

Making social research more visual and more public

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This presentation focuses on the use of photography and video as a means of following the lives and educational trajectories of thirty-six children growing up in urban, poor and working-class, racially diverse and immigrant communities in the northeastern U.S. city of Worcester, MA., USA. The children were given cameras to represent their everyday family, school and community lives at ages 10, 12, 16 and 18. At each point in time, they were interviewed individually and in small groups about their pictures, what the photos were meant to convey, why they took them, what pictures they wished they had taken but couldn't, and finally which pictures they wanted to make public that would best represent who they are and "what matters most" in their lives.

My presentation identifies advancements in theory building that I offer to enrich the tradition of "giving kids cameras" research that has burgeoned in scientific research over the last twenty-five years (Clark-Ibanez 2004; Clark 1999; Cook and Hess 2007; Kaplan 2013; Luttrell & Chalfen 2010; Mitchell 2011; Orellana 1999; Prosser and Burke 2007; Thompson 2008; Tinkler 2008; Wagner 1999; Yates 2010;).

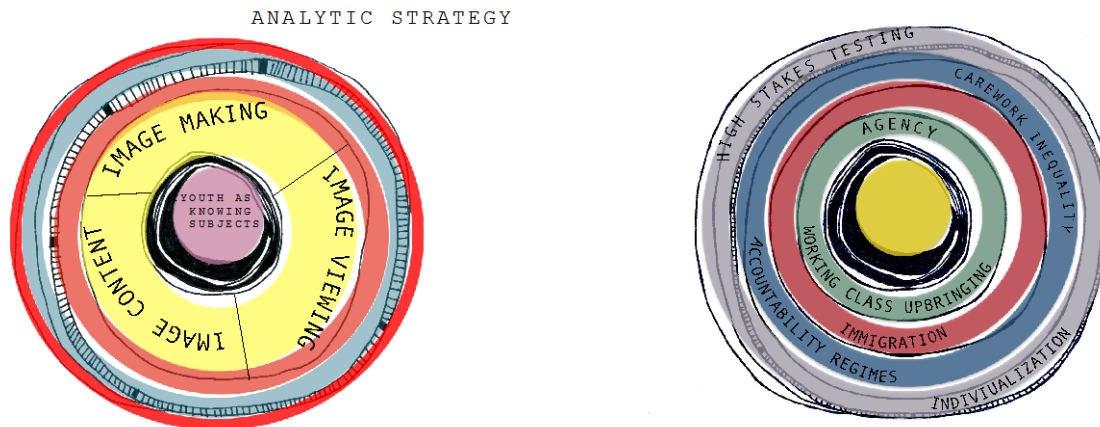


I discuss a practice of visual methodology and thinking I have developed called *collaborative seeing* (Luttrell 2010; Luttrell et. al 2011; Luttrell et al. 2012) that:

1) resists any single orientation to analyzing young people's image making, whether as an aesthetic experience, socio-cultural activity, or cognitive-developmental process, to name three common perspectives (Sharples et al. 2003). As an interpretive process, collaborative seeing follows the young people's lead and seeks to uncover and focus on the connections they see between their own and each other's images in different contexts and over time, generating both individual and collective insights. Through on-going dialogues with and among the young people and then other viewers, including teachers and teachers-in training, I use the collaborative seeing process as a means to draw attention to the contingencies of seeing; that we are positioned to see and be seen in multiple ways through multiple eyes.

2) rests upon and owes to Foucault's interlocking theories of discourse, knowledge, and power. Images operate within and produce truth regimes; they prescribe and abide by certain rules and conventions that need to be examined and challenged as part of the collaborative seeing process.

3) recognizes that the "relation between what we see and what we know is never settled," as John Berger cautions (1972:7) and thus assumes both a sense of curiosity for and skepticism about what we can claim to know about young people's selves and identities through their photographs and videos.

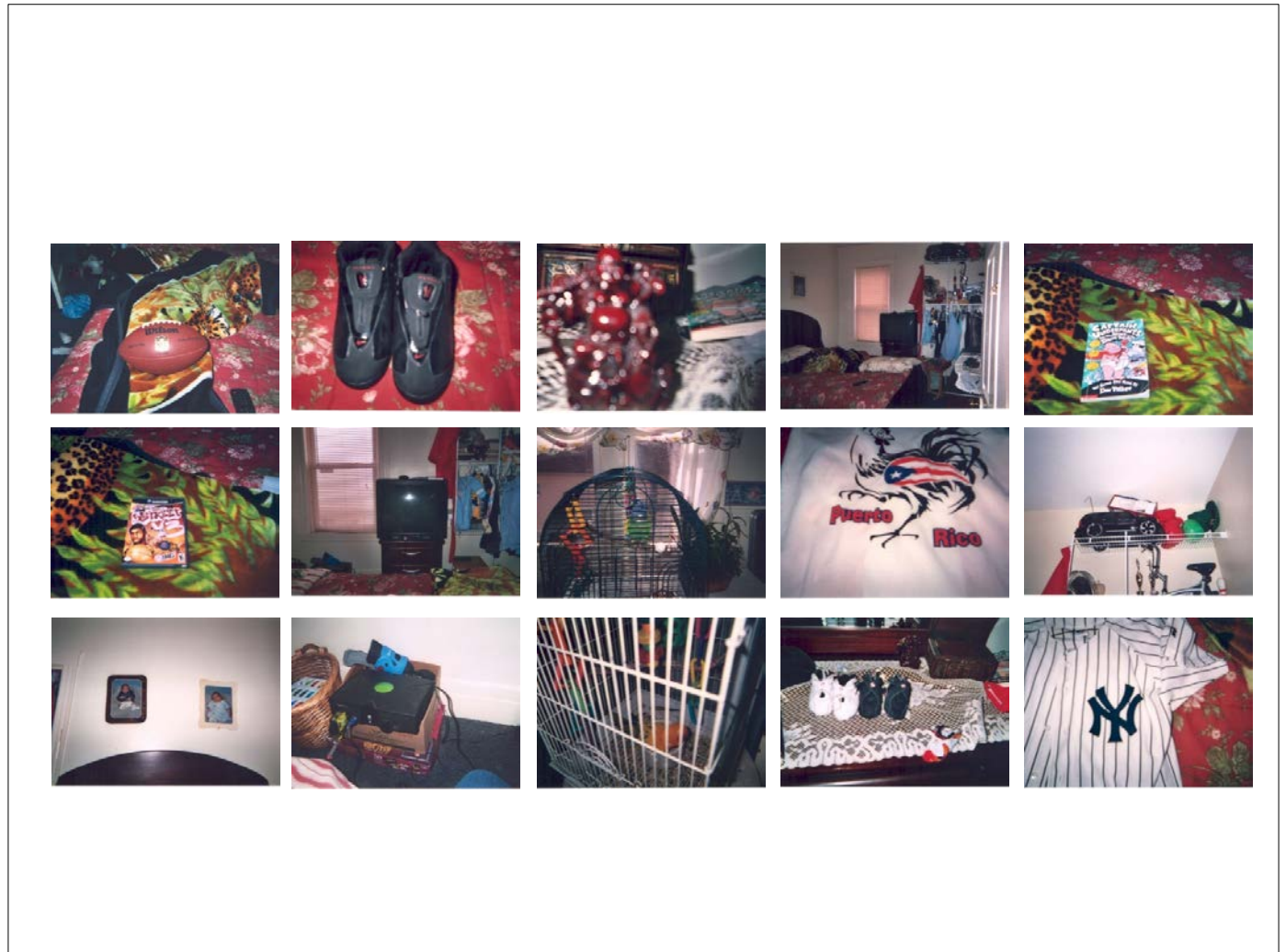


My analytic approach positions the young people as knowing subjects who produce and interpret their own and each other's images, and who are treated as reliable witnesses of their own experiences. The over 2,000 photographs; sixty-five hours of audio and videotaped individual and group interviews of the young people talking about their images; VoiceThreads (online annotated visual narratives made by participants at age 16 and 18); and a subset of youth-made videos of everyday life are analyzed in terms of the conditions of their making; viewing and content.

I will demonstrate the analysis utilizing material from the audio-visual "counter-archive" that makes visible how the young people show and read signs of care and express multiple identities over time. A key finding of the project is that the young people acknowledge the demands upon them and their desires to be a "caring" and "cared for" child, a dimension of self and human-ness that has been silenced in contemporary debate about educational standards and reform (Luttrell 2012, 2013). They express a care consciousness that is neglected, if not denied by the organization of schooling and its over-emphasis on individualization, competition and standardization.

I conclude by discussing the implications of this approach for educational researchers and for urban educational policy and practice. There is on-going concern among educators about how to resist the grip of deficit thinking that pervades educational discourse (Valenica 2010). This research places young people's own images, ideas and values about care and justice into the public realm as a way to build a more democratic imaginary of diverse, working-class childhoods and personhood and to stir public debate about the purpose of schooling in a diverse democracy.

Example of material from counter-archive



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