

Delgado, M. Urban Youth and Photovoice: Visual Ethnography in Action

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I was pleasantly surprised to be sent this particular book to review. I was not overly familiar with the concept of photovoice - it is much better known and utilised in the USA and other parts of the world than the UK although the charity 'PhotoVoice' has had a presence in London since 1998. They recently (2014) launched a new website, membership scheme and brand identity - see <http://www.photovoice.org/>.

I am now much more conversant with this participatory and empowering multi-disciplinary approach to social research. The book is well organized and structured. There are eight chapters and an epilogue divided into four sections plus a slim but useful index. The first three chapters comprising section one are scene setters. Chapter One provides an overview whilst Chapter Two traces the development of arts-based research and practice in general, acknowledging that that such a umbrella term invites debate and

tension not least in the actual question surrounding whether it is a legitimate form of research at all. Tension is a theme revisited in Chapter Three when the author provides a history of and a theoretical grounding on youth development and he offers a rationale for why the book focusses on 'urban youth'. The term is used to describe, not exclusively but predominately "youth who are of color, live in economically distressed areas of a city, and have limited options for upward mobility' (pg.53).

Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven make up section two which provides an in-depth understanding and explanation of exactly what photovoice is, including how to analyse data and the consideration of ethics. Photovoice is considered a subtype of participatory visual methods which includes techniques such as photo-elicitation and digital storytelling. These techniques allow research participants to create visuals that capture their individual perspectives as part of the research process. The origins of any research methods always seem to be open for debate but it is generally accepted that photovoice was developed by Caroline C. Wang in 1992 as a way to empowering rural women in Yunnan Province, China, to influence the policies and programmes affecting them (see Wang and Burris 1994, 1997). Since then, photovoice has been

commonly used in the fields of community development, public health, and education. Photovoice is described as highly flexible and can be adapted to specific participatory goals, different groups and communities, and distinct policy and public health issues. Photovoice turns on involving people in defining issues. It is argued that such an approach avoids the distortion of fitting data into a predetermined paradigm; through it we hear and understand how people make meaning themselves, or construct what matters to them. The emphasis that photovoice places on participatory principles and action serves to separate this form of qualitative research from photo elicitation.

Section three consists of Chapter Eight which is entitled 'Voices from the Field'. The entire section/chapter is used to present a case study (including photographs) of Camp CAMERA in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Camp CAMERA is a collaboration between Macalester College students and Youth for Cultural Appreciation and Racial Equality. The section/chapter illustrates the role of theory and action and pays particular attention to the rewards and challenges associated with this form of ethnography. The website offered in the book is not live but you can get some background material and look at the

pictures

at

<http://www.macalester.edu/news/macalestertoday/2011summer/campcamer>

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Section four is entitled 'Lessons Learned and Future Directions' and consists of the epilogue. Here within the author offers eleven themes or topics that have emerged from his engagement with photovoice - it is very much a contemplative ending to the book.

Photography has a long history of being used as an interrogative and critical documentary tool. For example, Jo Spence's Photography Workshop in Britain helped stretch the boundaries within which community groups, labour and women's movements, and adult educators could move toward a better understanding of the progressive potential for making and using photographs. Photovoice is very much in that tradition. Social work practitioners will find little here to aid their day to day practice. However, I would hope that the book will serve as an inspirational piece of scholarship for those who seek social justice - a constant theme throughout the text.

References

Wang, C, C. and Burris, M, A. (1997) 'Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment' *Health Education and Behavior*, 24(3): 369-387

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