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**Visualising children's participation in research: Lego Duplo, rainbows and clouds, and
moodboards**

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Visualising children's participation in research: Lego Duplo, rainbows and clouds, and moodboards

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of visual methods during research encounters with children and young people when investigating their perspectives and feelings towards their home and school life. By revealing the advantages and constraints of three visual approaches, including Lego Duplo, rainbows and clouds, and moodboards, the paper contributes to the range of techniques available when conducting research with children and young people. In conclusion, the paper highlights the depth of information which can be elicited from visual techniques as well as the oral data which can be obtained through the utilisation of visual methods.

Keywords

Geography; children; qualitative methods; visual methods

Introduction

Social science research has come to recognise the value of engaging with children and young people as knowledgeable social agents (Holloway and Valentine, 2000), raising questions over the techniques used in order to uncover their perspectives. Whilst acknowledging that children are competent social actors, there is also an appreciation that the abilities of children

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are generally different to those of adults (James *et al.*, 1998). Differences between individuals in terms of their preferences, experiences and skills are also recognised, with attempts made to ensure research techniques are more participatory, drawing on the cultural experiences of individual children. By developing a range of research methods which enable children to relate their experiences to the research questions at hand, they can be given the tools, environment and voice to effectively express their views, giving credence to their opinions and providing an insight into their lifeworlds. This paper illustrates how three visual methods were successfully utilised with children and young people to convey their perspectives on their home and school lives², adding to the range of tools available and highlighting the benefits and limitations of these three particular visual approaches.

The visual and visuality play a central role in the construction of social life in contemporary western societies (Rose, 2001). Everyday life is infused with different kinds of visual technologies and the images they present to us depict the world in visual terms (including television programmes, advertisements, CCTV footage and newspaper pictures). However, this (re)presentation is never innocent but rather interprets and displays the world in particular ways. At its invention, photography was believed to be a conveyor of truth and objectivity, aligned with positivist theories which attributed it scientific qualities. However, such visual methods have since been critiqued due to their potential manipulation by specific regimes of knowledge in order to represent an extant 'truth' (such as political institutions creating specific social histories through the use of imagery whilst marginalising alternative historical viewpoints) (Crang, 2003, 2009). This disenchantment with the visual has contributed to the continued hegemony of linguistic and numerical approaches within geography, despite the potential they offer within broader social science. However, the

² Analysis of the research findings is beyond the scope of this paper.

pervasive nature of the visual within contemporary western society highlights the significance of visuality for the construction of knowledge within geography (Rose, 2003), necessitating the development and application of visual research methods. Visual methods have been used in child development research, demonstrating children's spatial awareness through the production of mental maps (Blaut, 1997; Matthews, 1984). However, such cognitive techniques focus on the abilities of children according to age and gender, disregarding their individual preferences and imposing adultist interpretations of childhood. Recent sociological interest in children as social actors signifies a departure from cognitive visual research 'on' children to that which seeks to work 'with' children, utilising visual methods to gain insights into the context of children's lived experiences (Young and Barrett, 2001).

Visual methods: three case studies

This paper explores the possibilities offered by the utilisation of three visual methods; namely Lego® Duplo®, rainbows and clouds, and moodboards. Whilst acknowledging the competencies of individual children, these visual methods were developed during two research projects which also recognise that children in western contexts generally have different cultural experiences to adults. The first project (2003-2004) explored the potential offered by these methods in their own right and involved a sample of ten children and young people aged 4-16 years old³. The second project (2004-2008) involved a sample of 124 children in Year 1 (aged 5-6) and Year 4 (8-9 years old) from schools which served predominately white catchment areas. Schools with distinct socio-economic profiles were selected on the basis of free school meal eligibility, a key proxy of social class in the British

³ With regards the specific methods mentioned in this paper, the use of Duplo was trialed with 4-5 year olds, rainbows and clouds were piloted with 7-9 year olds and moodboards were used with 15-16 year olds.

school context (DCSF, 2008). In these encounters, a tool box⁴ of methods were utilised in order to explore children's attitudes towards parental employment. In the following section, the origins, application and benefits of each method is discussed in turn, before considering the potential constraints of each technique.

Lego Duplo

In the western context, the predilection to play has been part of what has historically defined the child, differentiating them from the adult who must work (James *et al.*, 1998). This has underscored the emphasis ethnographers have placed on children's play as a symbolic process (Cattanach, 1994), giving indications of children's practices and views. Basing research encounters around play, a central part of children's cultural experiences, reduces the pressure of a semi-structured interview (Stalker and Connors, 2003) whilst giving children a tangible focus as they express their opinion. However, play-based methods are not simply the preserve of childhood research, with tangible media such as Lego being introduced into corporate strategy-making through *Lego Serious Play*. Roos *et al.* (2004) suggest that in this environment, Lego can be utilised with adults, modifying the typical constraints of the strategy process to generate new insights, enhancing innovation and performance. David Gauntlett and colleagues have also developed Lego as a tool to unlock feelings and provide insights into everyday experience through their work at Art Lab (see <http://www.artlab.org.uk/lego.htm>). Providing participants with a hands-on method can enable the representation of the abstract, allowing individuals from a diverse age range to express meaning beyond verbal expression. In the case of some individuals, their linguistic abilities may not give them the same level of flexibility that can be provided by assigning

⁴ In the second school-based project, Duplo and rainbows and clouds were available in all encounters with children in Year 1 and Year 4 alongside other methods including rating activities, expressive faces and storyboards. Their use in each interview situation depended on the preferences of the child(ren) and the time available which was dictated by school staff.

blocks of different colours, sizes and shapes metaphorical meaning. Some children may be more accustomed to expressing themselves in creative as opposed to verbal means as this typically features in their lifeworld, and therefore research which takes account of these preferences and abilities can make use of individuals' talents and underscore their competencies (Banister and Booth, 2005).

With both projects in mind, play centred on the home and family presented an opportunity to explore a variety of issues related to the domestic division of labour through the use of Lego Duplo. Lego's Educational Division supports the use of Lego in classrooms in order to foster creative thinking and constructive dialogue (Legoff, 2004) and having been named as the toy of the century by the Toy Retailers Association of Britain (BBC, 2000); Lego is part of the cultural experience of children in western contexts. Lego Duplo is marketed for children aged one to six years old, using larger blocks and characters, and was included in both projects. By providing children with the blocks necessary for building a house, assorted household items (including washing machines, cars, sofas, prams etc), and characters which represented different ages, genders and ethnic backgrounds, children were able to construct a house from Duplo to explore the roles of individuals within their home.

All children were presented with a choice of research tools as part of the second research project and Duplo was chosen by some of the 5-6 year olds. Their brief was to build a representation of their own home from Duplo and to enact the roles of each person within the home and how these fit with their labour market responsibilities. In doing so, children were able to show, for example, how individuals from outside of the household interacted with the home, such as grandparents who provided childcare. By moving characters in and out of the

Duplo home, some children appeared more confident in explaining the movements of their family members and were able to recall where each person was at different points in time.

Figure 1a shows Annabell's Duplo representation of her home. By interacting with her construction, she was able to show how her parents spent their time both within and outside of the home, and how their movements corresponded with one another. She explained the gendered nature of car travel, childcare and employment through her Duplo house.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Utilising Duplo as a hands-on construction tool acts to create a more comfortable research encounter for children, normalising the process of questioning. It reduces reliance on discursive and drawing capabilities, offering an opportunity for participants to impart information in ways which are based in their cultural experiences. Children were able to imagine the Duplo characters as members of their own family, re-enacting how individuals performed their roles in a home-like environment, revealing further avenues for discussion. Construction sets marketed towards different age ranges can be used according to the cultural experience and dexterity of participants, broadening the applicability of the method.

Whilst it can act as a powerful research tool, there are potential difficulties associated with the use of building tools such as Duplo. Firstly, individuals may have preconceived ideas about the age suitability of construction blocks and similar 'toys' because they are marketed towards children. Although Lego was successfully utilised in corporate environments with adults (for example, Roos *et al.*, 2004), further research would be required to ascertain the suitability of the method with older children whose tenuous age status may be threatened by

the use of construction blocks marketed at younger children. Secondly, participants may become distracted from the task at hand, choosing to play their own game and moving beyond the remit of the research to a point where their representations do not engage with the research questions at hand. However, this problem is not unique to the use of Duplo as a research tool. As with semi-structured interviews, the quality of data produced depends on the ability of the researcher to balance the research requirements against the desires of the respondent to express their views and opinions on their own terms. Thirdly, it may also be difficult for the researcher to ascertain where the performance of domestic behaviours ends and imaginative play begins. In this case, the domestic and labour market responsibilities of parents emerged through play and re-enactment but so too did children's socialisation into particular gendered roles, and thus their play contributed further to the research topic. Duplo, as with many activity-based methods, cannot therefore be used in isolation, and continued dialogue with the participant and engagement in the task is necessary to understand the meanings individuals assign to their creation. Fourthly, the researcher must also be aware that the research materials they have provided, in this case Duplo, may not necessarily correspond with the concepts respondents are trying to express. To overcome this, those utilising Duplo or other construction blocks as a research tool must provide resources which cover an extensive array of situations and personal characteristics to ensure respondents have the opportunity to identify with the characters available. Finally, in this research, some children were concerned that their construction did not mirror the illustration depicted on the packaging which accompanied the Duplo house and therefore, researchers must be aware of the factors which can influence the form of play in which children engage. This potentially reflected the school environment in which the research took place, where children are critically aware of the necessity to provide the correct answer. Despite these caveats, the use

of Duplo was insightful, showing how characters interacted in the home and the roles they played.

Moving from Duplo as a hands-on play-based technique which engages with behaviours, abstract concepts and metaphor, the following section details the use of rainbows and clouds, which delve into the positive and negative elements of a research topic and give an insight into values and attitudes.

Rainbows and Clouds

During normative activities such as storytelling, children will rarely display negative feelings (Robson and Ansell, 2000). However, this is not to deny that children have negative opinions of aspects of their home life (DfES, 2004). The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2002) suggests that a structured ‘draw and write’ activity can help children express their opinions about a real-life issue, even when they have conflicting views. Rainbows and clouds were developed in order to provide an environment that was conducive to children expressing both positive and negative perceptions. On an A3 sheet of paper, a computer-generated image of a rainbow was produced and on another, a cloud was depicted.

Separately, yellow sunshines were cut from cardboard, as were blue raindrops. The sunshines were used in conjunction with a rainbow, which was presented first. On the suns, children were free to draw or write about positive elements of the topic for discussion, namely their parents’ (non)employment. The suns acted as a way for children to introduce topics that were relevant to the overall theme of the session, acting as a springboard to further discussion. Rainbows were generally conducted first unless children expressed a preference otherwise, as this eased them into the technique and helped them feel more comfortable in the

research setting. Whilst children chose to write or illustrate their sunshines, their home life would be discussed further, although in some circumstances, children found it difficult to concurrently write and talk. The method can therefore be adapted to the preferences of each participant, discussing all of their positive points during the activity or at the end when all sunshines have been glued to their rainbow. Once children had identified positive elements of the topic, they were asked if they would like to discuss any negative points in relation to the research area. With few exceptions children were willing to do this, given the confidence they had gained from the previous task and assurances of confidentiality. As with the suns, children chose to write or draw the negative elements of the theme on a number of raindrops and then attached them to the cloud.

As an example of the versatility of rainbows and clouds as a method, Figure 1b shows the six positive elements of maternal employment which Bethany chose to express. She believes that employment increases the income of her home, contrasting this with periods of maternal unemployment by highlighting issues of food insecurity, resource scarcity and maternal boredom. By disclosing the issues presented in her rainbow, Bethany provided an opportunity to probe further by asking her to compare different periods in her lifecourse and the path she would chose in her own future. Although these are questions pertinent to the research theme which could have been raised in a more structured interview, Bethany's early disclosure of these issues meant that the line of questioning could be directed by her, responding to her thought processes and increasing her feelings of control over the pace and depth of the dialogue.

For means of comparison, Figure 1c shows the negative parts of maternal employment for Bethany, who is anxious about her mothers' imminent return to the workplace as she is

unsure who will care for her after school. Bethany is concerned about her elder brother providing care for her whilst their mother is at work, whilst positive elements of her mother working appear in Bethany's cloud as she reinforces the financial benefits of employment. Rainbows and clouds thus act as a method which allows children to visualise and articulate contradictions, discussing them at their own pace without the adult researcher directly questioning the discrepancies in their argument. The method offers participants greater time to consider the information imparted through their production in comparison to a structured interview, allowing them to make amendments to the final production (Young and Barrett, 2001). They were also useful in encounters that were broken due to curriculum demands, meaning that when the interview resumed, children had a visual prompt to remind them of what had been previously discussed.

Although constructed as a method to capture positive and negative elements of a topic, rainbows and clouds are not limited to revealing only those opinions which are diametrically opposed. By coupling each rainbow and cloud with the dialogue of their author (rather than assigning the interpretation of the researcher to each production), it is possible to recognise and reflect on the deliberations of participants. This is particularly the case when issues were, for example, not always positive depending on the context or which were 'not bad enough' to place on a cloud. The pattern of suns and raindrops was therefore significant for some children, with the most negative issues at the top whilst others rotated the raindrops to signify teardrops and their feelings. During this research, the whole encounter was audio recorded and transcribed in order to capture how participants expressed their thoughts and feelings, adding richness to their already insightful productions.

Anonymised feedback from children (utilising an adapted secret box technique (Punch, 2002)) indicates that the majority of children who tried rainbows and clouds enjoyed them. However, children's diverse preferences mean that those who feel limited by their writing or drawing abilities may not engage well with the activity. If a child still wishes to utilise the method, the researcher can offer to act as a scribe, writing only what the child feels they cannot and thus making the technique accessible to more children. Although this method was utilised with a specific age group because of the requirements of the field study (namely to investigate children's views of parental employment at key points in their lives), I would suggest that it could be useful for a range of ages, dependent upon the tastes and competencies of participants. Chronological age, as with all methods described in this paper, is not the *sole* controlling factor when deciding on the range of methods to use; the preferences of individuals, their experiences and the research theme should also guide the techniques available.

Issues of ownership and anonymity are considerations with rainbows and clouds, as with any research which produces a final output. In this study, children's productions were, with their permission, taken away to be photographed for use in publications to ensure the image captured necessary levels of detail. Children were asked whether they would like their creation returned to them, with some choosing to retain both, others only the rainbow and some did not want to take either. Returned productions were placed in individual sealed tubes to be handed out at the end of the school day. This ensured that participants' productions were not immediately open to scrutiny by their peers, although there could have been pressure to show others what was inside. Those who chose not to retain their production suggested that the adults at home may have chastised them for discussing private issues with a researcher (despite parental permission being granted) and some children did

not want their parent or carer to see what had been written about them on the cloud as this reflected negative feelings which had not been discussed at home. This highlights the strength of the method, as it is capable of delving into the negative aspects of an issue which children may find difficult to discuss, at a pace and depth that is set by them. At the same time, it also suggests that productions need to be treated sensitively, as handwriting may be recognised and children may place identifying markers on their creation. Researchers therefore have a responsibility, as with other data, to ensure that the information presented will not identify the participant and cause undue distress.

In the following section, the paper outlines the benefits and constraints of an additional visual research tool for elucidating emotion and feelings, capable of exploring both memories of a past event and expectations for the future.

Moodboards

Collage is a term used to describe both the technique and the resulting work of art which incorporates a collection of newspaper clippings, photos, fabric and other items, arranged and fixed to a mounting surface (Tate, 2010). In psychology and art therapy, collage is utilised to provide an effective means by which both conscious and unconscious dimensions can be brought to the surface of a conversation (Roos *et al.*, 2004). Collage is used within geographical research, as images, symbols and descriptive text are combined to construct maps which produce a meaningful whole, yet the wider potential of collage is generally overlooked within geography (Digby, 2007; see McIntyre, 2000 for an exception). Rather than drawing on collage as an artistic method, the term moodboards is employed here, both to mark a departure away from collage as an art form but also to highlight the expressive power of images beyond first impressions. Moodboards, as used in the advertising industry, draw

on the concept of collage and consist of images, text and samples of objects. The resulting collection of images can be used to develop concepts and communicate ideas to other people, informing the overall impression that the designer is trying to achieve.

Projective research approaches, such as scenarios and moodboards, allow participants to express beliefs and abstract ideas without the requirement to put those feelings into words first and are therefore potentially useful with a range of individuals, including children and young people (Banister and Booth, 2005). Winter (2010) utilised the projective concept of reality boxes with 4-7 year olds to express their thoughts, feelings and aspirations. On the outside of the box, children constructed an image of themselves that best reflected how they believed they were viewed by the outside world, whilst the inside showed their feelings and perspectives on specific issues. This method utilised craft materials such as pompoms, pipe cleaners and lollypop sticks to convey emotions. These mediums of expression may be suited to some participants but potentially limiting for others who do not feel they possess the necessary artistic talents⁵ or imaginative flair to assign meaning to such craft materials.

Within my own research, moodboards are an assemblage of magazine and catalogue clippings although other items can be used, including pictures drawn by the respondent. They are representative of the way participants think or feel about the research object and due to their novelty, they provide a versatile outlet for participants to respond from their own frames of reference. Rose's (2001: 103) work on visual methodologies highlights the significance of the non-verbal, as 'we feel, we dream, we fantasize...and we can react to things in ways that feel beyond words', suggesting that the power of the image can be felt in the emotional states that it enables participants to uncover. Rather than showing only

⁵ In 2006, fewer than 20% of pupils taking GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) examinations in England studied art and design (Vidal Rodeiro, 2007).

concrete things, participants can use pictures and words to create a moodboard that gives across an impression through colour or texture, for example. In this way, participants can better articulate their thoughts, feelings and abstract concepts such as balance, energy and freshness, spending less time concentrating on the actual picture, but on its often multiple meanings in their eyes. This method therefore allows scale to be influential, giving symbolic and metaphoric potential which participants may not feel free to express in drawing. For example, formal schooling may teach individuals not to draw dogs the same size as houses yet those with such a phobia may feel that the utilisation of scale in this way would express the magnitude of their fears.

Participants were provided with a range of magazines, newspapers, brochures and catalogues targeted at a range of age groups, genders and interests, alongside coloured paper (which could hold metaphorical meaning in itself), glue and scissors. Using images from the media can mean that participants feel less limited by their own technical abilities, recognising that some people may not be confident in their artistic talents (UNICEF, 2004). The research theme and the age of participants must be considered to ensure that materials are not inappropriate (e.g. sexually explicit) whilst also providing a broad range of resources. In the first project which explored the utilisation of moodboards as a method for expressing feelings and emotions, some chose to represent a past event and thus relied on memory, whilst others looked towards the future and expressed their perspectives on forthcoming life changes, showing the versatility of moodboards.

After initial conversation, the concept of moodboards was introduced to participants by showing an example that the researcher had produced. They were shown how particular colours and textures on the moodboard held meaning for the designer of the moodboard.

Although the provision of an example could introduce bias into the research encounter, the novelty of the method necessitated the use of an illustration so that respondents felt more comfortable in the task. It also meant that participants could be assured that their meanings were the subject of enquiry rather than the interpretation of the researcher, and thus they were encouraged to talk whilst they chose, discarded and arranged images on their moodboard. The production of a moodboard can be a lengthy task, as participants flick through magazines trying to find an image which represents what they are trying to express; momentarily being distracted by the various articles in the media available to them. However, this time can be used productively, as the researcher is able to ask probing questions related to the moodboard itself and additional themes which participants raise throughout. By allowing participants time to complete their creation, they are able to make amendments to the final production ‘thus providing the truest representation possible’ (Young and Barrett, 2001: 144). It is therefore pertinent to audio record the encounter, as this can be transcribed and then subjected to thematic analysis, with responses coded and sub-coded, supported by photographs of the moodboard.

In order to highlight the use of moodboards as a social science method, Figure 1d provides an example of a moodboard produced by Julie, aged 16. She decided to depict her first day at secondary school, using her moodboard as a way to access memory and past emotion. Whilst selecting the images, Julie described what each meant to her in isolation, what else she would like to portray, and discussed other issues that the images raised. She also showed an interest in moodboards as a research method, suggesting that ‘they do say pictures say a thousand words’. The extract below details her summarising description of elements of her moodboard:

(T)he mirror that’s a reflection to show past and future ... this (jet ski, right) is like

falling because I thought that this showed different types of emotions, like fear, he looks kind of like, not shocked but bewildered and anxious and there's no one to catch him and he's just falling. ... (A)nd this (book, bottom left) was about self-conscious and other people and looking at other people and seeing how they dress and what they wear and I think you become more aware of it and I think you grow up quite a bit in that time...And that leads in with the 'staring' idea and people looking at you And this (balloon) is also to show change, it's like exploration, new world, new environment and different kind of heights....The word's significant on the balloon (Virgin) to do with naivety and things... and that (eye) fitted in with, like opening up, seeing different things, a new light on things which fits with the light in the mirror and the balloon.

This excerpt, although only a small portion of Julie's description of her moodboard, gives a rich insight into her experiences on her first day at secondary school, as she chose to represent them. When this narrative is coupled with her ongoing dialogue as she chose and discarded images for her moodboard, a richer depth is also given to her production. Other participants involved in the pilot project also suggested that once they understood the concept of moodboards (through the provision of an example), that the technique allowed them to express thoughts and perspectives which standard interview questioning alone would not have elucidated. They believed moodboards gave them time to think and reflect on their thoughts and feelings, and to express emotions that were difficult to vocalise. Moodboards may not be appropriate for all research participants due to their different preferences and abilities, but do provide an effective medium for others.

Projective techniques, such as moodboards, can raise a number of concerns.

Methodologically, the choice of images available to participants was constrained by the media placed before them, and may have meant they had to use certain images that did not fulfill their requirements. Participants may not identify with the age, gender or ethnicity of people depicted in the media yet some devised ingenious ways of finding the image they wanted, using multiple images to produce one whole face. When utilising moodboards, researchers could decide to use pre-cut images from the media but by doing so, the research would be subject to researcher editing. To avoid this effect, large stacks of complete magazines, brochures and leaflets were used in the research presented in this paper.

Researchers may choose to offer the same materials to all participants, necessitating the purchase of multiple copies of the same edition of a magazine, for instance. However, this is not necessary, as individuals ascribe different meanings to the same image and will therefore find expression within a range of resources.

Moodboards also raise issues of authenticity, interpretation and reliability. It is pertinent to remain aware of how any research encounter may affect the information which participants choose to disclose. For instance, through interactions with other people, respondents may be critically aware that their opinions or experiences may not necessarily conform to societal norms, and they may thus draw inspiration from a number of other sources (including their family, the media and peers) to portray an account of how they believe an event *should* be recounted. This phenomenon is not unique to visual methods; rather it applies to all qualitative techniques and is not necessarily detrimental to research outcomes. It provides an opportunity to uncover the social and cultural influences in the accounts of respondents, showing how their narratives are infused with the opinions of other people and prevailing social norms, alongside their own interpretation of events.

When analysing projective techniques, interpretation can be carried out solely by the researcher without reference to the meaning ascribed by the creator (Catterall and Ibbotson, 2000). However, visual methods are open to many interpretations and therefore analysis should be carried out alongside the dialogue of the participant. Moodboards reflect an assemblage of the thoughts and feelings of participants, affected by their cultural and social context. Individuals will place their own meaning on their production and by removing their dialogue from the analysis, the researcher risks assigning their own interpretation to the moodboard. As with many forms of research data, there is no single authoritative interpretation, and alongside a participant's description, researchers could also carry out a thematic analysis to look for recurring trends across moodboards. Moodboards do not present unique challenges in terms of authenticity, interpretation and reliability over other methods commonly used within social science; as with all analysis, the researcher must remain cognisant of the potential bias that they introduce to the interpretation of data and be candid about their analytical techniques. Issues of ownership, confidentiality and anonymity are also pertinent to moodboards, as with other research methods which result in the creation of an end product. In terms of ownership, those who participated in the study reported here were asked whether they wished to retain their moodboard. In the majority of cases, participants did want to keep it and therefore photographs were taken of each moodboard, with their permission. They were also asked for their consent to use the moodboard in a variety of ways, including academic papers, and pseudonyms are used in the storage and dissemination of findings. Relying on a camera to reproduce an image which is suitable for publication can be problematic given issues of overexposure and incorrect lighting, and researchers may choose to utilise other forms of data capture, including scanning, to produce their own copy of the moodboard (with permission from the participant).

Conclusion

The visual research methods outlined in this paper contribute to the array of techniques available to researchers, not simply because of their novelty but for the depth of insight they can foster. Duplo provides a hands-on tool for children to recount elements of their everyday lives and to think creatively about their practices, whilst normalising the research process for participants. Rainbows and clouds provide an activity which enables individuals to discuss the elements of their lives which are satisfactory and unsatisfactory without continuous questioning by the researcher. Participants have a choice over what they choose to disclose, with time to consider their responses and with control over the pace, content and depth of questioning. Moodboards provide an effective tool for delving into the feelings and emotions which individuals may find difficult to articulate. Whilst a novel concept to begin with, those who tried the method found it helped them express a diversity of emotions which may not have been uncovered through direct questioning alone. Although these methods were initially developed with children of particular age groups in mind, they can also be used with other age ranges depending on the competencies and preferences of individuals. Children are not less skilled *simply* because of their chronological age, yet the socialisation of children in western contexts means few are accustomed to prolonged question and answer sessions with an unfamiliar adult, and their linguistic skills may not allow them to effectively express their viewpoint. Visual methods thus present an opportunity to enable participants to express meaning in more than purely verbal terms.

Visual forms of conveying meaning therefore add an additional dimension to the research encounter over verbal modes alone, with considerable potential for including those of different ages without discriminating between different confidence levels and academic

attainments (Rose, 2001; Young and Barrett, 2001). However, the importance of dialogue cannot be lost even with the adoption of visual and activity-based methods. Creative methods generate knowledge about participants' lives and social experiences, and thus their creations cannot be understood in isolation. In order for visual representations to express the meaning of their author, a level of dialogue is needed rather than researchers attaching their own interpretations to the productions made by participants. Together, the combination of visual method with narration can offer deeper insights than either alone can provide.

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