Storytelling and capabilities' approach

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Discussion

Patricia: I would like to discuss the method of storytelling for educational research purposes. I was reading the photovoice policy brief facilitated by Dr. Faith Mkwananzi and a study by Andreson and Mack "Digital Storytelling: A Narrative Method for Positive Identity Development in Minority Youth".

Based on the photovoice policy, I realized that the objectives of the study went beyond the collection and analysis of data, including the improvement of the abilities of the students who acted as co researchers. I think this is not usual although it reminds me of the action research method. Undoubtedly, what impresses me the most about this method is the impact of this project on student researchers.

Lee: Hi Patricia. Thanks for starting us off. I´m still figuring out how this works so I apologise in advance for any glitches. I found the photovoice policy inspirational and I asked myself how it might be used in my context. I foresee a lot of potential issues, relating to supervision of the project (who owns the cameras, and who is "in charge"?, what if there are problems "in the field"?), and ethical considerations (who owns the photos, what if co researchers take photos without permission?). Mkwananzi states that her project involved co researchers in three workshops, where I assume they were instructed regarding these issues. In my context, however, I´m not sure that I could arrange this unless it was carried out in class time and formed part of the curriculum. Thoughts?

Miranda: Hi. I too am hoping this will work! I was part of the group, but I managed to remove myself from it, but it is letting me type, so I will give it a go!. I have found the project fascinating in both the methodology and the subject matter. It struck me how much more powerful it is to see and hear the agency of the students in action. They have embraced their capabilities and overcome many and varied difficulties to achieve something that they value. The impact is so much greater seeing and hearing their stories in person. Lee, would you have the opportunity to do similar research in class time? Is that something that you would have the freedom to initiate in your setting? Do you think your students would engage with this methodology? There would be ethical considerations but I think these would be more than offset by the experience of engaging in a video project. —

Patricia: Hi Miranda and Lee. I share Lee's apprehensions regarding logistical and operational issues of carrying out a digital storytelling project. In the Photovoice Policy Brief provided by Faith, it is said that each student received cheap digital cameras. Regardless of the cost of the cameras, I think this makes the realization of a project like this quite expensive. However, if I think about my students, almost all of them

have a mobile phone with acceptable resolution cameras, so probably they would only need memory cards. So, what worries me most is the question of coordination and control of tasks and times to carry out this kind of research. Obviously, it seems to be much more demanding than a standard type of study. However, as difficult as it seems, I am still delighted with the possibilities of research and, at the same time, helping students to increase their skills through a deep reflection on their experiences. Like Miranda, I am also fascinated by the power of agency of the students / researchers. In this sense, I share Anderson & Mack's assessment that "digital storytelling provides a method of authobiographical learning that allows youth to "restory"their lives (. . .). ·

Miranda: Hi Patricia. I think you sum it up when you talk about the possibilities of research. We have to think big and brave. And then worry about the logistic!

I've copied the questions that we are thinking about:

How is social justice (SJ) being conceptualised in the project(s) you are focusing on?

What theories or approaches about SJ underpin the project(s)?

What research methods have been used in the project(s) and do these seem fit for purpose given the research questions?

What issues are raised for you and your contexts?

I think our comments above have begun the discussion around the issues raised for us in our contexts.

I'd like to think about the theories and approaches about SJ that underpin the project. In the introduction to the project, there is a clear summary of the theory of capability, its relationship to functionings, and the agency of those involved. Attending university is the capability the students are striving for, and it is clear in their photographs and videos that this is something that they value. The functioning that they have had to navigate/harness/overcome are many. Finance seems to be a huge issues, as is the support, or lack of it, from home. Interesting, too, that teachers play their part. Makes me realise what an important role we have! For me, what the project really represents is the agency that these students have, both in achieving their aim of reaching university, and the agency they have used in being involved in the project. The fact that each of the photo stories is so individual really demonstrates this. Even the style of the photographs made me pause for thought - some are distant, wistful almost, some are looking backwards whilst others are looking forwards, some focus on the minutiae whilst others encapsulate the wider picture. The skills that the students gained in completing the project e.g. use of cameras, writing titles, being filmed, have also contributed to their agency. As Alkire (2011) points out, having resources doesn't always mean an increase in capability and functioning, but in this case, with the right support and guidance, the resources have been used to enhance both.

Lee: I was wondering whether there would be other ways of participants telling their stories besides photos. For example, by actually writing a story, recording it, uploading it to Youtube etc. I'm thinking about those participants who would prefer to express themselves differently and conducting research that respects their learning preferences. Here in Colombia, students leave school at the age of 16 so many of them are only young adults when they go to university. This adds another ethical dimension to any such research since parents would also have to give their permission. I agree that it is important to aim high, but we only have a limited time to conduct the research, and I think most of us on the

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work full-time. So I'm thinking about ways to get similar data which increase the agency of participants but require less time investment. Perhaps participants could use photos/videos they've already taken/recorded and published on social media. A workshop could then focus on choosing the appropriate photos/videos and discussing ethical concerns/permissions.

Patricia:

I think it's a good idea to use existing material, such as photos, videos or texts that students can collect. As Lee says, this would save time, which is a major restriction in our research work. I believe that this proposed form of work preserves the principle of digital storytelling method by allowing different narrative opportunities beyond traditional media. It would also be important to preserve the instances in which students freely organize the material they collect, since the process of joining the different pieces of material into a coherent story allows them to reflect on their own experiences and give them meaning. From my point of view, the latter is vital to develop some capabilities in students.

Summary

- We all agree that the digital storytelling method is inspiring and fascinating. We find it very valuable that, at the same time as research is being carried out, students/co-researchers develop new capabilities.
- There are concerns about the time and resources that a project like this requires, even when we recognize that the effort is worthwhile. The idea of adapting the method to time constraints has arisen, using existing material instead of creating it. Even in this way, the students freely collecting and organizing the material would allow different narratives of their own experiences.
- Another important concern is about the ethical issues involved (for example, in the case that permission must be sought from the parents of students under 18 years of age).
- The underlying social justice approach is explicit in the project: The Capability Approach. From this paradigm, we have identified some capabilities and functionalities that are present in the Photovoice project.We all agree that the digital storytelling method is inspiring and fascinating.