

Education Review

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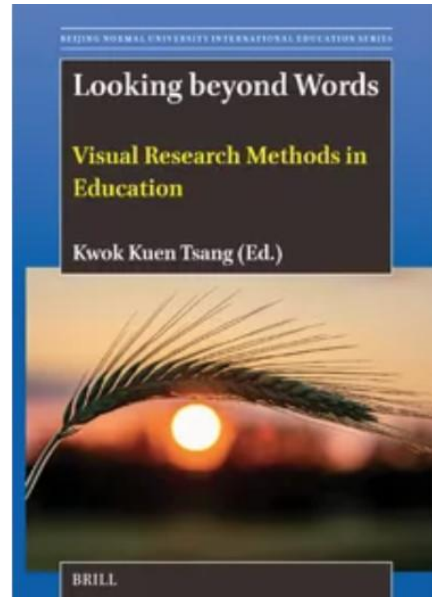
Tsang, K. K. (Ed.) (2024). *Looking beyond words: Visual research methods in education*. Brill.

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Although visual research methods have been available in such disciplines as the social sciences and health sciences for quite some time, their use in education has not been as widespread. Because we are now surrounded by all kinds of visual technologies by way of social media and our smartphones, I was eager to find out from this book if perhaps these tools have fallen into favor in education research. The explorations of this book demonstrated that, at least with these researchers, the power of visual technologies is indeed being harnessed in areas that are difficult to interpret using traditional narrative research methods alone. In the editing of this book, Dr. Kwok Kuen Tsang compiled 10 papers, seven of which were previously published, to showcase how a variety of visual technologies were useful to education researchers and practitioners in gaining deeper insights into educational problems in a variety of settings.



In the first chapter, Helen Hanna introduced a theme echoed throughout the book: how visual research methods, in comparison with narrative-based methods, empower participants and decenter adult or researcher perspectives. For example, through a qualitative research review involving the use of photography in research with primary or secondary education students in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Oceania, Hanna asks important questions: (1) What is the motivation for using photographic research methods? To represent respondents, to foster participation, or to encourage participant emancipation? and (2) How are photos introduced? Are they found or research developed, or are they participant-generated? Hanna reminds us that using photographs has the potential to include young people as active participants in the research process and to strengthen their voice and agency about issues of importance to them.

These considerations were further developed in the second chapter. Jayne White focused on the use of visual methods in early childhood education to decenter adult ways

of seeing the world using **visual surplus**. As described in Bakhtin's (1990) philosophical work, the objective of visual surplus is to strive to see *with* another and focus on the *process* of seeing more than the product. Doing so will lead to more expansive insights. White illustrated visual surplus in a case where classroom interactions were captured by video from three different perspectives: the teacher's, the student's and a 360-degree view of their classroom. All three videos are discussed, and teachers' interpretations of what was happening with toddlers in the classroom were broadened. This expanded insight thus demonstrates the importance of the agency of two-year-olds as research partners in their educational experiences. Later, in the fifth chapter, Zhaolin Zhou (pp. 104-117) echoed similar thoughts, advocating for the continued use of classroom video beyond its roots from as early as the 1950s with Flanders interaction analysis (1965), and using today's advanced video and AI technologies to enhance evidence-based research to improve classroom teaching.

Visual ethnography requires an understanding that meaning is co-constructed between research participant and researcher (Charmaz, 2015). In the third chapter, Ong focused on the use of visual ethnographic methods in a larger multimethodological study in various early childhood centers in Singapore, including Reggio-Emilia inspired centers that give children free reign of their imagination through encouragement and access to materials. By relying on Facebook posts or other social media for visual representations of children as active participants in learning, children and teachers involved in activity, and children, teachers, and parents participating in an activity or event, the researcher was able to elicit thematic codes, such as "Discovery of the World," "Multiple Intelligences," or "Numeracy skills." The study, especially for the Reggio-Emilia settings, demonstrated that young children "can use the graphic and expressive languages of drawing, painting, collage, and construction to record their ideas, observations, reflections, memories to further explore their understanding" (p. 76). Consequently, social media and new technologies can transform the way we view children's social realities through digital experiences and their creative arts.

Objective hermeneutics is a systematic, qualitative research method (Oevermann, 1995, 2014) that focuses on reconstructing the latent (implicit) structures of meaning within a text or case by analyzing sequences of data. In the fourth chapter, Boris Zizek and Hendrik-Zoltán Andermann applied objective hermeneutics to a website for adolescents helping each other anonymously with social problems and other issues associated with digital media, such as sexting. The authors' analysis revealed a contradiction between the latent meaning and the intentions of the website. The authors concluded that reconstructing latent meaning structures of websites is important because of their considerable socialization effect among adolescents.

Photo elicitation is a visual, participatory approach to the interpretation of participant-created or curated images. From its roots in visual sociology, Gary Becker (1974) established photographs "as valuable empirical data with subjectivity comparable to other data sources" (Li, et al., p. 123). In the sixth chapter, Guanyu Li, Xiaoyu Wang, et al. reviewed its use in studies involving such topics as (1) international and American undergraduates' perspectives on social engagement in online versus face-to-face learning, (2) children's understanding of matters pertaining to their lives, (3) learning processes and outcomes of students in business and management education, and (4) improving retention of underrepresented STEM students. When structured carefully, photo

elicitation provides an engaging way to gain nuanced insider perspectives that are otherwise difficult to elicit. “Images discreetly capture authentic classroom and school realities while empowering children and teachers through personal visual representations meaningful to them.” (Li et al., p. 132)

Photovoice is a “participatory action research method whereby participants identify, represent, and enhance their lives and communities through photographic techniques” (Wang, 1999). The seventh, eighth, and ninth chapters of the book are devoted to its use as a tool for (1) critical reflection in communities of practice, for teachers’ professional identity development through interaction with colleagues, and photo sharing (To, 2020); (2) mediating and adjusting preservice teachers’ perceptions of rural teaching and culturally responsive pedagogy through fieldwork in Yunnan, China, schools (Miao et al., 2020); and (3) a methodological, pedagogical, and assessment tool for Chinese graduate students to examine their insights into the impacts of globalization in Helongjiang Province, Northeast China (Wang, 2020).

In the 10th chapter, Tsang completed the overall narrative of the volume by describing two approaches to photovoice and offering a third. The critical approach seeks to raise people’s awareness of ideological control over their lives and to foster change. The phenomenological approach elicits meanings from photographs and encourages participants to “reflect, interpret, and represent the phenomenon being studied.” (p. 197). The third analytic strategy proposed by Tsang is a four-stage approach to overcome the limitations of both critical and phenomenological approaches: (1) photo analysis based on the researcher’s interpretation, (2) photo analysis based on participants’ interpretations, (3) a cross-comparison of both interpretations, and (4) theorization of relationships between themes developed during cross-comparison.

Throughout the book, there was an underlying acknowledgment of the importance of empowering research participants as fully-fledged human beings with the capacity to express themselves and not as “human becomings” (James & James, 2004) who are assumed to be incapable of representing themselves to the world. All the participants in the studies represented in this book were developing in their lives or careers and might normally be spoken *about* rather than spoken *with* under traditional research norms. This collection of explorations reflected a different balance between the researcher and those researched when visual research methods were introduced.

This exploration of several admittedly small studies contributes to a small and hopefully growing foundational body of literature on visual research methods in education. The authors documented the insights that various visual research methods brought to their research. They also acknowledged many challenges, including the amount of time and funding required for high-quality studies. Most important, they offered replicable examples of how different types of study using visual research methods can be developed and for what purpose. Despite a few instances of typographical or other mechanical errors, the authors showed how visual and narrative data can complement each other in achieving more expansive views on the lived experiences of all participants that leads to better-informed research.

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Original citations for seven of the book’s chapters

- Chapter 1: Hanna, H. (2020). Photography as a research method with learners in compulsory education: A research review. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 2(1), 11-34. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-00201003>
- Chapter 3: Ong, P. A. I. (2020). Visual research methods: Qualifying and quantifying the visual. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 2(1), 35-53. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-00201004>
- Chapter 4: Zizek, B., & Andermann, H.-Z. (2020). Analysis of youth-oriented websites: An introduction to the qualitative image-analytical methods of objective hermeneutics. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 2(1), 54-76. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-00201005>
- Chapter 7: To, H. K. (2020). Photovoice as a tool for critical reflection in communities of practice for teachers’ professional identity development. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 2(1), 77-88. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-00201006>

Chapter 8: Miao, P., Wei, J., & Chang, C. (2020). Exploring preservice teachers' perception on rural teaching and education through the mediation of photovoice. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 2(1), 89-111.

<https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-00201007>

Chapter 9: Wang, Ting. (2020). Using photovoice as methodology, pedagogy and assessment tool in education: Graduate students' experiences and reflections. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 2(1), 112-135. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-00201008>

Chapter 10: Tsang, K. K. (2020). Photovoice data analysis: Critical approach, phenomenological approach, and beyond. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 2(1), 136-152. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-00201009>

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About the Reviewer



Elsie Szecsy is emerita research professional at Arizona State University, where her research interests were on intersections between teaching, learning, and leadership, with institutional, organizational, and instructional arrangements in linguistically and culturally diverse education settings. She was involved in several documentation research projects in metro New York and metro Phoenix, Arizona, that aimed to improve Latino representation among high school and college graduates and among faculty and administrators in K-12 and higher education. Her research interests have since expanded to

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