

Qualitative participatory methodologies in education: Photovoice, vignettes and Ketso

Metodologías cualitativas participativas en educación: Photovoice, viñetas y Ketso

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Background

Qualitative research brings to the fore traditionally silenced voices in knowledge production and recognises that "the realities we study are social products of actors, interactions and institutions". In other words, it emphasises experiences as they are lived by subjects, but without losing sight of the fact that these are influenced by the specific contexts in which they occur.

In recent years, several research studies have emerged in the field of education that can be defined as participatory. From this approach, research is understood as a participatory, collaborative and deliberative process that involves participants in the analysis and transformation of their social reality.

Embracing these principles of recognition, participation and identity requires imagining new research methods and strategies.

Aims

Using our reflexivity as researchers, we revisit some of our research projects to critically examine the methods used: Photovoice, vignettes and the Ketso method. Our aim is to explore in depth some of the advantages, dilemmas and difficulties encountered in their use, as well as to analyse the impact of the interactions with the participants.

Method & procedures

This paper analyses three qualitative research studies in the field of education that seek to promote the identity, recognition and participation of the subjects and in which we have used participatory strategies and methods in the context of teacher or school training: photovoice, vignettes and Ketso.

Results & discussion

The Photovoice helped the participants to evoke reflections and dilemmas through the discussion of images taken by them. Photographs demonstrated their power to illuminate questions of reality that are difficult to reach from other semiotic codes such as words or writing. At the same time, we recognised the polyphonic capacity of images in that they are open to multiple readings and interpretations, becoming windows into the subjectivity of each participant. This experience also represented an extraordinary opportunity to deliberate on the ethical aspects of any research process.

The vignettes enabled participants to understand different perspectives, fostering dialogue and 'polyvocality' (representation of the different voices involved in the same situation) and consequently enabling the analysis and reconfiguration of the future teachers' beliefs around discrimination and exclusion in school.

The visual and tactile support of Ketso favoured the organisation of ideas and the subsequent discussion. As with the vignettes, the use of languages other than reading and writing supported some participants with different communicative affinities. It also allowed for the generation of inclusive qualitative data by establishing an individual moment of reflection in which ideas emerged that would be present in the subsequent group dialogue.

Conclusion

The methodological strategies employed in research cannot be reduced to a technical matter, as they are ineluctably knotted with the object of study, with the social relationships established between participants and with the context of the study. Furthermore, there are no inherently beneficial strategies and a reflexive and critical analysis is required to recognise their disadvantages and limits, as well as the reasons for using them.

In sum, this article seeks to situate the researcher in the complexity of the scenario that participatory counselling strategies entail. Despite the challenges, which are not infrequent, these strategies have made it possible to open up new spaces and times to represent the voice of all participants, who have played an active role in the processes of data production and critical documentation. It goes without saying that the results of each research project are genuine and express the particular relationship between the researchers and the participants and the research situations. However, we do not believe that this circumstance detracts from their validity. It is precisely this reflexive exercise that we carry out as an instrument to ensure the validity and quality of qualitative studies. Therefore, we consider that this capacity to increase the protagonism of the participants and to generate a more horizontal model of research more than justifies its choice. Indeed, producing knowledge from those who are involved in the problems studied is what gives legitimacy to the research. However, in order to contribute to participatory purposes, they must be designed to serve the interests of the participants and have a transformative purpose.

Keywords: qualitative research; participatory methodologies; reflexivity in research; reflective researcher

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