr, 2003).
- Engenders a co-sharing of reality, between participants, researchers, the community, policy-makers and the world at large; working towards equality of experience and participation where there are hierarchies based on gender, class or race and other axes of power.

Photovoice with refugees

- In societies where refugees are often viewed negatively, either as passive recipients of assistance, or as potential terrorist threats, Photovoice provides a way not only to validate peoples' lived experiences, but also to demonstrate their lives to the broader community in order to deconstruct stereotypes.



Photovoice

- Photovoice: Participants were asked to take at least five photos on each of the following themes, over a period of three weeks:
 - My home
 - My learning experiences
 - My employment experiences
 - My friendships
 - My life in Australia
 - Where I feel I belong

- 10 families
- Training session
- Mixed response
- Some participants took many photos, some few
- Some creative, some not



Recurring themes

- a strong connection to family;
- a connection to nature;
- the importance of finding meaningful employment;
- the difficulty of straddling two cultures;
- the longing for friends and family back home;
- hope and optimism for the future.

Photovoice on belonging

- Images predominantly about relationships
- Also institutions (education, migrant services, library, hospital) and nature
- Predominantly positive
- MCA – who is in the photo (family, kids, friends, material objects – books, scenery, buildings [house, mosque], institutions). Category bound activities (eating; singing; playing; thinking)

I feel happy, I have many
friends. I like being here



Park near our house. People play football there and we sometimes go and watch. The kids, especially the eldest son, play soccer and watch it on TV. We also went to a festival at the park which was really nice . It gave us a story to tell at English classes



Sunday school – church for adults every Sunday. I'm proud to get training. Never had the opportunity to learn more about spirituality. When I attend [church], we have good things in our heart.



Cooking kebab in the park, with my family and relatives. It makes me feel happy. I love nature and the sunshine in Australia. Makes me feel like I belong.

- (also included photos taken in Sweden and Syria!)





- Social gathering for Muslims and Arabs - sense of isolation, despite being in a group, daughter posed slightly apart from the group: “I learnt here that being together is not enough to feel like we belong.”



Similar, image appears to be about one thing, but is in fact about another

Not a typical 'Aussie beach scene' but a sense of isolation.

Ibrahim says that when he looks at the ocean he feels like a "small point in this huge world... searching" and thinking about his new life.



Daughter shown lying next to a drawing in the sand of an old friend being missed or a new friend yet to be made, link between the past and the future, there and here.

My home



RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES ACT 1987
Section 61 (a)

NOTICE OF TERMINATION

(This form is NOT to be used in respect of non-payment of rent.)

Heatham S Mati Safo & Baban Wadee Aboalk
(Name of tenant(s))

You notice of termination of your residential tenancy agreement and
possession of the premises at -

Unit 1/123 Walter Road BASSENDEAN WA 60
(Address of rented premises)





My employment experiences



“They just advise, they don’t help me get a job, they are just meetings without meaning, nothing more.”

Conclusions and observations

- Enabled participants to creatively represent and convey the various aspects of their settlement experience. Some better than others.
- Give people a camera and they tell a happier story generally, and about belonging particularly, than in interviews.
- See Guell and Ogilvie (2013) – commuters – “While our interpretations of photos of well-being could be subject to a methodological fallacy relating to a preference for positive over negative images in lay photography, we nonetheless suggest that the rich visual and oral narratives indicate a ‘real’ experience, albeit elicited through the photovoice. “
- Through the use of the camera participants are forced to think about how they want to represent their story, putting space between themselves and their experiences, in order to represent these to others.
- Everyday lives – relationships, frustrations, joys, hopes.

Outcomes

- Analysis, report (Lotterywest) and papers eg housing paper
- Photovoice exhibition in State Library, report launch
- Use in local publications

