Young visual ethnographers: Children's use of digital photography to record, share and extend their art experiences

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how visual ethnographic research, involving child-initiated digital photography, provided rich insights into how children experienced art across multiple contexts of home, preschool and school. Using Vygotskian perspectives, this paper outlines how visual ethnographic approaches, where children were equipped with digital cameras, promoted collaborative research relationships, provided a site for accessing and sharing children's perspectives, and linked various contexts of children's experiences and 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, 2000, p. 177). In addition, digital photography acted as a mediating device (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978) and as such heightened consciousness of the art experiences, afforded a site for art-making and promoted dialogue on interpersonal and intrapersonal planes. The child participants became co-researchers and used the camera to record, share and extend their art experiences.

Introduction

I have argued elsewhere that despite calls for early childhood educators to consider the social nature of learning, beliefs about natural artistic development, adult non-intervention and the overriding importance of creativity and artistic expression continue to dominate beliefs and attitudes about children's art (Richards, 2007). Notwithstanding some major philosophical shifts in early childhood teaching practices in general, teachers have grappled with contradictory notions about the nature of artistic development and about their role in supporting early childhood art education (Kindler, 1996b; McArdle, 2001; McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002; Visser, 2006). I believe that an understanding of how children experience art across multiple contexts will generate a broader view and understanding of children's artistic development and assist educators to take more interactive and co-constructive teaching roles. Yet Wilson (2004, p. 323) claims that there has been little art research that documents "the interpretations and narratives of young people".

Some research has considered children's art experiences in their homes, early

childhood or school settings (for example Brooks, 2002; Kindler, 1996a; Matthews, 2003; Richards, 2003; Ring, 2003). Although Ring's longitudinal research (Anning & Ring, 2004; Ring, 2003) investigated children's drawing activities in their homes, preschools and schools, her use of adult interviews meant that 'the child's voice was not being 'heard'. The parent and practitioner were mediating the child's 'versions' of their drawings' (Ring, 2003p. 69).

Brooks (2002) used digital video to record her Grade One children's drawing activities in relation to learning within the school curriculum. Her research analysis focused on the relationship between thought and drawing, and how drawing functioned as a learning tool (Brooks, 2005, 2006). Brooks' ethnographic research employed visual methods and was regarded as visual ethnography.

In preparation for undertaking my visual ethnographic research with children I looked at research involving children and visual methods. Some of these studies involved the researchers taking photographs or video of children (Brooks, 2002; Fasoli, 2003; Ring, 2003) while others involved photograph elicitation[1] (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002). Of particular interest to my own work were studies in which children had some control over the photographic methods (for example Clark, 1999; Cook & Hess, 2007; Mizen, 2005; Orellana, 1999). However, the children in these studies predominantly used disposable cameras with 24-26 exposure films, rather than digital photography. While some of these studies extolled the financial benefits of using disposable cameras, such devices limited the number of images a child could take, and the children did not experience the image until it was in the hands of the adult researcher. As such the experience of using non-digital cameras was 'limited by all the causes which interfere with perception of the relation between undergoing and doing' (Dewey, 1934, p. 44). Therefore I considered methodologies that would be more congruent with arts based approaches, and provided children with a platform for sharing their perspectives, while adding to the growing body of research on early childhood art.

I investigated four young Australian children's experiences of art in their homes, early childhood centres and schools. The children acted as co-researchers as they each had a digital camera with which they took photographs of their art and wider experiences and discussed their photographs with me. The photographs, interactions and discussions formed the basis of co-constructed research narratives which aimed at making meaning from experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The analysis of this research is ongoing and will be reported on in future publications.

Employing child-initiated digital photography as a research method provided children with an artmaking media and encouraged interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogue as the children used digital photography to record, share and extend their art experiences. Using Vygotskian sociocultural-historical perspective I will discuss how digital photography acted as a mediating device (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978) and heightened consciousness of art experience. These visual ethnographic approaches also brought into focus the importance of home-based art experience in terms of family relationships, the physical environment and family shared 'funds of knowledge' (González & Moll, 2002; Moll, 2000).

Researching Young Children's Experience of Art

This section begins with an outline of the purpose of my research and introduces the child participants. I will then discuss what I mean by 'collaborative relationships' and describe some of the ways my research supported collaborative research relationships with young children. Thirdly, I will give some examples of the ways in which the research processes provided insights into children's art experiences, family experiences and funds of knowledge. Next, I will consider how digital photography acted as a mediating device (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978) which heightened consciousness of art experience, afforded a site for art-making and promoted dialogue on interpersonal and intrapersonal planes. Finally, in a concluding statement, I will consider how these insights may contribute towards early childhood art education.

1. Research focus and participants

The overall aim of the research was to present children's perspectives of their art experience in their homes, preschool[2] and schools, and to consider how each child experienced art as a son or daughter, and as a preschool child and school pupil. Furthermore, this longitudinal study considered how each child experienced art as they transitioned between home and preschool and school.

Two boys (Lee and Jackson) and two girls (Sophie and Lilly)[3] were key research participants. They were aged between four-years seven-months, and five-years four-months at the beginning of the project. Lee, was a first generation Australia-born Chinese boy, and the other children where white Australians. All children lived in two parent families and had siblings. Lee and Jackson had seven-year-old sisters, while Lilly and Sophie had three-year-old sisters. Sophie also had an eight-year-old brother. The children lived in Ashtown (NSW, Australia) and attended Markham Community Preschool. They then attended three different schools.

2. Collaboration research relationships through visual ethnography

I made a conscious effort to promote positive research relationships (see Richards, 2009) and to involve the children as collaborative research partners. In classroom environments when 'staff and children co-construct their meanings and knowledge' (MacNaughton & Williams, 1998, p. 177) and each partner contributes to 'the ongoing learning experiences from their own expertise and points of view' (Jordan, 2004, p. 42) then collaboration can exist. In collaborative research, I believe that researcher's and participant's understandings and intentions are modified and internalized to accommodate the views of each other and in doing so an alternative and unpredictable state is reached and shared — and the process reiterates. Considering collaboration from a Vygotskian perspective, I believed that interpersonal relationships transformed both learners and teachers, research participants and researchers (Vygotsky, 1978). As my ethnographic research involved a small number of key participants and I had two years full time to work on my research[4], my goal of forming collaborative relationships was possible. The children and I became co-researchers as their photographs and discussions led the direction of the research.

Ethnographic approaches support Vygotskian perspectives in that they acknowledge that culture exists in human practice (Moll, 2000) and places the researcher in situ. Visual ethnography recognizes both the potential of visual media to inform ethnographic research and for an ethnographic approach to 'support the production and interpretation of visual images' (Pink, 2001, p. 1). Just as Vygotsky claimed that meaning was constructed through joint activity that 'involves mentoring by more culturally knowledgeable persons '(Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000, p. 2), Pink suggested that 'ethnographers should be self-conscious about how they represent themselves to informants and how their identities are constructed and understood by the people with whom they work' (2001, p. 20). As such, I was aware that my knowledge of art and interest in children's art experiences influenced the children's experience of art. While the children and I all had digital cameras, when recording our research narratives, I needed to be as loyal as possible to the 'context, negotiations, and intersubjectivities' through which we produced knowledge (Pink, 2001, p. 18).

Children's camera use

I met with the children in their homes and gave them their Kodak Easy Share C533 digital camera, rechargeable batteries, 1GB memory card and personalized camera bag. The camera was relatively simple to operate, which encouraged each child's sense of camera ownership and independent decision-making. Believing that young children are competent problem solvers and learners, I introduced them to the basic camera functions and encouraged them to take photographs while I spoke to their parents about camera use in their homes. An understanding of how families used cameras was important as cameras are 'part of a collective meanings system that are products of history' (Holland & Valsiner, 1988, p. 250) and understanding how participants identified with and used digital cameras in day to day living helped support collaborative visual ethnographic partnerships (Pink, 2001).

The camera was a significant artefact for a young child to own and the children developed relationships with me, and their camera, that evolved and changed over time and place. The children and I explored photographic possibilities through action – often the children made discoveries before I did. Developing shared and negotiated understandings of research intentions and relationships was important so I did not 'instruct' the children to take specific photos, but rather had several conversations with them and their parents about the nature of the project. I discussed how I was very interested in children's art experiences and ideas, and that the children's photographs and what they told me about these, helped me to understand children's art experiences better.

The children brought their own knowledge and past experiences to these interactions, both in terms of camera use and in understanding my research intentions. Jackson and I talked about his interest in drawing and making aeroplanes, and how he used information from books and other people to find out more about planes. Likewise, I was very interested in young children's experience of art and I discussed how Jackson and the other three children knew more about this than I did. Therefore, they were my experts and research partners. Through viewing and discussing photographs, the children not only set the pace and direction of the data gathering and analysis, but their voices and opinions were listened to, and they were visible in the research

narrative. The following section gives a brief overview of the nature of the research visits.

Research visits

In the first phase of the project, I visited the children on alternate weeks in their preschool and homes. In the last phase, I alternated between home and school visits. During home visits, each child had a parent nearby and the girls had a younger sister present. Typically, the children inserted their camera memory card in my laptop computer; we saved their photographs and then set these up as a manual slide show. The children discussed their photographs at their own pace, and I digitally recorded conversations. The children managed the slide show and could rotate or delete images. The few photographs that children chose to delete were blurred, and these photographs were usually followed by a similar, but well-focused image. Visits usually took place in the afternoons and ranged from one to two hours, with photograph discussion sessions of 30-60 minutes. Each child developed their own routines around my visits, which included such things as where we set up, having afternoon tea or playing games.

I visited the children at preschool and school, but the lively nature of home visits reinforced the impression I had that ways of being a preschool boy or girl or school pupil were different to ways of being a son or daughter at home. The nature of the children's interactions with me varied over time, place and context. At home the children not only responded to me as an equal, they often took a leadership role in decision-making. Therefore being a visitor in their homes, rather than just interacting with them at the preschool, helped to address adult-child power imbalances (Richards, 2009).

The children quickly confirmed my confidence in their ability to take photographs. In the first week, each child took approximately 100 photographs and over the course of the research they collectively generated more than 6,000 photographs. These images provided insights into the places, people, interests, outings, art-making and artefacts that constituted aspects of their day-to-day lives. Therefore, a trusting, open relationship with parents was vital, as I stored images of events and people that were usually viewed within the security of the extended family. Fortunately no parent censored or limited the scope of discussion or the images that their child shared with me. I believe that such relationships with the parents and children were possible only through collaborative attitudes and processes. As González and Moll note, 'the more that participants can engage and identify with the topic, the more interest and motivation is generated' (2002, p. 627).

3. Insights into family relationships, experiences and funds of knowledge

Moll referred to the 'bodies of knowledge that underlie household activities' as 'funds of knowledge' (2000, p. 258). Visiting the children at home, viewing their photographs and listening to their commentaries, brought a greater understanding of how everyday

family life and their funds of knowledge promoted or constrained art experiences. While this was true for each of the participants, I will share just a few examples from the experiences of Lilly Rose.

Drawing and other art activities were valued as part of the Rose family's home routines. Lilly's parents, Cathy and Phillip, provided their daughters with art materials, space to spread out and good quality, spiral-bound books in which to draw. Over the years, they kept hundreds of the girls' drawings and constructions. Drawing was a significant activity for Lilly, and Cathy and Phillip supported and encouraged their children's interests. In the first phase of the research, when Lilly was at preschool, she was drawing images and ideas based on The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, (Baum, 1900), and she had access to books and videos to support and extend this interest (Figure 1a).

Figure 1. Research processes provided insights into the way Lilly's family relationships and activities supported her art experiences

Lilly and her three-year-old sister Raewyn had drawings on display throughout the house. Not only were there framed drawings, drawings taped to walls, doors and the refrigerator, but there were marks drawn directly onto walls, floors and furniture. Such renderings conjured up images of children with ready access to art drawing implements, 'running wild' and marking walls with crayons and pens - but this was not the case. The Rose family were slowly renovating their old home, and the children were permitted to draw directly on their own bedroom walls and furniture. When I admitted to Lilly that, as an adult artist, I was envious of such freedom she explained to me that when they fixed up their house, they would not draw on the new walls. Lilly understood that what was appropriate then and in the past, would not be appropriate in the future.

It struck me that this house belonged to all the family, and the children must have had fun drawing on these usually forbidden sites. This playfulness, sense of fun, understanding of limits and conditions, reinforced the impressions I had of a family

full of love, laughter and playfulness. Therefore, it was not just provision of time, space and materials that promoted positive art experience, but family relationships. Other examples of supportive interactions included Cathy playfully posing with hats and glasses that Lilly had made while Lilly took the photographs (Figure 1e) and Lilly and Raewyn being encouraged to share construction materials and assist each other to solve problems (Figure 1d). Lilly's parents also joined in with the children's art activities, and encouraged visual fun such as making tomato sauce frog toasts (Figure 1f). Just as Ring noted in her research 'playfulness by "more able others"' (2006b, p. 74) helped these children to create new meanings in their home environment .
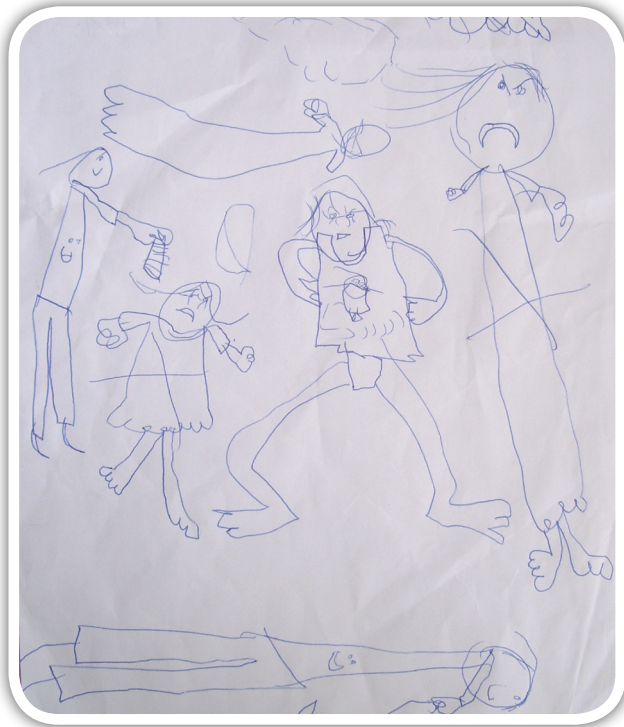

Figure 2: Drawing helped Lilly to make sense of real life situations and emotionally complex feelings

Drawing was not a trivial activity for Lilly, as it permeated many aspects of her daily routines and emotional experiences. For example, she had a supply of paper on her bed, on which she drew before going to sleep (Figure 1a). Lilly's focus on family relationships flowed into the themes of her drawings (Figures 1b, 1c; Figure 2), and her own experience of sisterhood was explored in drawings such as that of the 'queen's sister'. In addition, when 'cousins' appear in her drawing narratives this coincided with her father's cousin visiting. Lilly also drew to make sense of real life and emotionally charged situations. For example, when Lilly had an angry episode with her sister and mother, she expressed this eloquently in one of her bedtime drawings (Figure 2). She told me that the crosses drawn through her mother and sister showed that she wanted them to stay away, while the happy faces on the male figures represented that she wasn't angry with her father and step-brother. Lilly also explained that scrunched eyes, turned-down mouths and stamping feet showed how angry she was. Alongside these emotional cues, she placed the drawn characters in a real life context of bedtime routines – wearing bedclothes and having their hair brushed.

Therefore, through the cultural tools and symbols of art and narrative, Lilly not only

recorded aspects of her daily life, but explored bigger ideas of kinship, disharmony and alliances. Lilly's drawings and photographs not only facilitated conversations around the narrative of her drawings, but also provided insights into her family live and their funds of knowledge. Visual ethnographic processes encouraged Lilly's self-initiated dialogue about her graphically represented ideas, and about her feelings and interests.

4. Digital photography as a mediating device

Vygotsky regarded language as a primary mediating cultural tool, and referred to a range of language modes including drawing. He made links between young children's arts experience and the development of written language where 'make-believe play, drawing, and writing can be viewed as different moments in an essentially unified process of development' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 115). Vygotsky did not regard art as merely a cultural tool in the pursuit of language development but regarded important aspects of art, such as the 'absurdities, nonsense, inversions', as very close to children's play (Lindqvist, 2003, p. 248). He also recognized that children often developed narrative in their drawings that aimed at social connection with their thoughts and with others.

Research has shown that children's art experiences involved them in the use of cultural tools and signs, and children interacted on an interpersonal and intrapersonal level through their art (Brooks, 2005). Sociocultural historical perspectives recognized the importance of intrapersonal and interpersonal communication and acknowledged that, when children shared visual images (as an internal dialogue and with others), they often used vocals, gestures and actions to convey meaning and sense (Anning & Ring, 2004; Kindler & Darras, 1994, 1997a, 1997b, 1998; Matthews, 2003; Ring, 2003). In terms of this research, the children's photography was not only a mediating device in terms of a research community making sense of children's art experiences, but became integral to the children's lived art experiences. Therefore, through the social engagement with this media, children recorded, shared and extended their art experiences.

In a culture where children's art making is taken for granted as a natural part of childhood, the 'mediating device [in this case visual art] has been incorporated to the point that there is no longer any awareness of using the device to modulate thinking or feeling' (Holland & Valsiner, 1988, p. 252). This can make the study of children's artistic development and experiences very difficult. However, Holland and Valsiner suggested that 'there is a period in development and in history when the task or activity and the mediating device are not amalgamated and the dialectic between the mediating device and the task may be studied' (1988, p. 254). Herein is the value of using digital cameras and visual ethnographic approaches with young children. As the children expanded the ways in which they used the tools and symbols of visual art, they also engaged with the camera as a new mediating device – one that helps them to both share their stories and extend their visual arts explorations. Furthermore, human development is 'not simply a matter of biological maturation; it is immeasurably enriched and extended through the individual's appropriation and mastery of cultural inheritance as is encountered in activity and interaction with others' (Wells, 2000, p. 54). The use of digital cameras within this visual ethnographic research provided the children with a relatively new and novel mediating device – one that promoted interaction with others and afforded insights into the children's developing artistic and visual capacities.

Heightened consciousness of art experience

Child-initiated photography and discussions heightened consciousness of art experiences, not just for the four children, but for all involved. While it was problematic to suggest that the children became more conscious of how they responded to art while action and perception were united in the artmaking experience (Dewey, 1934), the combined use of photographs, discussions and social interactions focused attention on art experiences. The children's photographs had the capacity to 'uncover, provoke, and communicate beliefs and practices' (Moran & Tegano, 2005, p. 4) related to the topic under investigation. As the children were the photographers, the very act of selecting an image (most often of their own drawings and art constructions) heightened their awareness of art experience. Furthermore, the parents and I found that the key participants showed a greater level of consciousness about art experience than had been observed previously for this child, or for other people (such as siblings or pupils) in similar circumstances. From a Vygotskian perspective, learning and development was a social experience, and our raised consciousness of art was both a personal and shared state.

The way in which the research processes influenced another family member's consciousness of art became evident on one home visit when Lilly was unwell. As Lilly retired to the couch, her little sister Raewyn brought me her own drawings. To my surprise, Raewyn, who until that point appeared to be a passive bystander, mimicked the research processes. She asked me to photograph her drawings while she told me about them (Figure 3). I also noted that her drawing of a striped bug was similar to ones Lilly had been drawing on earlier occasions. Therefore Raewyn was conscious of both the nature of our research communication, and the type of images her sister was drawing. Cathy confirmed my impressions of Raewyn's heightened awareness, when she told me that the research process also motivated Raewyn to draw and talk about her art. Thus, the photographs not only facilitated conversations around the children's art-making, but also influenced the social experience of art in their home.

Each child in the research project enjoyed the social and emotional support of his or her family, which encouraged them to be the principal storyteller of personal experiences and images. Lee Wong, talked to me in English, but when he had trouble expressing an idea, he sometimes spoke to his mother (Jingjing) in Mandarin. Tannenbaum and Howie (2002)suggested that parents usually preferred to communicate with their child in their mother tongue, and as such 'this language would be expected to symbolise a most meaningful and emotionally loaded communication between them' (p. 411). Lee consulted with his mother and then spoke to me in English. Through these three-way conversations, we negotiated a better understanding of Lee's art experiences. Jingjing also commented that she had become more aware of what Lee was thinking when he drew and how his many projects of constructing and drawing linked together.

Figure 3: Raewyn talks about her bug drawing

Other parents also commented that they were more conscious of their child's art activities and were learning new things about their son or daughter. Sally was more aware of Jackson's sense of aesthetic awareness, and Stacey marvelled at Sophie's ability to keep a photographic journal, and to sort, critique and edit photographs. Cathy realised how her own drawing activities with Lilly, such as making a cross-through symbol for a 'keep out' sign, were later used in other ways by Lilly in her drawings (see Figure 2). Thus the digital images recorded events, people and art-making and provided a medium 'through which new knowledge and critiques' were created within these communities of people (Pink, 2001, p. 11), thus expanding their 'funds of knowledge' (González & Moll, 2002; Moll, 2000).

Digital photography: site of art-making and experience

Sociocultural historical theory recognises temporal perspectives, and time was an important aspect of this research - time in terms of the children's ages and growth; time in terms of preschool or home time; time in terms of one event influencing others; and time in terms of temporal distance between interactions and conversations. Digital photography proved valuable in terms of connecting time and events. Digital cameras provided instant visual feedback, as children reviewed their images. This allowed them to explore ways to modify images and actions in subsequent photographs. At the same time, it afforded them a strong sense of audience. For example, within a week of having the camera, Jackson explored a form of mime and role-play where he was both the actor/artist and the audience – taking self-portraits of various facial expressions. When he shared these photographs with me, he became the narrator. In one photograph Jackson had an exaggerated pouting expression and when he told me about this photograph he said he had 'Mo lips' (Mo was his horse). It was possible that when this photograph was taken, Jackson was exploring facial expressions, but when he viewed the image on subsequent viewings, he ascribed new meaning to the image. Just as 'events within a drawing-telling can also shift, and objects and characters that originally functioned in one way may be altered to function

in another way later' (Wright, 2007, p. 44), for Jackson, the act of 'pulling a face' had not altered, but the meaning he ascribed to this image had.

Photographs such as these reminded me that the nature or importance of photographic or artistic images could not be predetermined, but evolved out of the research process. Likewise, the ethnographic value of images and artefacts did not rely entirely on my research goals or the context in which they are obtained. Pink (2001) pointed out that in the broadest sense images were ethnographic when viewers judged them as such. Another example of this was seen in Jackson's photographs of colour, some of which appear in Figure 4. These photographs emerged as Jackson photographically explored colour in his environment. These 'colourscapes' were peppered amongst his photographs and were shared with good humour.
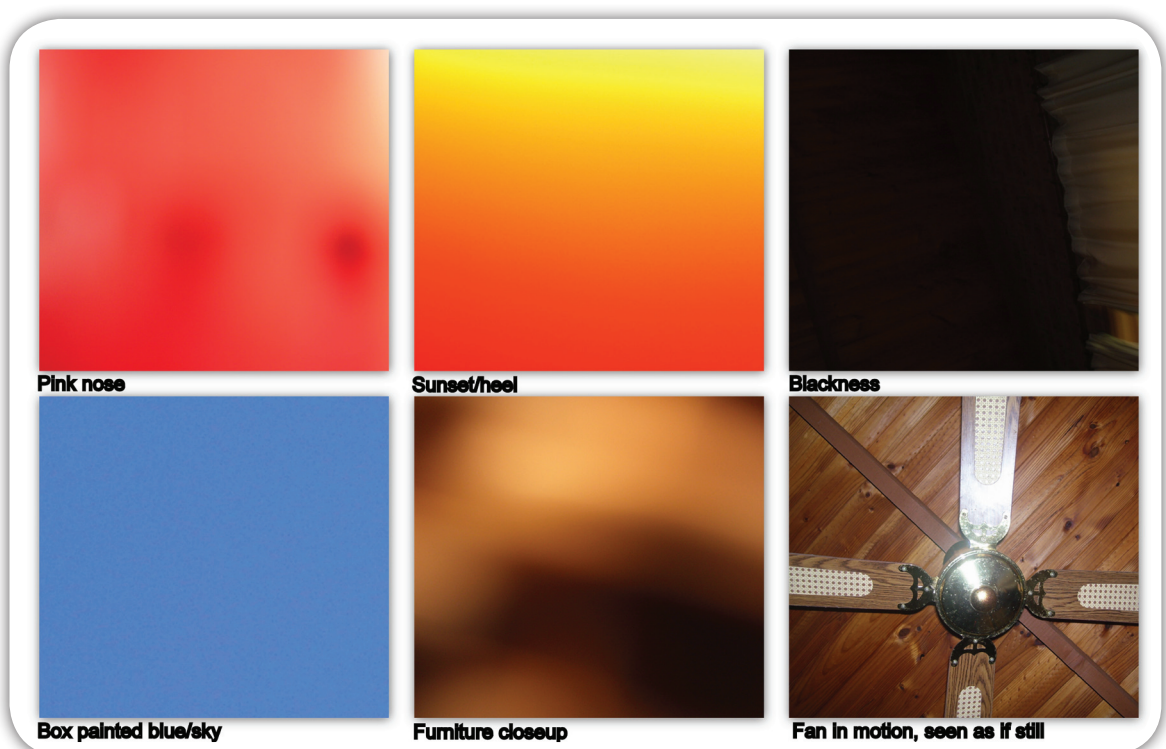

Figure 4: Jackson used photography to visually explore colour and movement

The first image (Figure 4, from top left to right) was of the 'pink nose', and the second photograph Jackson referred to as a sunset picture. He enjoyed my bafflement over how this image was taken and he took some time before he laughingly told me that he took this photograph on top of his heel, using a flash exposure. The third image was part of Jackson's exploration of black photographs and he richly described the bottom right as golden sparkles. The blue photographic image was taken of the sky but Jackson told me to "fool your husband it's something that is painted blue." Jackson then explored photographic effects of close-up shots of household furniture and of the ceiling fan in motion – appearing in the photograph as if stationary. These images and our interactions revealed that Jackson not only explored images on a personal level, but with the camera as a cultural artefact, he had a strong sense of the social in terms of the audience that I provided.

5. Digital photographs: promoting interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogues

Thus, digital photography provided sites for art-making and for social interactions on interpersonal and intrapersonal planes. Jackson's photographic mimes, such as 'Mo lips', were interesting from a Vygotskian perspective. Although one might suggest that Jackson experienced these at a personal level, and then at a social level, it was apparent that having a sense of audience was paramount in making this activity stimulating to Jackson.

Research processes involved the social experience of presenting and viewing photographs. Over time, Jackson's sense of audience developed in complexity as he internalised the role of artist/presenter and audience/viewer and expanded his artmaking repertoire to include colourscape photographs. These photographs evoked a quizzical response on the part of the viewer, and reflected Jackson's deeper level of understanding of the artist-viewer relationship. I recognised that as an art educator and artist, my response to Jackson's photographs heightened our consciousness of the art aspects of his explorations. However, Jackson was the only child in this research project who explored colour in this way, and to also invite a puzzled response from his audience. In this respect, Jackson's use of the camera as an art-making artefact and mediating device was quite sophisticated.

Concluding statement

This paper has touched on just a few examples of how visual ethnographic approaches facilitated collaborative research with four young children. Researching across multiple authentic contexts, the child participants acted as visual ethnographers. They enjoyed family support and exerted some control over research processes. The use of digital cameras heightened consciousness of their art experiences, afforded a site for art-making and social interaction on interpersonal and intrapersonal levels, and provided insights into the important role of family relationships and funds of knowledge.

Collaborative research such as this generates a clearer understanding of how children experience art across multiple contexts, and as such helps early childhood educators to broaden their thinking about early childhood art. In addition, 'gaining insights from collaborative research on children's daily lived realities can guide the field to critically examine long held practices and establish equity and social justice as paramount aims' (Soto & Swadener, 2002, p. 54).

Having a better understanding of how children experience art should assist educators in making informed pedagogical decisions that are cognisant of children's home-based art experiences. Teachers can also learn about their potential teaching roles by considering how these parents engage with their children through art experiences. In this research, and other research (Ring, 2006a, 2006b) parents provided simple and accessible art materials and space. They know and encouraged their children's interests, and were active participants in their children's art experiences – they discussed, demonstrated, work alongside and displayed their children's art. Importantly, parents provided emotional support, were playful with their children, and together adults and children had fun. The parents were tolerant of mess, and encouraged their

children to use the family home as a site of artmaking. For these families art was an everyday, interactive and relevant experience.

These findings also provided insights into notions of young children's artistic development. As demonstrated in several of the findings, artistic development was not just an individual endeavour, but involved social interaction with family and others. A sense of audience, which appeared heightened by the research processes, encouraged both interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogues. While traditional models of artistic development favoured a progression towards realism, findings from this research suggested greater support for the concept of artistic repertoires (Kindler, 1999; Wolfe & Perry, 1988), as the children called upon various artistic and graphic approaches to fulfil the need to extend and share personal narratives. During the first phase of this research project, when the children were at preschool, at no stage did the children show concern for the need to make a realistic image. They did however, show a concern to express a personal story or extend a visual idea. Likewise, drawing and art activities were not isolated or one-off events – rather they intertwined with broader experience and other artistic endeavours. For early childhood educators, these aspects attest to the importance of social interactions in young children's art experiences and development. Adults can provide children with a sense of audience, share interests and narratives, talk with children about their art or involve themselves in joint art activities with them. These insights, and the collaborative nature of this research also suggests some ways in which teachers might co-construct an understanding of children's early art experiences.

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Endnotes

1 Photo elicitation is based on the idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview to elicit more information, and according to Harper (2002, p. 13), to elicit a 'different kind of information'.

2 The Australian community in which I lived and researched used the term 'preschool'

to describe their early childhood centre. I do likewise in this article and in publications arising from my Australian research.

3 All names of places are changed and participants are identified by pseudonyms.

4 I was a recipient of a two-year Massey University Pro Vice Chancellor's International Doctoral Fellowship (2006-2007).

About the Author

Rosemary Richards is a Senior Lecturer with Massey University. Her teaching, research and personal interests focus on art, art education and early childhood. Her Masters of Education thesis investigated young children's drawing self efficacy, and she is currently completing a PhD thesis. This research is an ethnographic study of four young Australian children's experiences of art in their homes, early childhood centres and schools as they transition between preschool and school. Rosemary was co-convenor of the 2nd International Art in Early Childhood Conference, held in NSW in 2007.