Children's Engagements with Visual Methods Through Qualitative Research in the Primary School as 'Art That Didn't Work'

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Abstract

This article considers the implications of using visual methods in research with primary school aged children. The research explored the meanings children made of reading at school. Visual methods, through drawing, were part of the research design. The children resisted drawing in a range of ways, including ripping pages out of books and leaving pages blank, or they used drawing to make meaning of their lives outside the context of the research topic, in particular indicating an adherence to normative gender identities. Through initial analysis these methods were framed as 'art that didn't work'. It was only through treating everything as data- thinking about silences and absences, as well as what the children did draw, that it was possible to reposition the data as useful for understanding the impact of drawing as a method. The article argues that whilst in previous research, visual methods have often been hailed as straightforwardly positive for working with children: they increase participation, access to research, and promote pupil voice; in this research a far more complex set of power relations emerged around drawing. Findings indicate drawing does not work as a method to enhance children's participation in the research process. While the paper is methodological in nature, it also contributes to our knowledge of children's agency, and agency as resistance. The article disrupts assumptions that such methods are 'good' at providing a mouthpiece for vulnerable groups such as children, to explore their identities.

Keywords: Visual Methods, Participatory Research, Research with Children, Children, Primary School, the Agentic Child

Introduction

1.1   This article considers the implications of using visual methods in a research project with children about their experiences of reading at school. The realisation of the need to treat everything as data is core to the analysis made in this paper: silences, gestures, and absences, as well as what was present were all significant in the data produced. The initial data generated required serious reconsideration, and reflection on the methods used.

1.2   The aims of the research were to explore minority children's perspectives on picturebooks, and how picturebooks are employed in their social worlds; to consider how minority children construct their ethnic and racial identities and subjectivities as readers, and to look at the taken for granted processes of children learning to read. Centrally, the research aimed to listen to children, through foregrounding pupil voice, and develop perspectives that focus on their agency.

1.3   This article explores one aspect of the research design: the use of picture diaries and data they generated. Visual methods, as opposed to what Phoenix et al. call 'word- only interviewing' (2008:346) are argued by Collier and Collier 1986 to evoke a more emotional many-layered response in participants. First, the paper examines visual methods as they are framed in the methodological literature, and some background to the study is provided, as well as situating drawing as a cultural practice. Drawing on these issues, three themes

generated in the data are explored, to show evidence of the children's resistances to the methods used, and to discuss the ways in which they used the research as a space to work through their own gender and age related concerns. The article ends with some concluding remarks about visual methods, and specific issues around the skill and practice of drawing, as well as possible spaces for the agentic child to surface in the use of such methods.

Visual methods in research with children

2.1 Visual methods have been documented by previous research in a range of positive ways as: 'fun' 'relaxing' ' triggering remembering' and 'helping the abstract become concrete' (Fargas-Malet *et al.* 2010: 183;Gabb 2010: 44; Smart 2009: 301; Leitch 2008 cited byElden 2012). Darbyshire *et al.* (2005) and Mitchell and Ross (2006 cited by Mannay 2010) found drawing exercises 'valuable' in their research with children. It is particularly what Mannay calls the notion that visual methods 'minimise the power relationship between adult researcher and child' (95) which drew me to want to use these methods in the research design, and, equally, which the data presented in this article disrupt. The core argument made in this paper is that visual participatory methods can remain strongly power-laden with the researcher in the ascendant position. The article seeks to question the assumption that such methods are 'good' or promote 'equity' or 'equality' in the research process where children are involved. What we learn instead from the data is new knowledge about the ways in which children employ resistance strategies to avoid adult-set activities which they do not wish to engage in, in the context of participative research, and how school agendas of the need to complete work within allotted time scales permeate the research tasks.

2.2 The idea of visual methods being 'appropriate for children' opens up a wider debate about assumptions of what children 'like to do'; in this case, with a focus on drawing. Whilst theory on childhood has gone some way to suggest children are not simplistically 'innocent' (James and Prout 1990) or passive beings, methods adapted for children are rarely subjected to much scrutiny (James and Prout 1990). One of the advantages of using visual methods is that unlike interview data, visual data are not necessarily a textual reconstruction of a past event (Billings cited by Fielding 2008), though they provide a snapshot of a particular time. Such an approach aims not to privilege the articulate. This, however, suggests children's meaning making needs to be 'interpreted' by adults, or that they are not competent to speak for themselves (Elden 2012).

2.3 In addition, Leitch (2008) suggests that the use of visual methods can get at the unsayable, even the unconscious. There is a potentially insidious implication here - that children may 'accidentally' 'give away' in a drawing what they would not be prepared to *say*. As I argue through this article, the use of drawing as a visual method is very much shot through with power relations, and in many ways, rather than being 'emancipatory' (Brownlie 2009) it re-draws, or reinscribes adult:child binaries in the space of the school. What the use of such methods reveals is how children resist them. Within the tradition of using visual methods in research with children are also connections with well-established participatory research traditions. These are discussed in the context of the current research project in the next section.

Participatory research

3.1 The use of participatory methods is part of an innovative movement in research which aims to be particularly ethically sensitive to participants who are vulnerable, because it cedes some of the control over the research to participants (Chataway 2001; Small 1995; Wadsworth 2001; Alderson 2001; Sinclair 2004; Fine and Weiss 1997). What makes research participatory is not without contention, as discussed by those such as Brownlie (2009), and Hammersley and Atkinson (1981/1983). Within the Sociology of Childhood, there are debates around how participative these methods really are, in the sense that they give a semblance of children being able to air their opinions rather than establishing that those opinions will be followed through into policy and practice (Tisdall and Bell 2006). The inclusion of children's opinions in research 'on' their lives has become well established in the field of the Sociology of Childhood in recent years, but is less established within broader public and policy forums (Pimlott-Wilson 2012 and Holloway and Valentine 2000). Having explored the debates around the uses of visual methods and participatory research in the literature, some background on the school and the study is now provided to create a context in which the research took place.

The research site

4.1 The school, given the pseudonym 'Three Chimneys,' was an average sized, one form entry, community primary school based in inner London, with around two hundred pupils. The school was ethnically diverse, with no one majority group, and children practiced different faiths, though around three quarters came from Muslim backgrounds. There were a very high number of Ethnic Minority children, with two white British children in the

sample. The children's ethnicities are indicated in the data; these are self-described. The research took place in two classes, Year 2 (six and seven year olds) and Year 6 (ten and eleven year olds) in order to consult participants from different ages and stages of school. Speaking a language other than English at home was also very common in the sample, with over ninety per cent of the children having English as an Additional Language (EAL). Because of the high percentage of EAL children, one of the intentions of using visual methods was to provide a way for children to respond to the research which was non-verbal, aiming to access meaning that might have been limited by language barriers. The sample was roughly composed of an equal number of girls and boys, and an equal number of children from the older and younger age groups. The next section focuses upon the methodology used in the study at Three Chimneys.

Methodology

5.1   Visual methods were used as part of a wider research design with children, where children were interviewed in friendship pairs, and participant observation in class and in an after school reading club took place. Data from these sources are outside of the key focus of this article, though a small amount of interview data and fieldnotes are used to provide a context in which children's drawings were produced. Felt tip pens, coloured and lead pencils were provided for the children to use. These "age-appropriate" tools were selected prior to entering the field, without consulting children; such resources therefore conveyed adult-centred ideas about what is 'fun' and 'child friendly'. The materiality of the drawing tools is perhaps also important - felt tips and coloured pencils entail implicit notions about skill; they assume children are not competent to use oil paints, for example. The instructions for the task were deliberately left open. The children were told they could reflect on anything we had discussed in their interviews, on reading, or about the experience of being interviewed.

5.2   Practical constraints also influenced the materiality of the resources used, and how they were organised. The interviews took place in the newly refurbished school library. In order to use the space in a way which would not jeopardise my relationship with the school authorities- for example by staining the carpet with oil based paint- felt tips were used to minimise mess. Trying to fit interviews around the school day in the least disruptive way possible was a priority, and was one of the greatest challenges of the research. The use of resources reflected this, as pens and pencils could be used quickly and easily, with little need for explanation or concern about health and safety.

5.3   The rationale for using the data presented here is twofold. First because of their salience, and secondly, for what was evocative. Blank pages and torn paper were the majority of the data. What is presented here is a coherent portfolio of what was 'drawn,' which I seek to make meaning of from the scraps of data gathered. Significantly, the characters, plot, titles, or details of the books used appeared extremely rarely, if ever, in what the children drew in their picture diaries. In fact almost no drawings were linked to the research topics, or what had been discussed in participants' interviews, as can be seen in the data presented, after a discussion of ethical considerations.

Ethical considerations

6.1   Ethical considerations were made about this project through reflecting upon and engaging with the literature on ethics in research with children. Having gained favourable ethical approval for the fieldwork through the university where I was studying for my doctorate, ethical approval information was included on information sheets given to teachers, parents, and children prior to their interviews. Parents had ultimate choice over whether children participated in the project or not, through signing a consent form, as all children were under sixteen. Given the research agenda was a participative one, I also felt it was important for the children to have a say on the day in question about whether or not they took part in the interview. Therefore, children were provided with an illustrated information sheet, and an assent form. The information sheet highlighted ethical considerations in the research process, and the children's ethical rights, protections and protocols. The sheet informed the children of their right to confidentiality and anonymity. It was made clear that this would only be broken if the children disclosed issues which indicated risk from harm, or illegal activity. It also indicated children could withdraw from the research at any point.

6.2   In reality, ethical considerations were negotiated on a moment to moment basis. Children requested to go back to class at different points in the research process, but never in the middle of interviews, only during or before drawing. The impact this had on the visual data was that they are piecemeal, because the activity was not universally popular. There were several incidents relating to the children's welfare where it was necessary for me to share information about child protection issues with the class teacher that emerged in interviews. This had little relevance to visual data, however. In these situations, the children were asked to repeat what they had told me to

the teacher, having been forewarned that this would happen when the issue was first disclosed.

6.3   We might gain some purchase on the data from examining the teachers' responses to the task, however, teachers were not interviewed. Part of the ethical assurance I gave to the children was that I would not share what they said in their interviews with anyone else in the school and that the use of data- both visual and oral- would be purely for research purposes. Therefore I would no more have shared the children's drawings with the teachers than played them interview recordings. This was part of the agreement I made with the children. I do not see this as a drawback to the research, since by showing that I was not routinely sharing what the children had drawn and said, I was able to build trusting research relationships with the children.

6.4   The 'thick description' (Geertz 1994:213) of ethnography makes it difficult to tabulate data on children's responses to drawing. A straightforward tally indicates that higher numbers of the older children engaged with the task; however, there is a tension between the picture painted by the qualitative and quantitative data. Nine of the older children's 'engagements' only involved writing the title of the book they had read, and then asking to return to class. This told me very little about what they thought of the project, or about reading. Thirty four children exhibited what could be called passive behaviour during the task, twenty two in the younger age group, twelve in the older age group. Nonetheless, we could question whether leaving pages blank is 'passive' or whether this constitutes a form of active resistance. Indeed writing the book title could itself be deemed passive resistance as it avoided engagement beyond the name of the book. Of the twenty eight children in the Year 6 class, twenty two participated in the visual methods part of the research; three boys and three girls asked to leave after they had been interviewed. It is worth noting that these children were happy to take part in interviews, where none asked to leave. Of a total of thirty Year 2 children, all chose to participate in the visual methods part of the project.

6.5   A common response to the task was to tear pages out of picture diaries. These were usually discarded in the bin; on occasion pages were kept and pocketed. This suggests the reason for tearing pages was twofold: either something was 'rubbish' (to be thrown away) or torn out to be kept as it was too 'good' for the picture diary, and presumably was taken home or shared among friends. Page tearing was less common among older children, with only six doing this, with an equal composition of genders, compared to seventeen of the younger children. Older children's page tearing, however, happened in the context of an after school reading club where they were in the company of the Year 2 children, which suggests perhaps that this became seen as 'the thing to do' at reading club. There were no obvious trends of ethnicity in the page tearing behaviour. Other than the children articulating gendered norms in their drawings, discussed later in the section on gender, there is little which differentiates the responses of the children across the sample in terms of age, ethnicity or any other factor. The content of drawings also does not seem to be influenced in any way by ethnicity or nationality.

6.6   The ethnicities of the participants are self-described. Whilst there are many different backgrounds in the sample, there were a larger number of children from broadly South Asian backgrounds (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh) Eastern European (Kosovo and Russia) and the Middle East (Iraqi and Kurdish). Most did not identify as British - as a prefix- apart from Aliyah who proclaimed herself British Pakistani, and two Year 6 girls, Isabel and Nicole, who described themselves as Black British. All children had been in the British education system since nursery. In class, children from all ethnic groups were prepared to draw and did so often as part of teacher-directed activities. The difference is, in class, sanctions were in place if children did not adhere to the teacher's instructions. While the children spoke at length about their ethnicity and identity work more broadly in their interviews, there seemed little interaction, if any between ethnicity and drawing. Having considered some broad trends in the data, the next section looks at the first of three themes in the data, silences and scribbles.

Troubling the art: three examples

Silence and scribbles

7.1   Scribbling was an aspect of the children's picture diaries across age and gender. Leaving blank pages is also considered here. Most of the picture diaries were filled with pages akin to the one in figure 1- marked by various kinds of scribbles, which, when I asked the children to tell about it, elicited responses such as 'I don't know'. Hutchby (2002) argues children's use of the phrase 'I don't know' acts as resistance to talking about sensitive topics during counselling: therefore resistance becomes a form of agency, showing social competence. Silence can avoid answering an adult-directed question, as can saying 'I don't know'. 'I don't know' potentially prevents adult prompts for further answers. Children's desire not to reflect, or expand upon their drawings was also made through chains of body gestures; shrugging, looking down or moving away from the interview into another part of the room. Nawaz, whose picture is in the excerpt below, was a little more forthcoming. He

explained that he was 'trying to fill up the book' and this was the fastest way to do so:

Figure 1. *Nawaz, 6, Bangladeshi.*

7.2   The use of scribbles could be perceived as a form of resistance to drawing: rushing to fill or complete a book suggests Nawaz wanted to be rid of the activity, and perhaps the diary itself- he saw it as 'work' which had to be completed, and best done quickly. Other children presented similar, swiftly made marks, like Gufor's. He shrugged and looked away when I asked him to tell about it, indicating he had nothing more to say:

Figure 2. *Gufor, 11, Bangladeshi.*

7.3   Certainly this was 'art that did not work' from the point of view of the research, as meanings related to the topic of reading could not be 'read off' from the drawings. Another possible explanation, given Nawaz said he wanted to complete his picture diary, was that he wanted a legitimate escape from the activity through its completion. From what the children said and did, it appears not to be the case that they saw scribbles as meaningful; rather the meaning lies in their resistance to drawing, and in their resistance to reflecting on what they had drawn, choosing rather to be silent.

Drawing in 'the space of the school' (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:37)

8.1   The significance of the research taking place during school time should not be underestimated. Schools are places where work is appraised and assessed rather than being produced for 'fun-' as Leitch (2008: 11) suggests visual methods in research can be. The children's responses to the use of visual methods indicate that they experienced the production of drawings as a situated, social process; both in place and time. School rules

permeated the interview space: picture diaries needed to be 'completed', individual drawings needed to be 'done'. Children would often bring me their picture diaries asking or telling me that they were finished, for my approval and agreement. There are often sanctions for walking away from, or not completing an activity at school, in spite of having explained that the children could withdraw from the research at any point, these rules may have pervaded the research for some children.

8.2   Time was also a key aspect of drawing at school- interruptions were frequent, as was seeking to reclaim time, for example during school assemblies, to complete picture diaries. Brice-Heath and Wolf (2005) argue that when children had free access to art resources, and how they used them, their 'artistic' skill improved. Too often, however, the ways in which such resources are used are teacher-sanctioned. The connotations of such resources then, may already not have been 'fun'. Drawing at school is often seen as an integral part of literacy and also creative development (Winner and Hetland 2008). Children learn to form letters and subsequently to write in the early years, through practicing mark making in their drawings first, Winner and Hetland argue. Having discussed scribbles and silences, some different themes play out in the next section on writing, including bubble writing and writing celebrities' names.

Writing

Bubble writing

9.1   In this section, we explore bubble writing. Like scribbling and blank pages, this was also highly salient among the older children in particular, with around half of the sample using it. Such writing was often used to present children's own names. As a result of issues of confidentiality and anonymity, it is not possible to share many of these examples. The children wrote their names in bubble writing, in different coloured pens, and also covered whole pages with their signatures written over and over again on the page. An example where a child used a middle name gives a flavour of this sort of 'work', which has been clipped to ensure anonymity:

Figure 3. *Hamid, 10, Iraqi.*

9.2   Such bubble writing seemed initially to be a frustrated and frustrating line of enquiry- or an act of resistance on behalf of the participant in terms of the brief to write/draw about their interviews, or about picturebooks. It was the conversation, or rather awkward interchange which accompanied the 'drawing' which completed the picture of resistance as agency. Rather than the talk around Hamid's picture providing 'an accompanying dialogue' to elucidate the picture, a process described by Mannay in her research, (2010: 96) Hamid merely shrugged and commented, pointing at his name: 'it's bubble writing'. Certainly this did not appear to be 'getting at' deeper, hidden issues. Nor was the drawing a way of touching on something emotionally raw and important.

9.3   Another example, from a separate interview, by Emma, where she wrote the name of a friend outside school, shows similar playing with text and colour:
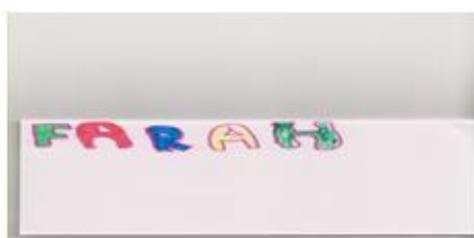

Figure 4. *'Farah' by Emma, 10, white British.*

I argue that the use of bubble writing worked as a resistance strategy to drawing.

9.4 Aadab, when asked about figure five, looked away and was silent. The body was used to physicalise a response: gesture and lack of 'voice' indicated she did not want to, or could not respond. After a long pause it was clear there was no further comment to be made. It is important to point out that this sort of silence, and stoppage, was very different to the long conversations, where the children spoke reflectively and openly about the research topic during their interviews- it was not that they did not wish to talk at all about the research topic but rather that the method of accessing it was at issue: drawing.
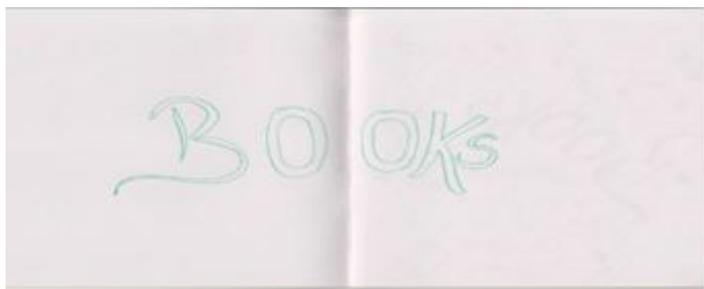

Figure 5. *Aadab, 11, Moroccan.*

9.5 Apart from Aadab's example above, the bubble writing always took the form of the writing of names. To write your name is to mark, or 'tag' something, it is also to assert selfhood, and indicate possession of something. A further possibility is that it is for the very reasons it is not possible to share some of the picture diary data in this article- confidentiality and anonymity- that the children wished to include their names. It had been explained to them at the start of the research that their individual names would be removed from transcripts, and also the name of their school; this was not always popular, as children indicated that they would, in fact, like to have their name and contribution included in the research. Therefore, participants' writing their names repeatedly in their picture diaries was a way of including and naming themselves in this research. In addition, this 'naming' could have been an act of resistance; resistance to the suggestion they draw something, where they chose to write instead, and resistance to the fact that they, and their school would be anonymised, as by signing their names, they were literally writing themselves 'back' into the research (and ironically then disqualifying the data from being used).

9.6 Certainly the writing of names is divorced from the topic of research on reading. Perhaps it is also separate from what we think children's drawings should 'be': pictorial representations, rather than writings. In the research context, I initially expected drawings which reflected the content of books we read in interviews, such as the characters or plot, or the paraphernalia of the interviews themselves- classmates, digital recorders, books and chairs. These were never depicted.

9.7 Given these examples of bubble writing were not an expected aspect of data production, we need to consider what we do see as 'artistic' or perhaps what we think children's drawings *should* be. Some notions about artistic competence originate in school. Art work is deemed 'good' or not, based upon the creator's capabilities with direct representational drawing, rather, for example than scribbling (Matthews 1984). For example, a child's ability to draw a face which bears a likeness to the person depicted might be deemed a 'good' drawing. The ability to replicate, on paper, the 'real' object so as to make it clearly distinguishable from another (a pear from an apple, for example), or even to accurately copy other artists' work is 'good' drawing too (Duncum 1988). The control of a medium- pencil, paper, charcoal and so on- are all also framed as 'good' skills by teacher narratives. More mediated modes of expression such as collage, which borrows images, or photography- where the act is to frame and to story not create something "from scratch" were not made available to participants. These were not considered in the design of the project, for the sake of time and practical convenience. This was again linked to my unexamined assumption that drawing would be popular with the children and would 'work' as a method to illicit data. Crucially, what we know about power relations in the primary school came into play in terms of the ways in which the children interacted with the drawing task that was part of this research. It was something they completed but did not 'like'. Having looked at silences, scribbles and bubble writing, the next section reflects on how this research connects with other studies where participants also found drawing 'difficult'. We see how some children in this research expressed the difficulties they found with drawing. The paper then moves on to look at the final two themes in the data, celebrity names and gendered drawings.

Difficult drawing

10.1 Whilst we have considered the well-documented assumptions about a positive reception to drawing in

research with children, drawing in research with adults is more contentious in the research literature Guillemin (2004). In Guillemin's (2004) research with patients with heart problems, she asked participants to draw pictures of their condition. Feeling 'I can't draw' was voiced by many respondents (2004:223). The respondents found the request to produce what they saw as 'art work' created feelings of pressure to perform, rather than the intended catharsis. Guillemin's respondents often recoursed to writing, feeling this to be a less-self-conscious mode of expression, and the children in my research followed a similar path of writing not drawing, when provided with drawing or 'art' materials. Gladstone *et al.* (2012) who also used visual methods with adults in health research, met with similar challenges outlined by Guillemin. They argue it is necessary to remember that art is always a social process, produced in a situated, social context, and that if it is used as a tool in a research project, this is still the case.

10.2   There were specifically generational concerns the children brought to drawing in my research. Some older children saw drawing as outmoded; had digital cameras, or some other new media been used for example, the children may not have resisted the use of them. This was made clear in Rowan's evaluation of the reading club I ran after school:

> It would have been better if we could have gone on the computers…and I did not like drawing with the little ones [younger children in the research sample]. They are babyish and annoying (Rowan, 11, Bangladeshi).

10.3   Rowan suggests that the use of computers would have been welcome in the project. The task of drawing was perceived as 'babyish'- it was the preserve and pastime of younger children in Rowan's eyes. In this way I 'got it wrong' by picking a tool, or a task which Rowan, and perhaps the other older children, felt was outmoded and not sufficiently mature or sophisticated for their age-range. In contrast, a request for computers was not part of the younger children's feedback about the research, suggesting the response to this task might have been age-related. The next section explores further data which support the argument that the children's responses to the task of drawing was age related; the writing of celebrity names and uninterpretable data.

Celebrity names and the uninterpretable

10.4   There did not seem to be any synthesis between what the children were saying - that they loved taking part in the interviews, and what they were actually *recording* in their picture diaries - the scribbles we have already seen, and celebrities' names, or their own names, or simply shapes and squiggles. Significantly, the writing of celebrity names only involved the older children, unlike scribbles and bubble writing which cut across ages. When I asked 'why' the children had written celebrity names at first, I received shrugs and silences in response. A key insight into what they drew- or rather did not draw - came from Zeitlyn and Mand's work (2012) with Bangladeshi children in London:

> although visual participatory methods overcome barriers posed by language capacity…some children resisted drawing people on account of Islamic religious rules which forbid the drawing of humans or animals (Zeitlyn and Mand 2012: 1002).

10.5   These were issues I had not considered before entering the field, but what Zeitlyn and Mand point out was relevant for the Muslim participants in this research. While drawing people may not have been an issue for non-Muslim participants, they also did not draw people in their picture diaries. Equally, children from Muslim backgrounds *did* draw people in drawings they made in class, after all, such drawing was out of a religious context, so this may be less of an issue than resistance to drawing per se, but is nonetheless worth considering.

10.6   One Bangladeshi-heritage respondent who did not draw images of people or things was Rowan. She wrote instead of drawing. What she drew is given a different vantage point if we read it against her comment about the whole project, discussed earlier. In the context of what she drew in the excerpt below, we can see she may have been reaching for an older model of femininity to identify with; one concerned with desiring pop stars, consuming and having tastes in music, and allying herself with youth culture rather than a 'kids' culture of felt tips and drawing:

Figure 6. *Rowan, 10, Bangladeshi.*

10.7   Writing the name of a pop star indicates a consumption of popular culture and production of a self that knows about and appreciates Justin Bieber. This may be significant in order to 'do school' at eleven years old in a way it is not at seven. What the children produced were gendered mark-making exercises using the tools they were provided with, but this tells us more about their social worlds and social competence than it does about what they made of the process of interviewing, and being interviewed, or their thoughts on the books we read during their interviews. Perhaps to step out of the narrowly ascribed codes at school of 'girl' and 'boy', and reach for other identities felt too risky, and could chalk the individual up as "different", something the children wanted to avoid.

10.8   A way to avoid positioning yourself as 'younger' 'older', 'girl' or 'boy' at all might have been to draw a squiggle, mark or shape. This could be the visual equivalent of saying 'I don't know'. The child has offered something which satisfies the adult request to 'draw' and halts further questioning, whilst at the same time resisting the brief given to draw about the research topic. Such drawings I again argue contribute to knowledge about children's resistance strategies. When such drawings are coupled with a resistance to making a verbal explanation of the picture, through shrugging or asking to leave the research setting, pictures become somewhat uninterpretable:
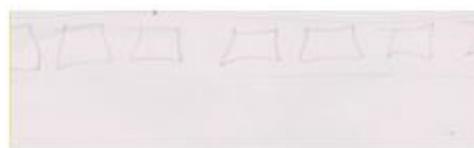

Figure 7. *Hamza, 11, Iraqi.*

Figure 8. *Xena, 10, Kosovan.*

10.9   I argue the children's paramount concern in their identity work at school was with manoeuvring a satisfactory place for themselves (Scherer 2014). This was inflected through stratifications of ability, gender, religion and age. If this is the case, then the identity work children were doing when drawing in their picture diaries- or not drawing- was framed through that need to create a satisfactory sense of self, and therefore, writing your name, or writing the word 'Justin Bieber' was evidence, for yourself, and your peers, of 'getting it right'. The children, through writing celebrity names, are 'doing' child at school, or 'doing' 'tween' (Chan 2011) identity – somewhere between child and adolescent. Nilan (1991) and McRobbie's (1978) work both look at the significance of friendship, and the need to 'get it right' in order to be accepted and acceptable to peers at school. The context in which these drawings were made, I argue, was one where the construction and maintenance on an everyday basis of gendered identities was crucial. This is discussed in the next section.

Gendered ideas about drawing: humour and 'prettiness'

11.1   The final theme discussed in this article is the way in which drawings were gendered; first the use of humour and violence, employed by boys is explored. This can be seen as a foil against girls' 'pretty' drawings

which were decorative, discussed next. I argue both the boys' use of humour and violence, and the girls' pretty drawings were a form of resistance to the research topic; it was resistance-as-agency, evidence of children's social competence at 'doing school' and 'doing girl/boy' (see in particular Renold 2005, for a discussion of the need for reaching for normative gender identities as a way of getting on and fitting in in the primary school, and her application of Butler 2006, for an exploration of the way in which gender is 'done' or performed and enacted on a daily basis in schools by children). These data suggest that part of the social construction of drawing, which we have already seen was situated in school discourses, was also seen as gendered by the children.

11.2 We know from other research that boys gain credence among their male peers in the primary school for 'masculine' performances such as skill at playing football, and other sports (Connolly 1998), not crying when they were hurt (Renold 2005) and quick, witty, repartee to indicate hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2008). Perhaps then the act and skill of drawing is seen as a 'female' preoccupation - a set of skills which are usually individual decorative endeavours, and require sitting still, concentration, and applying aesthetics through picking colours and composition.

11.3 The boys in this research sought to reframe drawing as their own- to put a constellation of masculine attributes into drawing, as they saw it, or to resist drawing at all - as we have seen, pages were ripped out, left blank and scribbled on. These 'rough' treatments of the picture diaries show not 'caring for' them; care being a conventionally female attribute (Evans 2007). Another tactic was the use of humour and violence as a way of moving drawing away from an essentialised notion of 'girly'- these boys' drawings seek to avoid 'neat and tidy' discourses which evoke gender appropriate elements of 'being' (Weekes 1997). The context in which the pictures and text were produced below is key to understanding the 'joke' made in figure 9:
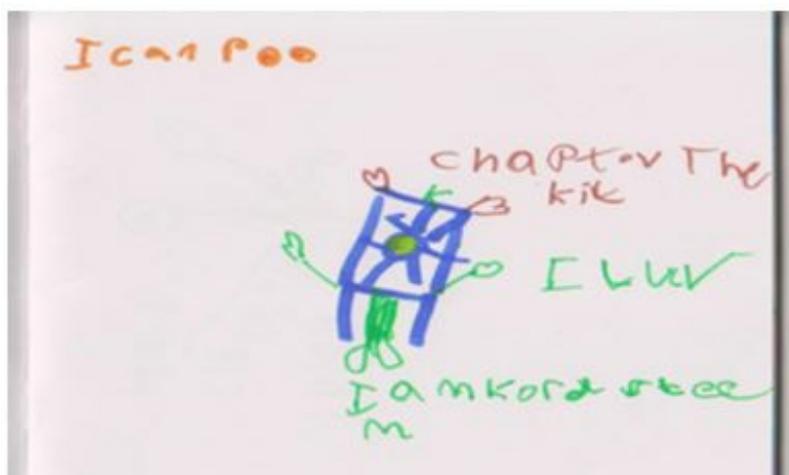

Figure 9. *Malik, 7, Iraqi. (Text reads from top of page: 'I can poo. chapt ov The Kit in the Tree I luv [sic]. I am cool see me').*

11.4 Malik, having finished the main part of his interview sat for some time looking at the blank page of his picture diary. Finally he:

> M: [*Picks up a brown pen. Sighs. Reluctantly? Starts to write:* 'Chapter *of the Kit'. Puts the pen down, looks at researcher.*]
> I: [*Reading*]: 'chapter five of the *Cat in the Tree'*? What did you like about the book?
> M: [*Picking up a blue pen, writes 'I luv' whilst saying*]: Last night I done poo.
> [*All three boys fall about laughing- nothing can be heard but giggling. Laughter dies down.*]
> M: [*Picks up an orange pen. Covering his page with his hand, writes something. Looking researcher in the eye, and then furtively looking at his friends, reads out loud:*] 'I can poo'.
> [*All three boys fall about laughing again*].
> M: [*Then writes 'I am cool see me' and reads it aloud, grinning*].

11.5 The comic timing was effective- Malik's friends Evan and Amir collapsed in hysteria and pointed at the word 'poo' on the page. All three looked up to the researcher- was it for affirmation, or as a challenge? Certainly there was an element of carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984) as the boys stepped out of everyday drawing practices at school to be 'all lads together,' (Connolly 1994) transgressive in shared hilarity of the scatological and the taboo. From the data, we gain a sense that Malik was uninterested in engaging with his picture diary. There was silence, and stoppages around the task, and when I prompted, or probed, it was with reluctance that Malik

provided a brief and vague comment 'I luv'. He then engaged in a performance; he covered his writing, and then revealed it, with the intention to amuse, but also to dare to challenge, perhaps to see if the adult researcher would pull rank, or let the issue pass.

11.6   The last thing Malik wrote was 'I am cool see me' after the laughter had died down. In terms of Malik's identity work, the fact he then wrote 'I am cool see me' as a final flourish to the drawing suggests that his ability to make his friends laugh affirmed him as 'one of the boys' and as 'cool' (Connell 1989). He wanted to be part of the picture; he wanted to 'be' someone who makes his friends laugh. We see Malik's resistance as a form of agency against engaging in the adult-defined task of writing about the book we had read.

11.7   The next excerpt comes from Matthew's picture diary. Here, he similarly used his picture diary for his own ends. In his interview, he had been verbally sparring with Simon, his partner, where they had been pretending to be in a computer game, fighting one another. Matthew had 'won' this verbal sparring:

> S: I will shoot your head
> M: I can break your gun and -
> S: I will get a new one!
> M: I will break it [indicates *snapping something over knees*].
> S: [*Reproachfully*] you can't it's a machine gun
> M: Doosh, I can take it out [*makes a swiping gesture*] I can call my team to take it off in your back [*in delight*], and squash them! Because they are little teeny weeny teeny ant [*he is holding his first finger perhaps 1mm from his thumb and squinting through the gap at the light shining through*].
> S: Up there! [A *combat gesture in the air*].
> M: [*Counter attacks, pins Simon's arm to his chest*] Duf! [*Triumphant, pretends to slice Simon's chest*].With a knife. Yeah I cut their hearrrt and I eat it [*whispering*] for lunch…

11.8   This 'attack game', which Matthew 'won' by coming up with something more horrible than Simon could counter- 'cutting out your heart and eating it' effectively silences Simon. It was in this context that Matthew made this drawing:
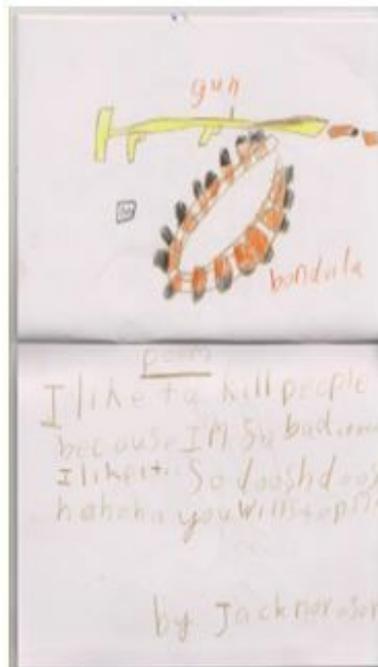

Figure 10. *Matthew, 7, Pampangan. (Reads: ' Poem: I like to kill people because I'm so bad…I like it. So Doosh Doosh hahaha you will stop me by Jack Morason').*

11.9   This drawing comprises both an image and a short narrative labelled 'poem'. Having drawn and labelled some weapons, Matthew then assumed a pseudonym to write with - 'Jack Morason'. The nature of his drawing and the content of his poem give a gendered impression of his 'presentation of self' (Goffman 1954) - through violence, the sound effects 'doosh doosh' of killing someone, and 'being' 'so bad…'. He read this out loud after he had finished it, laughing and relishing in verbalising the 'hitting' noises. He seemed to have a sense in the verbal sparring with Samuel - who remained quiet and watched whilst this victory drawing was made- of having gained 'hegemonic masculine status' (Connell 2008:12) through being more competent in evoking violence through

language. This verbal violence was reaffirmed in the drawing he made.

11.10   When participants engaged with working through their own identity work, and went 'off piste'; that is to say away from the research topic of reading, we see not silences and stoppages, but rather text and image to articulate one boy's experience and positioning of himself as one who 'knows about' and enjoys engaging in imaginary violent play. There is a twist in the way Matthew presents himself as he uses a pseudonym, though the reasons for this are unclear. Perhaps he does not wish Matthew, the child at school to be aligned with violence and weapons, or perhaps the pseudonym, like a superheroes' allows him momentarily, to be someone else.

11.11   We now consider girls' gendered drawings, which in contrast construct themselves through gendered norms of 'nice' and 'decorative' or 'pretty'. Whilst the pictures seemed to have little to do with the topic of reading, they showed an understanding of 'doing girl' properly (Walkerdine and Lucey 2001; Weekes 1997).

Figure 11. *Lucile, 11, Kosovan*

Figure 12. *Zora, 11, Moroccan.*

11.12   Mannay's work (2010) is useful in situating the girls' drawings, many of which sought to be traditionally 'pretty' in her research; she suggests that as part of both their 'school work' and identity work at school, girls seek to make their drawings decorative. The gendered use of colour- pinks and purples, like Zora's in figure 12, and the use of decorative devices, such as hearts within a heart, used by Lucile, make a patterned 'pretty' picture.

Figure 13. *Camilla, 10, Kosovan.*

11.13   Camilla's unfinished flower reiterates the point about the lack of time, at school, made available in order for the children to complete their picture diaries.

Figure 14. *Emma, 10, white British.*

11.14   Camilla, Emma and Aliyah each chose to include images from nature - in the form of flowers, to complete a rather traditionally gender 'appropriate' composition.

Figure 15. *Aliyah, 7, British Pakistani.*

11.15   Certainly the use of the colour pink, the drawing of hearts, and flowers make a clear juxtaposition against Matthew's drawings of weapons and his poem about death, within the drawings which, I have argued in this last section, are gendered.

Conclusion

12.1   Having considered the literature on the use of visual methods, and sought to situate art as a cultural practice, this article aimed to disrupt some of the assumptions that using visual methods in research with children will have positive outcomes for participation. Bringing together three of the themes in the data; scribbling, writing and gendered 'drawing', we saw the ways in which the children used drawing for their own ends. They resisted the researcher's brief, using, where there were spaces to do so, the picture diaries for working through their gendered and age-related subjectivities at school. The implication of this is that the adaptation of 'methods for children' needs to be done very carefully, if at all. Perhaps had the children been consulted about which methods they would have liked to have used, the outcomes would have been different. We also learnt that at least one of the older children would have favoured the use of new media, though there were little data on this in general.

12.2   The data presented here raise the question of the extent to which participative methods such as drawing redress the researcher:researched relationship- as they often claim to. 'The art that did not work' was, in many ways more thought provoking, about research methods, childhood agency, and participatory research, than art that might have worked, whatever that may have looked like- drawing which linked to the research topic at least.

12.3   If the metaphor of visual methods being 'broken' in this research fits, perhaps we can see qualitative interview data instead as 'working'; since, as indicated, interviews generated rich, multilayered data on the research topic. The key point is that in the use of visual methods there still remains a potential power dynamic

whereby adults have the power- to decide upon resources, to set targeted outcomes, time available and space used - but that this is generally not made visible, or reflected in methodological literature on the topic. Whilst the children had a choice over what materials they used within a selection, drawing is not a value free skill or activity, and this was inflected through how the materials were used, and shaped by the school and its disciplinary power. Indeed when choices were made available to the children - in how to use the resources – they chose to resist the methods. They scribbled, wrote their own and celebrity names, drew pictures of weapons, or 'pretty' hearts and flowers.

12.4   What we learn from the stoppages, resistances and silences in the art that didn't work is that the children came to the activity with their own agendas. These agendas were involved with identity work which, in the act of performing and working through, was preoccupying. A key way for us to make meaning of the children's resistance to the task comes in reframing that resistance as agency. Much like Hutchby's participants who say 'I don't know' (2002: 147) the children in this research did not draw pictures about the research topic, as a way of resisting adult agendas to 'open up' about their lives. Adult researchers, or counsellors have the power; power to control the materials, and the setting, which such methods aim to cede to children. Such power relations can be reinscribed in how participative methods are utilised with children.

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