

DEVELOPING THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL PLACE ON STUDENTS' IDENTITY, PEDAGOGY AND LEARNING, VISUALLY

Joseph S Agbenyega

*Department of Early Childhood Education
Faculty of Education,
Monash University, Melbourne Australia*

Inclusion in education is based on the premise that given the right educational opportunity and support, every student can achieve to his/her optimum level. This paper reports a study of 50 Junior Secondary Students' experiences of schooling using phenomenon auto-driven photo elicitation approach. The paper examines issues of school place in relation to identity, pedagogy and learning that constitute important determinants of inclusive education. Two themes, spaces of learning and identity explain the connectivity of place characteristics to students' general experiences of schooling. The strengths and weaknesses of the research approach are also discussed.

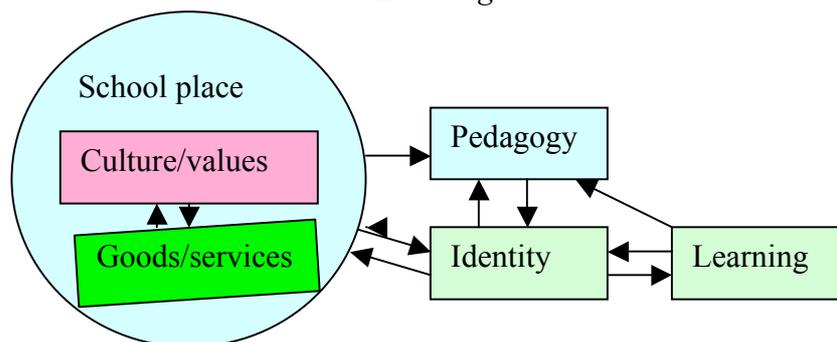
Introduction

Educational disadvantage continues to increase despite international and local efforts to combat the driving factors. In many national education systems the 'school place,' where students inhabit plays a major role in teaching and learning, what they learn and the nature of the relationships they develop, contributing to varied identity forms. This research paper contributes to current debates on the connectivity between the school place, pedagogy, identity forms and learning. Adams, Hoelscher, and Till (2001) argues that "place and place-identity are increasingly seen as significant media through which people construct an identity" (p. xxi). For Brey (1998), place connotes "an area or space that is a habitual site of human activity and/or is conceived of in this way by communities or individuals" (p. 240). Therefore, in educational terms a school place can be the whole school, a classroom, the playground the meal area or assembly hall just to mention a few. School places differ from one another if not significantly and so impact differently on the experiences of teachers and students.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I developed a conceptual framework to facilitate the understanding of the relationships of school place, pedagogy, identity and learning.

Figure1 A Conceptual Schema of Interconnectedness of School Place, Pedagogy, Identity and Learning



According to Relph (1993), “a place is, above all, a territory of meanings” (p. 36). Drawing from the conceptual schema I have developed school places contain *goods* and *services* of both animate and inanimate nature which interact in a symbiotic fashion to create these meanings. The nature and types of goods and services available in a particular school place are directly related to the culture and value systems of the society which creates these places, and the goods and services in turn shape the culture and value systems. The goods in school places may include the teachers, classroom resources such as books, play ground equipment, learning technologies and the classroom architecture. Services may include sick bay, administrators and cleaners. The main thing that distinguishes one place from the other is the difference of their objects (goods and services) which implies that the function of the classroom place is driven by the goods and services within it. For example, an Australian school place with computers, good lighting and ventilation compared to say, a school place in a developing country with insufficient furniture and inadequate supply of teachers would influence different student interactions and identity forms. It is argued that what one derives from and what one gives to a particular place context engenders the consequence of *placeness* of a place (Smith, Light, & Roberts, 1998). Placeness therefore implies spaces with particular uses.

Drawing from the conceptual schema, the nature of the goods in a classroom place affects teachers’ pedagogical behaviors and their relationship with students. Suppose a school place with high student teacher ratio and insufficient books; the teacher in this place is more likely to use didactic instruction which would invariably affect students’ way of learning. The goods of the school place also affect students’ identity formation. A good school place with appropriate and adequate resources (teachers, appropriate architecture and materials) would serve as an extrinsic catalyst that cushions the confidence level of students and increases their potential and intrinsic urge to learn and succeed. It is also more likely to create positive image for the inhabitants of that place in the public domain than a poor school place that espouses and creates vulnerability identity forms. Public perception and attitudes towards Black Ghettos in South Africa and elsewhere is a typical example of how a place and its goods combine to create atypical communities. It is therefore important not to think of a place as merely a location in physical space, but as a human foundation and habitual site of human activity which is constantly changing and shifting (Ellis, 2005). To Ashcroft (2001), a place evolves “like a discourse in process” (p. 155) as humans and objects (goods) cohabitate.

The schema also reiterates Ashcroft’s (2001) position that the continuous cohabitation of individuals and the goods of their place is “intimately bound up with the culture and identity of its inhabitants.” (p. 156). In the classroom situation individuals bring in unique identity forms which include teachers and students’ values, behaviors and perceptions. These individual formations are in turn influenced by the culture and values of the place they co-create. Ellis (2005) argues that the entire experience that results from the way people inhabit a place, and how they inhabit it is influenced by identities they have already created in other places such as homes, play ground or former schools. This is particularly critical for student and teacher relationships as these drive the type and nature of teaching strategies that are organized for students in a particular classroom place.

Usually, the political, social, and economic forces contrive the dynamics of school places (Aitken, 1994). Consequently, irrespective of children’s own agency, potential and competence in creating positive cultural identities, place factors beyond their control can shape their lives in negative ways (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). For example, in a school place where there is aversive control of students, coupled with transmission pedagogy, students may experience a diminishing sense of themselves on the conditions needed to

create a welcoming and progressive school community. Damaging the desired relationship between a place and its inhabitants may affect the sense of community and identities (Crang, 1998) because “place relationships enable people to define themselves and to share experiences with others and form themselves into communities” (Crang, 1998, p. 103).

The Research Journey

Being aware of the potential of good school place in enhancing and supporting holistic and context-sensitive inquiry, I believe that drawing attention to aspects of the school place and the type of interaction that goes on there can serve to remind educators of their opportunities and responsibilities of how to create educational places that enhance optimum learning for all students. Studying students’ experiences without reference to the places that shape their experiences and identities detaches the researched from its context and obscures positive meaning making. The purpose of this study is to explore how the concept of place can be a useful inquiry about how classrooms and its processes support positive identities and progressive learning experiences for students.

There are many satisfactions to derive from perceiving pedagogy anew and to do that is to be ready to negotiate some privileged positions. When places are not well thought of and well managed it could degenerate into unhealthy relationships and false cultures – cultures where people cover up their true identities. At its best, understanding the effect of place on students’ identity formation could provide nuanced and insightful ways of developing and practicing pedagogy. At its worst it could become a ritual which is repeated to all students without due consideration for their rights and differences.

Choosing a visual methodology

As positivistic quantitative research often treats students as objects of study without due consideration for their voice and agency (Jenks, 1996), I decided to use phenomenon auto-driven photo elicitation approach. This term reflects the unique approach of studying phenomena through photography and student voice. Visual approaches play an essential role in educational research by encouraging researchers to test and improve their understanding of school places, processes, and practices that operate within individual elements of the school’s cultural system (Brown & Jones, 2001; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Fetherston, 2008; Packard, 2008; Pink, 2007; Prosser, 2007). In as much as better understanding of school based problems encourages better decision-making (Brown & Jones, 2001), visual methodology as a research approach can offer educators a reflective and dialectical terrains to question routine school policies, identify gaps and design appropriate programs to address issues of exclusion and power imbalances in schools.

I approached this study with the perspective that students are creative, responsible, active and critical actors in their learning places and that visual approaches to educational research in which students as researchers take their own photos give voice and agency (Thomson & Gunter, 2007). Students as researchers is a shift from dominant positivistic empiricism to a more legitimate ethical practice that promise the understanding of the particulars of educational practice, for instance, the norms and structures that underpin the quotidian aspects of students’ experiences which are cultural and historically associated. Brown and Jones (2001) argue, “this approach leads not to unlocking of the complexity but also elucidation of rigid preconceptions which serve only to confirm injustices of the found world” (p. 5). In my view, dominant approaches deny children the opportunity to develop and convey aspects of their peer culture which can be brought to the fore through photo elicitation (Eder & Fingerson, 2001).

In this study, I chose a methodology that departs from reflection based on my privileged position as a researcher in order to make the school place a subject of critical thinking, to explore and to better understand the textured complexities of teachers and students' co-habitation of a school place. This approach, providing students with the agency and voice, would lead to multiple perspectives that may seem a mess that deviate from the package deal of commonsense realism (Law, 2006). But I am mindful of the fact that trying to make students' voices fit to my assumptions might sway me from important aspects of student constructed meaning of their experiences. Law argues that "incoherence is a commonsense realist way of putting down something that doesn't fit the standard package... Realities are not flat; they are not consistent, coherent and definite" (Law, 2007, p. 605). I approached the research field without a preconceived motive but as a listening researcher, opened to students and their conversations about schooling. I was, particularly interested in their voices, to create space where I can interrogate pedagogical practices and what school life meant to the students.

By using phenomenon auto-driven photo elicitation research approach that allowed students to generate the images themselves I significantly reduced the power imbalances between me as a researcher and the students (Brown & Jones, 2001). Through visual images one can identify and visualise the dominant school cultural forms and regimes which exercise power on students, which teachers and administrators have constructed and embodied. It helps researchers to open up opportunities for critical reflective practice that challenges these dominant cultures (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

The Research Setting

The study took place in Winneba, the administrative capital of Ewutu Efutu Senya District in the Central region of Ghana. Ghana is a country in West Africa with a current population of 23 million people, a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 6.3% and per capita income of \$2, 963 (Government of Ghana, 2007). The official language, English was a colonial legacy from Great Britain. Although tribal and ethnic groups use their various local dialects for conversation in households and in non-academic settings, English is used as the means of instruction in schools. Current literacy rate stands at 82.7 % for males and 67.1% for females. There are 10 administrative regions and 138 districts as of 2006. Education is partially administered through regional and district directors of education but the development of curriculum, assessment, training and posting of teachers is administered centrally by the Ghana Education Service which is the implementing body of the policy decisions made by the Ministry of Education of Ghana.

Pre-tertiary formal education is in two levels. The first level, Basic education, comprises of two years kindergarten, six years primary and three years junior secondary schooling (JSS). The second level is senior secondary which is for three years. This study is concerned with the JSS level. Report on Basic Statistics and Planning Parameters for Basic Education in Ghana 2006/2007 indicated the presence of 9,054 JSS with 7,122 public and 1,932 private ones (Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MOESS), 2007). Details on JSS school enrolment for 2006/2007 indicated the presence of 952,151 and 180167 students in public and private schools respectively. Out of a total of 67,005 teachers in both private and public JSS, 21,292 have no teaching qualification (MOESS, 2007).

Sampling and Generating of Data

The data for this research was gathered over a three month period in the last quarter of 2007 in Winneba. Permission for the research was granted by the District Director of Education,

and through formal letters, the head teachers of all the Junior Secondary Schools in the district were contacted. From 17 schools which initially responded to the invitation, a purposeful sampling was used to select five schools that represented urban and rural locations. I then selected 30 students from each school using assigned random numbers. These numbers were further reduced through further randomization to 10 students from each school. The total sample consisted of 50 students (30 girls and 20 boys) with ages ranging from 13 to 16 years and a mean age of 15.3 years.

My decision to use a visual approach is based on the assumption that photographs have the effectiveness to prompt deeper reflections that words alone cannot (Deppeler, Moss, & Agbenyega, 2008). Clark-Ibanez (2007) argues that researcher made images may be limited by their own interests and obscure the discovery of important aspects of the research that is interesting to the participants. To avoid this I asked the students to take their own photographs which were later used as the focus of conversation and discussion about the phenomenon they have captured (Clark-Ibanez, 2007). The purpose of the research was explained to the students including brief guidelines on how to turn on and off the digital cameras, how to zoom and how to change the batteries in case their batteries run down. This was necessary because none of the students had used digital cameras before.

Directions provided to students to guide them in taking the photos included but not limited to the following: To take photos depicting practices in their schools that they liked or dislike; things that made them feel happy or unhappy; the type of school they would like to go or not go to and situations that depicted how they would describe their teachers and schools to friends. Students then broke into pairs to take visual images during school times. The taking of the photographs took place in each school at different times. Students were asked to take notes and to indicate reasons for their choices of photos. All students, their parents and teachers of the participating schools signed consent forms prior to the commencement of the study.

Data Analysis

I approached data analysis through systematic content analysis of visual data (Gottschalk, 1995; Holsti, 1969; Prosser, 2007; Weber, 1990). Images are communication tools and messages they convey reflect the psychological state of the image producer, communicator and enacted practices (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). Communication in any form whether verbal or non-verbal is central to human existence and its content represents a unit of analysis. The analysis began with students through systematically defining the corpus of images to be discussed or in other words the images that form the domain of representation for students in the study (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). In the event of analysis I examined the routine comments made by individual students about the images they produced to see how they described themselves in relation to the places they inhabit. I juxtaposed students' representations with my understanding of the images which led to the formation of categories and themes. While doing this I was conscious of the fact that "content analysis alone is seldom able to support statements about the significance, effects, or interpreted meaning of a domain of representations" (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001, p. 13). Two themes, spaces of teaching and learning, and Identity emerged from the two categories that were formed. This is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 *Number of photos from each school and extracted categories*

School Type	No. of participants	No. of photos	Category
School #1 (Urban)	10	18	Pedagogy/Relationship
School # 2 (Urban)	10	15	Relationship/feeling of self
School # 3 (Rural)	10	23	Architecture/pedagogy
School # 4 (Urban)	10	21	Relationship/pedagogy
School # 5 (Rural)	10	27	Relationship/feeling of self
Total	50	104	2

The two themes, spaces of teaching and learning and identity that emerged were not taken as representations of absolute reality but as pieces of information for further insight and debates about what students in this research site feel generally about schooling. The results are reported with extracts from students' voices using school numbers from which they emerged.

Results

Spaces of teaching and learning

The study sought to explore institutional practices and students' experiences of schooling through an auto-driven elicitation approach. These two variables are dialectically related as instructional practices influence students' experiences and vice versa. The findings indicated that the school place characteristics for example, class size was interconnected with pedagogy and teacher-student relations. This supported findings from previous research that class size differences alter classroom processes and the relationships between teachers and students (Achilles, 1999; Anderson, 2000; Finn, Pannozzo, & Achilles, 2003).

Figure 1 *Crowded Classroom*

For example, in this study it was found in School #1 and School # 4, which were both urban schools, that there was on average 63 students jammed into a classroom space under the

tutelage of one teacher. Due to the large class size, much of what goes on in this learning space is dictated by the teaching staff with limited opportunity for student engagement and interaction. Students' discussions of their photos indicated that they would love to be working in groups and be more engaged but no such opportunity exists in these classrooms for them to do so.

See how large this class looks...if you are not sitting there you don't know, I think that is why our teacher never puts us in groups (School # 4)... we only do work on our own...sometimes you talk to the person sitting beside you but you must be careful not to talk loud, you can get into trouble with the teacher... (School # 1).

Here the students' articulation of their dissatisfaction with the large class and how they were taught was evident. For these students being in groups or getting assistance from peers is a valued endeavor, yet being aware of the consequences of such engagement without authorization from teachers limited their interaction with peers. Sitting in pairs in dual desks seems to offer some form of opportunity for students to collaborate with peers sitting next to them but this is not allowed. This is an indication that classroom pedagogy is unidirectional and students get frustrated and agitated for prolonged teacher talks, which to them, do not convey meaning.

One thing annoys me when it is hot like that and the teacher keeps talking and talking, I don't even get it (School # 1).

The classroom conditions and the teachers' instructional relationship with the students demonstrated that the teachers place premium on individual achievement rather than on collective activity. This portrays the notion that students are in competition with each other, and to justify their continual existence in this classroom place, they learn teacher handed information individually; to be able to justify knowledge retention in response to tests and evaluations. This practice carries with it expelling tendencies, particularly for students who are not very competitive.

Whilst students' responses were focused on their personal experiences they were also aware of the difficulties their teachers face as a result of the large class sizes.

...hmm, he is already suffering from this big class (School # 4). It is difficult to learn when the room is hot... teachers shout at you when you talk... We are too many all we do is to obey the teacher (School # 1).

This aspect of the classroom dimension influences the pedagogical practice traditions of teachers leading them to adopt adult-run pedagogy which corresponds to the theoretical notion that learning is a process of transmission from experts to novices. Rogoff, Matusov and White (1996) have argued that learning is a "process of transformation of participation in which both adults and children contribute to and direct shared endeavours" (p. 389). Without group participation it would be difficult for students and teachers to engage in this collaborative endeavour. I argue that this practice of transmission pedagogy as experienced by these students is on the one hand due to the large class and on the other hand is an inherited education model from colonialism which most adult Ghanaians and teachers have experienced. This is in sharp contrast to Ghanaian traditional education system and daily living which value shared endeavours (Agbenyega, 2005). This is not to suggest that learning does not occur in the classroom places which these students inhabit; learning does occur but the important issue is that different instructional models involve different relations of learners with their peers and teachers and to the information being learnt. This also determines how

knowledge acquired in school is used in socio-cultural activities in later life (Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996).

Furthermore, the auto-driven photo elicitation (Clark, 1999), lead the way for identification, conversations and sharing about classroom conditions that trigger students' discomfort and misbehavior.

It feels too hot to be in this classroom...we don't even have electric fan. You are talking about fan? Our school doesn't have power...fan works on power...When is our school also going to get this power? ...I like morning lessons but I don't like it when it is hot.I cannot concentrate... see they all look serious as if they are learning something... they fear the teacher that is why (School # 1). The government is cheating us...how?... if you see my friend's school they have everything and it is a nice place to learn. But that is a private school and you cannot pay the fees...maybe your friend's father is rich... Yes... do not compare yourself. All fingers are not the same... but all students must be treated equally (School # 1, 2 & 4).

These comments from students are consistent with studies which suggest that the quality of the physical environment, for example, building conditions significantly affect how well students learn and what they achieve (Earthman, 2004). Imagine these students in hot conditions, how long can they concentrate for? As good school architecture and comfortable places enhance teacher-student collaborations and teaching and learning (Siegel, 1999) there is no doubt that the students in these school settings are experiencing estrange relationships and didactic teaching. Siegel (1999) emphasizes that "the arrangement of space has immediate and far reaching consequences for teacher's ability to effectively and efficiently accomplish daily activities, the formation of social and professional relationships, and the sharing of information and knowledge" (p.4). The comments students made about their photos were thus very useful in that they provided opportunity to feel in real terms how school places act on students and teacher pedagogical behaviors.

Identity

It is argued that children's environments have an effect on their cognitive and behavioral development and on childhood vulnerability (Ellis, 2005). I saw the evidence of this through the nature of student engagement and the practice traditions in their schools' places which they (students) captured in their photos. These photos emphasized the notion that schools and classrooms are not just places students inhabit but also spaces that shape and describe individual identity and emotions.

In this study I found that the school's architectural place and teachers as service providers in these places played a significant role in this identity construction. Analysing the students' perspectives in relation to the practice traditions of the schools I was confronted with the images and students' discussion of the dominant school practices, reproduction of power and marginalization which construct for them subordinate identity forms. Generally, the classroom place should be a source of security, meaning, belonging where students can form positive identities. This can only happen when meaningful relationships are made possible by bonds students develop with school practice traditions.

In this study, instead of the lived relationship connecting students and school places together and enabling them to define themselves positively the disconnection between students and their school and formation of estranged communities were evident.

Figure 2 *Teacher Wielding Power through Caning*

Ellis (2005) argues that the identity of a place itself also contributes to its meaning for inhabitants. The demands placed on teachers due to the large class size were enormous and to manage their classes effectively they resort to wielding of illegitimate powers and aversive approaches, for example, caning to tame and control students. Mutually respectful student–teacher relationship is critical for good teaching and learning but I perceived its difficulty for a teacher dealing with a class of 63 students to implement strategies that value all students.

You can't say anything...we are packed like objects and the teachers hit us any how (School # 5). They don't care if you are with your friends....I feel shy and annoyed when that teacher treats me like a child (School #1)...It hurts when we are treated like bad people (School #3)... That particular teacher Miss...behaves like we are her children...I don't even know how we can make her stop this. The control is too much. It makes me dislike school...some of my friend too said the same thing...last time (School # 5).

Students develop identity through interactions with the practice traditions of their school spaces. The findings in this study suggests that the traditional power relationships, domination and control which teachers exercised through their pedagogical techniques and physical punishments carve negative identities for students. It exemplifies teacher attitudes and traditional construction of students as objects of control. By examining individual comments about their photographs there is evidence of detachment of students from teachers and the uncomfortable classroom situations under which they learn. This supports the view that the identity of a place is largely defined by its contents and the extent to which the contents support desirable human activities and experiences (Keep, 2002).

Researchers have argued that the physical conditions of teaching spaces including seating, furnishings, spatial density, privacy, noise and acoustics, climate and thermal control, air quality and windowless classrooms, impinge on students' attitudes to school, engagement, achievement, attendance and general wellbeing (Earthman, 2004; Higgins et al., 2005; Keep, 2002; Lackney & Jacobs, 2004). Being in a good school place is important for these students as good school places enhance positive identity formation. The labels on schools determine the type of teachers they attract and retain. For the children in this study their learning spaces mirror spaces for disempowerment and reproduction of class and inequality.

Figure 3 *Classroom under Trees*

This is our classroom...a tree classroom...other students are learning in a building classroom...when it rains the school close...we have to go home (School # 5). If it rains for three days, no school for three days. Other students will do better than us because they learn more (School # 5). The government always say this school doesn't do well...It is not our fault, teachers don't want to come here to teach us...we have two volunteer teachers now...when they go we wait for another one (School # 3). It is not good to learn like this... sometimes when we see somebody passing bye we look at them... I don't understand some children are treated like this (School # 5)

These comments suggest that school places and how teachers organize them can enlighten students much about adult expectations and power structures (McGregor, 2004). Arguably, the identity constructed for students learning in this space, is that of vulnerability, forgotten or second rated citizens. The conditions of the schools constantly reminded these students about their poor family backgrounds and as people who do not qualify to attend good schools. The identity of an unproductive or failing school invariably generates negative emotions and uncertainty in students which affect their confidence to learn. In addition, they have reduced capacity to compete with other students from well endowed schools for entry into post secondary institutions. This implies that class reproduction and powerlessness among students will continue to exist as long as large disparities exist in the education system with regards to disparate school practice traditions and distribution of resources. I implied from this research that increased access to appropriate school resources and good practices may increase positive student identity formation. If access to permanent teachers and other school resources depend on one's social class and economic standing then through education we continue to widen class boundaries and creating disparate identity forms.

Reflections

Teachers occupy a very important role as parents and facilitators of knowledge. In this regard they need to motivate all students in a systematic and organized way by involving students in group activities. It is difficult for teachers to engage all students and to meet individual needs in large classes. Large class sizes can be spaces for increased diversity in student population and fertile spaces for misbehavior. When student diversity and misbehavior is not well managed it can degenerate into chaotic classroom experiences and affect teaching quality.

Dividing students into cooperative work groups with learning support from teachers and volunteers is one way forward to implementing effective teaching strategies in large classes (Blachford, Galton, Kutnick, & Baines, 2005). This can be organized in or outside the classroom. Cooperative group work promises to minimize disruptive behavior and increase student engagement with peers and teachers. Students work together being responsible for one another's learning and their own (Slavin, 1991). They improve their communication and collaborative skills as well as develop relationship between students of diverse cultural and ability groups. The teacher also gets sufficient time to visit groups more frequently than attempting to deal with individuals (Kowalski & Rizzo, 1996).

Organizing students into effective learning groups will reduce oppressive pedagogy in the classroom and lead to transformational learning (Freire, 1973). Keddie and Churchill (2005) noted that authoritative school cultures constrain, frustrate and disengage students from schooling. Education as the practice of domination fuels the credulity of students and shape them to conform to existing orthodoxies and oppression (Freire, 1973; McKenzie, 2003), which is counterproductive to knowledge construction and inclusion. To increase understanding of educational experiences of marginalized students we must shift our research methodologies from dominant approaches that look 'tidy' and as the only way to locate reality. Providing digital cameras to the students in this research gave that openness to balance the power between me and the students involved so that they can come out with how they are represented in schooling in Ghana. As students interrogated the research field and the images they have produced they seemed to talk about many things which in traditional commonsense were messy and which seemed to be wavering in my approach to discover the real purpose of the research. Yet the research is for the students, and their voices count the most because the intension is to awaken in them the spirit to lead the emancipation struggle against unfair treatment and marginalisation in school.

Warren (2005) states that "the process of making a photograph probably tells us more about the photographer than what he/she has chosen to photograph given that the particular visual cultures they are bound up with will shape their choice of subject within the frame and what they choose to leave out"(p. 864). The engagement with this visual study produced a refreshing flood of critical thinking disrupting the dominant paradigms; but I do not regard the photographs as necessarily representations of empirical truth (Prosser & Loxley, 2007). To me, the photographs constitute a process of expanding on questions that trouble my mind regarding what amount to good practice for inclusion. I derive great satisfaction from this research because I *counted the students in* which gave them the agency to communicate dimensions of their school lives and to reveal inequalities and overwhelming teacher control that transforms them into mechanistic receiving objects. This means that students need a repositioning as valued members of their school places and teachers need to adopt pedagogy of listening (Clark & Moss, 2005), because a learning place where both students and teachers exist in dialogical relationship seeking knowledge jointly through mutual respect may be a positive step towards inclusion and reduction in power relations and marginalization.

Conclusion

This study focused on the potential use of auto-driven photo elicitation in uncovering the experiences of some students in a developing country. Ghana's effort in providing educational access to all children is a valued endeavour. Yet inclusive education does not work on one front. Resource mobilisation and equitable distribution as well as teacher training that recognizes and legitimizes student positive identity are indispensable constituents of inclusion. The conceptual framework sufficiently attests to the linkages of

student identity, pedagogy and the goods/services available in the school places. As I reflected on the research, approach I discovered that if I had used phenomenon auto-driven photo elicitation with other qualitative methodologies such as, observation, and interviews with teachers and policy makers, I would have illuminated dynamics and further insights and produced a flexible, contrastive and reflexive rhetoric (Prosser, 2007). In conclusion, a future study to examine the visual culture of schools should endeavour to blend visual approaches with other qualitative strategies.

REFERENCES

- Achilles, C. M. (1999). *Let's put kids first, finally: Getting class size right*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Adams P.C., Hoelscher S., & Till, K.E. (2001). Place in context: Rethinking humanistic geographies. In P.C. Adams, S. Hoelscher, & K.E. Till (Eds.), *Textures of place: Exploring humanistic geographies* (pp. xiii–xxxiii). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Agbenyega, J. S. (2005). *An investigation into the barriers and facilitators of inclusive education in Ghana: a policy reform study*. Monash University, Clayton.
- Aitken, S.C. (1994). *Putting children in their place*. Washington, DC: Association of American Geographers.
- Anderson, L. W. (2000). Why should reduced class size lead to increased student achievement? In M. C. Wang and J. D. Finn (Eds.) *How small classes help teachers do their best*. Philadelphia: Temple University Center for Research in Human Development.
- Ashcroft, B. (2001). *Post-colonial transformation*. New York: Routledge.
- Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., & Brown, P. (2005). Teachers' and pupils' behavior in large and small classes: a systematic observation study of pupils aged 10/11 years. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97 (3), 454-467
- Brey, P. (1998). Space-shaping technologies and the geographical disembedding of place. In A. Light and J.M. Smith (Eds.), *Philosophy and geography III: Philosophies of place* (pp. 239–263). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Brown, T., & Jones, L. (Eds.). (2001). *Action research and postmodernism: Congruence and critique*. Buckingham, Philadelphia Open University Press.
- Clark, C. D. (1999). The auto-driven interview: a photographic viewfinder into children's experiences. *Visual Sociology*, 14, 39-50.
- Clark-Ibanez, M. (2007). Sociology of childhood and photo elicitation interviews. In G. C. Stanczak (Ed.), *Visual research methods* (pp. 167-196). London: Sage.
- Clark, A. & Moss, P. (2005). *Spaces to Play: More listening to young children using the mosaic approach*, London: National Children's Bureau
- Crang, M. (1998). *Cultural geography*. New York: Routledge.
- Dahlberg, G., & Moss, P. (Eds.). (2005). *Ethics and politics in early childhood education*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (1999). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Post-modern perspectives*. Philadelphia: Falmer Press.
- Deppeler, J., Moss, J., & Agbenyega, J. S. (2008). The ethical dilemma of working the visual and digital across space. In J. Moss (Ed.), *Researching education visually, digitally and spatially* (pp. 209-227). Amsterdam: Sense Publications.
- Earthman, G. I. (2004). *Prioritization of 31 criteria for school building adequacy: American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Maryland*. Accessed online on 10/04/08 at <<http://www.aclu-md.org/aTop%20Issues/Education%20Reform/EarthmanFinal10504.pdf>>.
- Eder, D., & Fingerson, L. (2001). Interviewing children and adolescents. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research* (pp. 181-201). California: Thousand Oaks.
- Ellis, J. (2005). Place and identity for children in classrooms and schools, *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 3 (2), pp. 58-73.
- Fetherston, T. (2008). Visual culture in the classroom. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 33(3), 17-30.
- Finn, J. D., Pannozzo, G.M., & Achilles, C.M. (2003). The "why's" of class size: Student behavior in small classes. *Review of Educational Research*, 73(3), 321-368.

- Freire, P. (1973). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Gottschalk, L. A. (1995). *Content analysis of verbal behavior: New findings and clinical applications*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc
- Government of Ghana. (2007). *Ghana 2008 budget statement to parliament*. Accra. Government Publications.
- Higgins, S., Hall, E., Wall, K., Woolner, P., & McCaughey, P. (2005). *The impact of school environments: A literature review*. The Centre for Learning and Teaching, School of Education, Communication and Language Science, University of Newcastle. Accessed online on 10/04/08 at <<http://www.cfbt.com/PDF/91085.pdf>>.
- Holsti, O. R. (1969). *Content analysis for the social sciences and humanities*. Reading, Mass.
- James, A., Jenks, C., & Prout, A. (1998). *Theorizing childhood*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Jenks, C. (1996). *Childhood*. London: Routledge.
- Keddie, A., & Churchill, R. (2005). Teacher-student relationships metadata. In D. Pendergast & N. Bahr (Eds.), *Teaching middle years: rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (pp. 211-225). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Keep, G. (2002). Buildings that teach, *The Educational Facilities Planner*, 37 (2). Accessed online on 16/03/08 at <<http://sbw.cefpifoundation.org/pdf/BuildingsTeach.pdf>>.
- Kowalski, E. M., & Rizzo, T. L. (1996). Factors influencing preservice student attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly [APAQ]*, 13(2), 180-196.
- Lackney, J. A., & Jacobs, P. J. (2002). *Teachers as placemakers: Investigating teachers' use of the physical learning environment in instructional design*. US Department of Education, Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) ED463645, 2002. Accessed online on 10/04/08 <<http://schoolstudio.engr.wisc.edu>>.
- Law, J. (2006). Making a mess with method. In W. Outhwaite & T. P (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of social science methodology* (pp. 595-606). London: Sage.
- McGregor, J (2004). Spatiality and the place of the material in schools, *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 12(3), pp. 347–372.
- McKenzie, J. (2003). Pedagogy does matter! *The Educational Technology Journal* 13(1), 1-6.
- Ministry of Education Science and Sports. (2007). *Report on Basic Statistics and Planning Parameters for Basic Education in Ghana 2006/2007 academic year*. Accra: Government Publications.
- Packard, J. (2008). 'I'm gonna show you what it's really like out here': the power and limitation of participatory visual methods. *Visual Studies*, 23(1), 63-77.
- Pink, S. (2007). *Doing visual ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Prosser, J., & Loxley, A. (2007). Enhancing the contribution of visual methods to inclusive education. *Journal of Research in Special Education*, 7(1), 55-67.
- Prosser, J. (2007). Visual methods and the visual culture of schools. *Visual Studies*, 22(1), 13-30.
- Relph, E.C. (1993). Modernity and the reclamation of place. In D. Seamon (Ed.), *Dwelling, seeing, and designing: Toward a phenomenological ecology* (pp. 25–40). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. G. (2005). *Analysing media messages using quantitative content analysis in research*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Rogoff, B., Matusov, E., & White, C. (1996). Models of learning in a community of learners. In D. R. Olson & N. Torrance (Eds.), *Handbook of education and human development: New models of learning, teaching, and schooling*. London: Basil Blackwell.
- Siegel, J. (1999). Architecture California, vol. 20, no. 1. In J. McGregor, 2004, 'Editorial', *Forum*, 46, (1), p.2.
- Slavin, R. E. (1991). *Student team learning: A Practical guide to cooperative learning* (3rd ed.). National Education Association Washington DC.

- Smith, J. M., Light, A., & Roberts, D. (1998). Introduction: Philosophies and geographies of place. In A. Light & J. M. Smith (Eds.), *Philosophy and geography III: Philosophies of place* (pp. 1–13). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Thomson, P., & Gunter, H. (2007). The methodology of students-as-researchers: valuing and using experience and expertise to develop methods. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28(3), 327-342.
- Van Leeuwen, T & Jewitt, C. (2001). *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Warren, S. (2005). Photography and voice in critical qualitative management research, *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 18 (6), pp.861-882.
- Weber, R. P. (1990). *Basic content analysis, second edition*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.