

Researching a Child's Perspective of Experiencing Positive Feelings Through Photography and Interview

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DOI: 10.26907/esd.19.4.09

EDN: KRJFHA

Submitted: 10 October 2024; Accepted: 16 December 2024

Abstract

In the research article, we focus on research and data collection from the perspective of the child, where the latter is an active researcher. During the research, we sought to break the scientific effect of data collection, which can only be done through play and by including all children in research, or so-called experimentation. We offered them resources that encouraged a high level of motivation, and we guided the children through the research with open-ended questions. Qualitative research is presented with an emphasis on interview techniques. In the theoretical part of the article, we focus primarily on photography, which is a very common visual method in research with preschool children. Namely, it is one of the methods that encourages children to discuss, think and discover the unknown. We present the advantages of photography as a widespread method and the challenges we face when researching with younger children. In the empirical part of the research, a small sample of children (N = 9) was interviewed with a photograph taken by the child, and the purpose was based on the analysis of the child's perception and interpretation. The central theme refers to the child's experience of positive feelings expressed through the photograph. A descriptive causal non-experimental method of empirical pedagogical research was used.

Keywords: qualitative research, interview, photography, preschool child.

Исследование детской перспективы переживания позитивных чувств с помощью фотографии и интервью

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DOI: 10.26907/esd.19.4.09

EDN: KRJFHA

Дата поступления: 10 октября 2024; Дата принятия в печать: 16 декабря 2024

Аннотация

В ходе данного исследования авторы стремились дополнить научный подход к сбору данных, который, как принято считать, может быть достигнут только через игру и путем вовлечения всех детей в исследование, или так называемое экспериментирование. В теоретической части авторы сосредоточились на фотографии, использование которой является распространенным визуальным методом в исследованиях с детьми дошкольного возраста: он побуждает детей обсуждать, думать и открывать неизвестное. Качественное исследование проводилось на основе интервью, то есть сбор данных осуществлялся с точки зрения ребенка, где он был активным исследователем. Детям были предложены сначала ресурсы, которые способствовали высокой мотивации, после этого – открытые вопросы. В эмпирической части исследования небольшая выборка детей (N=9) была опрошена по фотографии, сделанной ребенком, с целью последующего анализа восприятия и интерпретации детей. В результате были выявлены преимущества фотографии как средства работы с ребёнком и проблемы, возникающие при проведении исследований с детьми младшего возраста. Основным предмет изучения – переживание ребенком позитивных чувств, получаемых им из фотографии. Использовался описательный причинно-следственный неэкспериментальный метод эмпирического педагогического исследования.

Ключевые слова: качественное исследование, интервью, фотография, ребенок дошкольного возраста.

Introduction

...photography /.../ does not tell stories, but it enables them, because it asks questions.
(Peljhan, Kravanja and Rutar, 2011)

Children's views and knowledge have a significant impact on the development of pedagogical research paths. Not only are they participants in research led by an adult, but they are also included in the research itself in such a way that they are active, invited to think, discuss, participate in data collection, processing and interpretation. This is precisely what participation is about (Štemberger, 2019), which allows children to take an active role in research of which they are the “subject”. It allows children to express their experiences, feelings and views. It is also important to emphasize that they are adequately protected in this process in the sense that they decide for themselves about their role in the research and that participation does not bring any negative consequences to the child (Štemberger, 2019).

Research with children reflects a shift from viewing children as objects of instruction to including children in the research process, where they are seen as the main actors

(Einarsdottir, 2007). How we will include children in the research itself is the task of a researcher. In doing so, we must not forget to highlight the purpose or goal of the research itself. We include children in the course of the research in an interesting and attractive way for them. Therefore, by using photography as a method of data collection, we can invite children to a different way of communication. As Thomsson (2008) argues, it is not that children do not have anything to say, but it is necessary to create the right way of listening. Children explain what they find important in everyday life with their photography.

In the theoretical part of the research article, we primarily present the interview as a qualitative research technique together with photography as one of the many visual methods. As stated by Istenič Starčič (2020), digital technology is included in the socio-cultural practices of the family in the direct physical environment with social interaction, children's play and artifacts, which in turn affects the child's everyday experiences. Digital technology intervenes in the relationship between the child, the interaction content and the environment. As a result, it changes the interaction in the family by changing the context in which the child establishes the interaction. In the continuation of the empirical part, we are primarily interested in the use of digital technology used by the child in his or her authentic environment that contribute to pedagogical research itself.

Interview and conversation with children in qualitative research

Qualitative research encompasses different types of sources such as case studies, life histories, action research, and many others, each of which has its own specificities (Vogrinc, 2008). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), qualitative research is the collection of data that contains content based on descriptions of people, events, and situations, and is usually collected in natural situations. This data is not processed using statistical procedures. Bryman (2004) states that qualitative research places great emphasis on words. Mesec (1998) also defines qualitative research as a part of the material where we process and analyse verbal descriptions (verbal, pictorial form) without using measurement procedures.

A research interview is a qualitative research technique used to collect data/information for research purposes (Sagadin, 1995). An interview is one of the most commonly used data collection techniques (Vogrinc, 2008), with conversational communication between two people, one of whom asks questions and the other answers them (Sagadin, 1995). During an interview, the interviewer must pay attention to the responses of the person being interviewed, including non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, tone of response, etc. Through an interview, the researcher finds out how people think, and learns about their emotions, thoughts, and intentions (Vogrinc, 2008). Through an interview, we learn about what we cannot find out through observation (Patton, 1990).

The difference between verbal and image interviews stems primarily from the way the brain works. The parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information, so visual images evoke deeper parts of the human consciousness than words. Photo-based interviewing is not just a mere interview process, but a process to obtain as much different information as possible during the interview (Harper, 2012). One of the effective and acceptable methods in qualitative research is visual methods (Pain, 2012), which are defined below.

Visual methods

There has been a growing interest in children in recent years, particularly in terms of how children represent their own views of their experiences, perceptions and understandings of their lifeworlds (Clark, 2005). This interest has led to a wide range of methods (Thomson, 2008), many of which have incorporated visual tools as a strategy to

encourage children's participation. Visual tools can be photography, video or drawing. Lipponen et al. (2016) also argue that the growing interest in researching and documenting young children has led to the increasing use of visual methods, such as photographs and videos. The use of visual methods can make it easier for the child to collect data, and the camera also allows us to immediately discuss the photograph of the child. Visual methodological tools open up space and time for younger children to express themselves (Shaw, 2020), and also offer participants an opportunity to visually document situations, reflect on these situations, and discuss them, which is very important (Quinn & Manning, 2013). Visual methods increase the richness of data by discovering additional meanings, adding validity and depth, and creating knowledge. These cover different type of data than oral and written methods (Glaw et al., 2017). Pain (2012) also states that the use of visual methods facilitates and enriches communication and improves data acquisition. Research where children use photography can lead to new insights and perspectives from children (Shaw, 2020).

Photography in research with a preschool child

Photography is one of the visual methods. It is an artistic medium that children handle very skilfully and with its help carefully observe the world, discover patterns in "frozen moments", and become aware of their own position as an observer and an object in the photograph. With the help of photography, they convey their experiences to their peers or adults. Children's photographs illustrate the child's experience of themselves and the world (Štirn et al., 2015). Bignante (2010) adds that they offer us additional validity and depth, as well as new opportunities and perspectives. Photography has long been a well-known tool for scientific observation, experimentation and archiving. Narrating children's feelings when taking a photograph is a modern form of digital media (Wilder, 2009).

Photographs represent the child's perspective, and the child decides what to photograph (Clark & Moss, 2001). This is also joined by Hugh and Faith (2000), who add that photographs also encourage expression and create an ongoing basis for discussion. Lomax (2012) and Rose (2016) also state that taking photographs is inviting and interesting, as it also confirms the child's participation in the research. Quinn (2013) states similarly, adding that with photography we "freeze" time and display it in a way that written or spoken observations cannot.

The photography strategy allows us to improve the child's ability to communicate with the researcher, and it also improves the researcher's ability to communicate with the child (Meo, 2010). With the help of photography, the child and the adult communicate with each other. The latter better supports children in the sense of what is required of them in the interviews (Schoultz et al., 2001). Clark-Ibáñez (2007) and Rose (2016) state that the advantages of using photographs in research interviews are mainly the possibility of evoking information, feelings and memories that might not have arisen or are difficult to describe in words. Einarsdottir (2005) emphasized that when taking photographs, children describe their opinions and feelings about their lives. Noland (2006) believes that the method of interviewing with photographs reveals different meanings. The participant – the child – is free, but at the same time chooses what he or she wants to talk about in the interview.

The photography does not take long. Therefore, children do not lose interest. Photography provides a tangible product that can be reviewed later and the discussion can be continued (Rasmussen, 1999). Clark (2005) defines that photographs act as a tool that encourages everyday dialogue with younger children to better understand their views and interests. Shaw (2020) states that through photography, children are

allowed to have subjective and active interpretation. Children ask questions and can also express emotions. Authors Dockett et al. (2017) cited Guillemin and Drew (2010) and identified that the use of photographs opens up new and interesting ways for potential participation in research, as well as a greater willingness of children to participate. Lomax (2012) and Rose (2016) add that photography encourages different types of discussions among participants, highlights some self-evident elements of life, and the photographer is an expert in discussing photographs. Cappello (2005) adds that the motivation for photography is a creative process that stimulates children's thoughts and reflections.

Epstein et al. (2006) pointed out that the use of photographs in interviews sharpened the memories of participants, as well as conducted longer and more extensive interviews. Digital technology, such as a camera, is fast and easy to use and attractive to children. Collected photographs, drawings and videos are used as stimuli in the so-called interview (Clark, 1999). A digital camera allows the child to create new photos until he gets what he wants (Shaw, 2020). They allow flexibility, as the child can delete any photos he does not like (Dockett et al., 2017). The camera increases children's power because they decide for themselves and choose things that are important to them or things that have made an impression on the child (Einarsdottir, 2005).

One of the most important challenges in research with young children is certainly communication. Using photographs to collect data from children helps us overcome these communication difficulties (Hurworth, 2004), as we invite children to communicate differently. Children explain with the camera what they find important in their everyday lives. Einarsdottir (2005) cites the authors Schratz and Steiner-Loffler (1998), as the mentioned method is particularly useful when working with young children or children with poor written and oral expression. Mauther (1997) states that children quickly get tired of talking, and they also struggle with words. Since they are very limited with the latter, their vocabulary is also limited, and they have difficulty finding words to describe something. Cappello (2005), Clark (2007) and Thomson (2008) state that the use of photographs can help us alleviate communication challenges. It allows us to communicate through both visual and verbal means.

The purpose of the research task is primarily to find out whether the photos taken by the children and in which the child experiences positive emotions say enough or whether it is advisable to add the child's narration.

As part of the research, we set goals that are related to the answers to the research questions, namely:

- How does a child express his positive feelings through photography?
- How much text is accompanied by the photograph?
- How much data do we obtain from the photograph taken by the children, and what contribution does the child's narrative give us about the expression of positive feelings?

Methods

Research design and participants

The research design is a descriptive causal non-experimental method of empirical pedagogical research. A qualitative approach is used. A small sample of children (9 children) aged 6 years was interviewed with a photograph, the purpose of which is based on the analysis of the child's perception and interpretation. The central theme refers to the child's experience of positive feelings expressed through photography. The study included nine children aged 6, two boys and seven girls from different locations of one city.

Data collection

The children had a camera on their mobile phone at their disposal and they took pictures with it, which made them happy or made them experience positive feelings. Along with the resulting photo, they told stories when answered the question “What makes you happy” and were also interviewed if necessary. The questions asked were open-ended and varied according to the content of the child's narrative. The obtained data were recorded. A verbatim record of the child's narrative and the questions asked of the child was made. Preparing the photograph and conducting the interview with the child took about an hour.

Findings and discussion

In the following, for detailed analysis, three photos are presented with an added narrative of children out of a total of nine collected. The reason for the presentation of the selected data is mainly due to their representativeness, as they contribute to the illumination of the main findings of the research. A detailed analysis of all nine obtained data showed the repetition of similar patterns, through which we obtained answers to the research questions and objectives.

The story of a girl

Figure 1: What makes you happy?



“This is a mask. I use it to dive and see everything underwater. When I dive, I have to take a breath and open my eyes. Then I see clean water and dirty water. Sometimes I can even see seaweed in the sea.”

What do you like most about diving with a mask?

“When I dive, I can look with my eyes, I can keep them open. I can make bubbles with my mouth underwater. I would use a mouthpiece. That would be how I would breathe underwater, that's what I really want. They could take pictures of me when I dive, so everyone could see how I dive. I prefer to dive with a mask. When I dive, I first put the mask on my eyes. I put the strap up here and the goggles on my eyes. Then I can dive. I have to close my mouth.”

Do you use a mask when you dive in the sea or somewhere else?

“I was diving in the pool with my friend. My friend pushed me a little underwater. We saw each other underwater and waved. I even went down the slide with a mask on, no water splashed in my eyes.”

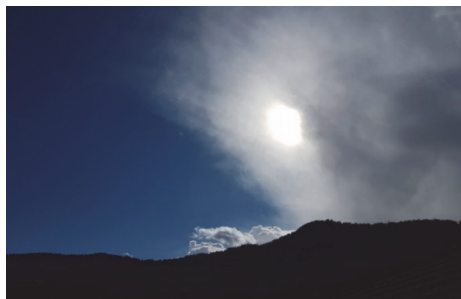
The girl independently took a photo of an object—a mask, which is on the floor, using the camera function on her mobile phone—to which she added an extensive narrative. If we had only the photo available without the child's interpretation, we could conclude that the child is happy/delighted by the mask, but with the added interpretation we obtain

much more information. The girl described what she does with it, how it is placed, where she has already used it, what the mask can be used for and what else she would like to have in addition to it and why.

From the data obtained, we can conclude that the photo encouraged her to describe events and think about the use of the mask. The photo contributed to the children's expression/explanation.

The story of a boy

Figure 2: What makes you happy?



“I like the sun, but even if it’s a little cloudy, it’s still beautiful. When the sun is shining, we’re outside a lot. We play, cycle or ride a scooter. But I wanted to take a picture of the hill, do you see it?”

I see a hill. What can you tell me about this hill?

“This is our Mestni vrh. Mestni vrh is beautiful. I walk up there with my father. There’s a Slovenian flag up there, but you can’t see it. When we go up the hill, we take a sandwich and something sweet with us. There are markings on the way, so you know if the path is the right one.”

The boy also took a photo outdoors using the camera function on his mobile phone. He did not need any help using the camera on his mobile phone, but he spent some time thinking about what makes him happy/delighted. He decided to take a photo of the sun. However, as part of the interview, he added a word about the hill to his interpretation. Based on the data obtained, we can conclude that the photograph encouraged the child to continue the discussion, which is difficult to decipher from the photograph. The boy’s story is comprehensive and gives us much more information that cannot be deciphered.

The story of a girl

Figure 3: What makes you happy?



"I like to create on paper, I create surprises. This drawing reminds me of a forest, the hearts are trees. These trees remind me of the trees in the cartoon Peter Pan".

The girl independently photographed her drawing, as something that makes her happy. From the data obtained, we could conclude that she perhaps likes to create with crayons, that she likes hearts and rainbows. The girl's story is short, but when she adds her own interpretation to the photograph, it acquires a new meaning. The captured elements represent something completely different and new, which cannot be expected or, last but not least, predicted. Despite the fact that the interpretation is very short, it is important and represents an important contribution to the captured photograph.

Based on the results obtained, we conclude that interviews with preschool children are meaningful if they are designed in a correct and systematic way. In large parts of the world, many children grow up with technology. Anggard (2015) believes that even if technology was not primarily designed for children, children gain new experiences and also transform the ways of playing and learning. Mobile phones with a camera function are most similar to a digital camera. Therefore, it is right to use the latter in research work. They quickly attract the child's attention, and at the same time act as a good motivator for obtaining important results for us. As Thomsom (2008) claims, it is not that children do not have anything to say, but it is necessary to create the right way of listening. The results obtained show that we do not have to extract as much information from the photograph itself as if the photograph is accompanied by a child's narrative, because as Dockett et al. (2017) state a photograph can have multiple meanings and interpretations. Clark and Richards (2017) state that the presence of a child's narrative in research indicates validity and power. With its presence, the photograph also becomes a place of data (Dockett et al., 2017). During the research, we came to interesting conclusions. The children used the camera function to photograph what they wanted at a given moment and also found it very important to them. They presented their view of the world from the perspective of what causes them a feeling of joy and satisfaction. Through an interview with open-ended questions (what makes you happy, what did you photograph), they confirmed the photographs taken and described them in words. It is clear from the photograph itself and the child's narrative that it gives us significantly more information than we can deduce from the resulting photograph alone. The captured photograph, accompanied by the child's narration, gains additional validity and also presents us with new points of view and perspectives. The use of a camera on a mobile phone is not foreign to the child, which is evident from the photographs taken by the children without asking for any help. This can be linked to the fact that children are growing up in the world of digital technology.

Through the research, we obtained answers to the questions posed. The children chose different photographs of objects and nature, which were photographed outdoors or indoors. Each child created one photograph. Regardless of how much of the child's narrative is accompanied by the created photograph, it offers us new perspectives and insights, as it is evident that the created photograph does not offer the child as much as the child's narrative does. Based on the child's interpretation, we find that the photograph made encouraged the child to discuss and talk, as the photograph is accompanied by a relatively large amount of text. The child connects the photograph with his or her experiences.

Conclusions

A frequently used method in the research field is qualitative research, especially from the perspective of easier interpretation when we have in mind the child as an active participant in the research process itself. The child must be adequately motivated for the course of the research itself and the content of the research must be presented to him

in a way that he understands. Research must be fun, because only then will the child show great interest in participating in the research. All this was achieved as part of the aforementioned research using one of the visual methods, namely photography.

Through a narrative interview with photography, the child creatively expresses himself, shares his views, thoughts, and adds his own expression to the resulting photographs. The child tells us and provides us with significantly more information through the photograph than we could otherwise understand on our own. The data obtained are much more extensive than expected, and they also allowed us to see the photograph and listen to the child's story in a new way. Children's photographs and their stories do not only express the view of the world through the eyes of the child, but also express their reality.

Whether the inclusion of children in the research process, where they take on the role of active researchers, makes sense needs to be further investigated, because as some authors state, there is some concern about the formation of attitudes (Pound & Lee, 2011). An individual's value system consists of attitudes and prejudices that enable them to judge what is right and what is wrong. This is formed over the course of life, but it depends on interactions in the social environment, education, knowledge and past experiences. We know that a preschool child does not yet have formed attitudes, as this is completely understandable given their age.

The results of the research conducted will serve us for further research, which will also be based on interviews conducted with preschool children, mainly with an emphasis on comparative techniques.

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