Faculty of Health and Social Science School of Nursing and Midwifery NAM 13 Qualitative Research

Visual Methods in Research

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Images above, L to R: Charles Darwin Notebook; L. King “Collages in Evaluation”; T. Lackey Midwifery research

Introductions and agenda setting

• Your aims and expectations for this session?
• What kinds of research do you/might you undertake?
• My aims: to offer a **practical** introduction to some potential uses of hands-on visual methods for:
  – exploring ideas and planning research projects
  – gathering qualitative research data:
    – *organising, analysing and communicating your results*
• Theoretical issues and approaches addressed in other sessions apply equally to visual methods.
Sketchnotes from IVCM Conference by Dr Makayla Lewis
http://makaylalewis.co.uk/2015/09/18/sketchnotes-4th-international-visual-methods-conference-2015/

See also http://www.interactivecultures.org/2015/10/international-visual-methods-conference-2015/
‘Graphic Medicine’
http://www.graphicmedicine.org/

• Al-Jawad M. Comics are Research: Graphic Narratives as a New Way of Seeing Clinical Practice. Journal of Medical Humanities. February 2013.  

• PhD as comic book

• http://spinweaveandcut.com/
Before we start: Text mapping

• A useful way to ‘see’ the structure of any text
• Photocopy the article and join the pages into a continuous scroll – on wall or floor
• Working alone or in a group, mark headings, key points as you read; outline sections and subsections; add doodles or notes to help you remember what each bit is about – make the structure visible!
Some background

• LearnHigher Centre of Excellence (funded 2005-2010) was a consortium of 16 universities researching different aspects of learning development and sharing resources [http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/](http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/). Now part of the national Association for Learning Development in HE.

• University of Brighton led the Visual Practices area:
  – to improve understanding of the visual knowledge and skills required in different disciplines and how these are taught and assessed
  – to develop resources for students and staff

• The legacy website is at [http://www.brighton.ac.uk/visuallearning](http://www.brighton.ac.uk/visuallearning) includes sections on
  – Visual research methods – links to resources
  – Drawing - downloadable Drawing to Learn booklets in different subject areas – also useful for research
Key lessons from funded projects

- Visually representing abstract concepts or relationships helps **understanding** (at any level, including doctoral and post-doctoral)

- Physical making - eg drawing, tracing, copying, collage - helps **engagement & memory**

- Keeping the bigger picture in view helps us **deal with complex information**

- Constructing visual representations within a research context can trigger **richer more productive discussions**
Drawing & collage as tools for learning & research

• Recording & description
• Representing processes (eg through diagrams)
• Thinking about ideas and visualising abstract concepts
• Accessing and reflecting on ‘hard to verbalise’ experiences –
Activity 1. Visualising concepts

• *In pairs*: Draw quick pictures/diagrams to show to each other (or as if to a colleague, patient, student or friend) what you mean by **health** *(2 minutes)*

• In small groups, compare your drawings and discuss differences and similarities in their interpretation of this concept *(5 minutes)*

• How might you use (a longer version of) this kind of activity in your own research?
“Perceptions of Illness” Big Draw staff workshop, School of Health Professions
“it showed [us] that drawing depicts concepts in a very emotionally raw way, and that people are accessing their thoughts and feelings via quite a different route than when verbalizing... iterative drawing exercises allowed us to push through one-dimensional stereotypes of particular illnesses or conditions into a more multi-faceted understanding of the relationship between illness, internal and external perceptions of illness, treatment, aftercare and identity....” (participant feedback)
Rich Picture Analysis

Originally developed as part of Peter Checkland’s Soft Systems Methodology for gathering information about a complex situation. (Checkland and Scholes, 1990).

“The idea of using drawings or pictures to think about issues is common to several problem solving or creative thinking methods (including therapy) because our intuitive consciousness communicates more easily in impressions and symbols than in words.

Drawings can both evoke and record insight into a situation, and different visualization techniques such as visual brainstorming, imagery manipulation and creative dreaming have been developed emphasizing one of these two purposes over the other (Garfield, 1976; McKim, 1980; Shone, 1984; Parker, 1990).”

http://systems.open.ac.uk/materials/t552/pages/rich/richAppendix.html
Activity 2: Mindmapping

• *Individually:* Draw a quick mind-map of questions you might pose as part of your (actual or potential) research project *(4 minutes)*

• *In pairs:* Discuss each other’s ideas *(4 minutes each way)*

• Add any notes/new ideas to these during the session
Visual research methods

A number of disciplines make use of qualitative visual research methods, with a rich literature on practical and methodological issues, particularly in the fields of visual sociology, anthropology and ethnography. These will also be useful to anyone attempting to explore the visual aspects of learning in other disciplines, as will some school-based educational visual research methods. Here are some useful starting points, mainly web-based resources.

General

- About Image-based Research
  Useful overview, part of the website of The Image and Identity Research Collective (IIRC)
- Building Capacity in Visual Methods Project based at Leeds University offering introductory and advanced workshops on applied visual research methods.
- Digital Video as Research Practice: Methodology for the Millennium Shrum, Duque & Brown, Journal of
Observation

Observation of behaviour or environment:


Examples from other fields:

- Case (1991) investigated historians’ classification of texts, examined distribution of stacks of books and papers in their offices, made sketches of the workplace
- Michel (1992) observed objects such as signs and library aids, and physical as well as behaviour of library users searching for information
Documentary approaches

- Video/photographic data collection to record objects of study (19th century ‘realist’ documentary approach)
- Often used in sociology and anthropology, but may be less appropriate for healthcare settings
- More recently, collaborative/participatory approaches where research subjects are more actively involved in production
- Issues:
  - power dynamics
  - analytic tools
  - evidential status of images (not an unproblematic reflection of reality but themselves artefacts/representations – but that is equally true of interviews and other evidence and research data)
  - Ethical procedures – normal informed consent processes and include photo/video release forms
Image elicitation

- Using images (photos, drawings, collages etc) as a trigger for discussion. These could be pre-existing images:


- or those produced by the participants themselves:
In the 1980s photographer Jo Spence documented her own experience of breast cancer “through photo narrative, montage and performative re-staging of personal trauma.”

[She also developed] “‘Photo-Therapy’.. adopting techniques from co-counselling... to invert the traditional relationship between the photographer and the subject. If historically the subject had little control over their own representation, Photo-Therapy shifts this dynamic. The subject was able to act out personal narratives and claim agency for their own biography. “

http://www.jospence.org
Arts-based research

‘The arts-based paradigm states that by handing over creativity (contents of the research) and its interpretation (an explanation of the contents) to the research participant, the participant is empowered, the relationship between the researcher and the research participant is intensified and made more equal, and the contents are more culturally exact and explicit, using emotional as well as cognitive ways of knowing.’


See also:

Image-making

...the use of image-making as a focus for discussion [...] provides researchers with a simple procedure that accesses the inner world of the informant [...] the process of expressing themselves graphically frequently enabled [participants] to talk about their experiences more lucidly...

Reflecting on experience

Lackey ‘Using Art in Midwifery Research’

“A qualitative study, using illuminative art-work, exploring newly qualified midwives perceptions of transition from that of student to that of qualified midwife”

Visual Practices Conference, School of Nursing & Midwifery, University of Brighton July 2008
Collage as a tool for reflection

Above left: Hannah Hoch ‘Cut with a Kitchen Knife’ 1919-20
Above right: Photograph from a collage workshop
Collage: rationale

“When using collage reflectively, the researcher [or participant] focuses on a question, dilemma or the like, and then selects pictures that metaphorically reflect aspects of this thinking. Then operating intuitively she creates a collage, producing a visual composition with the selected fragments. This collage process breaks away from the linearity of written thoughts by working first from feelings about something to the ideas they evoke, instead of the reverse. The resulting visual juxtapositions frequently reveal new connections and understandings that have previously remained tacit.”

Activity 3: Picturing ideas

Stage 1: select images (10 -15 minutes)

• Browse through the collection of images and magazines on the table, and choose a variety of images that resonate in any way with your feelings and thoughts about research

• This can relate to ‘research’ in general or your particular topic, but don’t think too hard about the task at this stage. It’s OK to choose images just because they appeal to you in some way in subject, colour or pattern. You won’t necessarily use them all in your collage pictures
Activity 3 (continued)

• Stage 2: Construct collage (20 - 30 minutes)
  – Clear the working area of any surplus materials, and each take a large sheet of paper
  – Use some or all of your chosen images to put together a collage that - in any way that makes sense to you - relates to the theme of research and/or represents relevant ideas, feelings and connections.
  – Don’t stick your materials down too firmly to begin with – you may want to move things around
Activity 3 (continued)

• Stage 3: Discussion (30 minutes)
  – *In pairs* Take some time to explore each others’ collages - using open-ended prompt questions (next slide) to help you notice visual or conceptual links

  – *Whole group*: discussion of outcomes, shared understanding, key conceptual differences
Useful questions

• This is about noticing, not judging – some questions to start you off:
  – What are your initial impressions of your partner’s collage?
  – What general observations can you make about eg darkness /lightness, choice of colour, range of imagery, rhythm and flow?
  – What specific things do you notice in regard to:
    • Repetition?
    • Things placed next to each other or far apart?
    • What is emphasised, what is almost hidden or missing?
    • Directional or scale relationships between images?
    • Particular gaps or areas of emptiness and/or very dense areas?
  – What broader ideas or questions does the collage provoke?
  – Each person: let your partner’s observations help you to notice any less conscious aspects and relationships revealed through your collage

Based on Angela Rogers (2009) Interactive and Iterative Collage Workshop, Creativity Centre, University of Brighton
Reflective collage: some tips

• Avoid using text – this can fix and limit the potential exploration of meaning. (It may be useful to write notes when reflecting on your collage, but keep these separate, to allow for a different response next time)
• Don’t stick everything down immediately – leave room for manoeuvre – you may want to adjust the relationships between elements following discussion with your partner or private reflection.
• For a large collage, try to allow at least 30 minutes to select material, 30 to compose, and 30 to reflect on the result.
• A series of small collages (e.g. on postcards) can be a helpful way to explore a specific theme over time or for a research group to explore their various perspectives on collaborative research questions

Based on Angela Rogers (2009) *Interactive and Iterative Collage Workshop*, Creativity Centre, University of Brighton
Plenary discussion

• Sharing ideas: how might you incorporate any of these visual methods into your own research?
• Potential issues/risks/challenges?
• Solutions?
• What relevant resources /knowledge/skills can we share?
Thank you

Email: p.ridley@brighton.ac.uk

Visual Practices website:
http://www.brighton.ac.uk/visuallearning

See in particular Visual Research and Drawing sections