

Knowing schooling, Identity and pedagogy visually

Joseph Agbenyega (Monash University), Joanne Deppeler (Monash University) & Julianne Moss (The University of Melbourne)

ABSTRACT

This research produced in one region in Ghana examines the production of educational practices, relations of power and student experiences within teaching and non-teaching spaces in junior secondary settings. The strength of the visual approach in interrogating school cultural norms and the problematising of the tangled complexities of knowing about schooling, identity and pedagogy are outlined. An important aspect of the study is the foregrounding of educational practice as a social act occurring in response to historical circumstances and changing social contexts (Brown & Jones, 2001). We see this work as an important step towards democratization of the research relationship and empowerment of students to contribute to the way they are educated. But also we are wary of how representation through visual methods also can 'frame' participants and the researchers. We recognise that one way to uncover how school practices are exemplified in Ghana is to put students in the middle of researching their experiences. In this way, our research moved from constructing students as simply consumers of adult designed and managed products to practices based on democratic participation (Thomson & Gunter, 2007). Throughout the research journey we were guided by the fact that knowledge is not neutral or to be discovered. Culture and communicative processes are essential determinants of reality. In this study the students as researchers, produced photographs that trigger dialectical conversations of students' perspectives that foreground their experiences at school. This enabled us to digress from dominant positivistic empiricism to a more legitimate ethical practice, and understanding of the intricacies of educational practice, the norms and structures that underpin everyday actions in schools.

Introduction

Formal Schooling in Ghana began as a commercial colonial product in the 16th century by the European merchants and the Christian missionaries to train clerical workers and interpreters for merchant and missionary activities (Ghana Information Services, 1974; McWilliam, 1967). From the 16th to the 20th century, Ghana's education system replicated the traditional British education system in which learning was defined by the teaching and mastery of specific subjects, strict compliance to teacher routines and authority – an oppressive pedagogy that marginalised potential learners (McWilliam, 1967). Long after the colonial departure in 1957, the legacy of formal inculcated foreign ideologies, cultural values, marginalisation and reproduction of class continued the propagation of inequalities in education. Provision of education in Ghana is largely supported by international development partners including United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), German and International Development Cooperation (GTZ), International Monetary Fund (IMF), UNICEF and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The international support is aimed at achieving universal basic education for all children in Ghana, an objective which is consistent with UNESCO declaration in Salamanca in Spain in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994) that:

Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning...education system should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of the characteristics and needs of children (p.viii).

Despite the positive intentions of the government of Ghana and her development partners to improve access, teaching and learning, a number of schools in Ghana has been plagued with poor teaching, disparate distribution of resources and poor teacher-student relations (Agbenyega, 2005,

2007; GES, 2003, 2004; Kameka, 2004). How poor teacher-student relations, resources, and school practices are exemplified in disenfranchising students can be analysed through critical and postmodern lenses (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Kanpol, 1994). Critical and postmodern theories form radical dialectic paradigms with which to interrogate the complexities of schooling and disadvantage. These theories assume new insights and possibilities for innovative methodologies in studying the school's cultural space. Through critical and postmodern lenses researchers examine the historical context and the existing political flux and how these shape school life (Mclaren, 2007). Although critical and postmodern theories constitute a generic set of ideas their central theme is empowerment for liberation from the banking form of education, exploitation, marginalisation and oppressive classroom cultures.

Ghana gained independence from British colonial rule in 1957 with the purpose to exist as a free state, to empower the citizens and to regain native identity through national policy transformations. After independence Ghana undertook radical educational initiatives to bring about emancipation and dramatic expected social changes as it became evident that schools have become places of learning, marginalisation, oppression, selection and reproduction of class (Brown & Jones, 2001; Bruner, 1996; Kanpol, 1994; Schmidt, 2007). Critical theorists and postmodernists reject the traditional form of teaching, learning and organisation of schools where the teacher teaches, organises and directs and the student listens (Freire, 1973). Similarly, researchers in the critical and postmodern paradigms perceive cultural, political and economic factors as shaping school practices and try to better understand school culture in order to effect change (Mclaren, 2007). Brown and Jones (2001) argue that "teacher practice is probably governed to a much greater extent by social norms and the policies generated within these" (p. 169). It is our view that to be a free citizen depends to a great extent on the nature of the education system, its organisational framework, and the distribution of resources to individual students. School systems that value difference and where students have the opportunity to question traditional orthodoxies and dominant cultures are at the fore-front of liberation from ignorance, exclusion, suppression and poverty (Freire, 1973; hooks, 1994; Lesourd, 1986; Mclaren, 2007).

Current developments

Much has occurred, particularly in basic education in Ghana in which we are very interested. Various shifts have taken place in terms of educational policy within the last decade which has had considerable effect on schooling and teaching. A Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) was introduced in 1996 as part of a policy measure to increase access to basic education, improve physical facilities and teaching for all children (Agbenyega, 2005; GES, 2003, 2004, 2006). The purpose is to reduce class reproduction, remove the poverty of processing ideas, the poverty of making informed choices and the poverty of democracy by making education responsive to the needs of all students (GES, 2003, 2004, 2006). This initiative was followed by a Capitation Grant Scheme, a policy that introduced a free feeding programme for school children in deprived schools and communities to encourage them to enrol and stay in school (Mornah, 2006). It is difficult to ascertain how these policy measures have succeeded in transforming school experiences for students without giving them voice and agency to interrogate existing practices that affect them. Agency and knowledge have a mutually reinforcing relationship. We recognised that some aspects of students' experiences are difficult to capture by researchers' eyes or words alone (Eder & Fingerson, 2001) and these aspects need to be captured by students themselves through visual images. Our aim therefore was to capture and interrogate how student identity is constructed in the classroom space in light of the current institutional policy measures and to problematise the tangled complexities of knowing about schooling and pedagogy (Brown & Jones, 2001). The purpose of the study was to understand students and teachers beyond our subjectivities and how we can use the knowledge gained through visual process to increase opportunities for inclusion in education. We

were also keen to determine how students are constructed within their school's cultural spaces and the implication that has on their learning.

Why the visual?

How do we understand students' experiences of schooling? Positivistic quantitative research has treated students as objects of study negating their voice and agency (Jenks, 1996). Such dominant approaches study students in "the aggregate and consider the effects of independent variables to understand students' experiences and likely outcomes" (Clark-Ibanez, 2007, p. 170) and do not examine students' own experiences. However, we approach this study with a new perspective of students as creative, responsible, active and critical actors in their learning spaces. We consider visual approaches as essential methodology in educational research that gives voice and agency to students (Thomson & Gunter, 2007) and encourages researchers to test and improve their understanding of school policies, processes, and practices within teaching and non-teaching spaces that operate within individual elements of the school's culture (Brown & Jones, 2001; Dahlberg et al., 1999; Fetherston, 2008; Packard, 2008; Pink, 2007; Prosser, 2007). This involves identifying mechanisms and acquiring feedback, both within and between components that influence systemic behaviour, teaching, learning and socialisation with the view to predicting future changes in both physical organisational and pedagogical behaviours. In as much as better understanding of school based problems encourages better decision-making (Brown & Jones, 2001), we view visual methodology as a process through which school principals, teachers and policy makers can reflectively and dialectically, question routine school policies, identify gaps and design appropriate programs to address issues of exclusion and power imbalances in schools.

Students as researchers is a digression from dominant positivistic empiricism to a more legitimate ethical practice that promise the understanding of the intricacies of educational practice, for instance the norms and structures that underpin the quotidian aspects of students' lives which are cultural and historically connected. As Brown and Jones (2001) have put it, "this approach leads not only to unlocking of the complexity but also elucidation of rigid preconceptions which serve only to confirm injustices of the found world" (p. 5). Dominant approaches to education research excludes alternative ways of understanding and interpreting educational practice (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). In our view, it denies 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). Our intention is to depart from reflection, based on our exclusive thinking as researchers, make the school space a subject of critical thinking, and to explore and better understand the textured complexities of Ghanaian students' lives. We anticipated that in giving students the agency multiple perspectives would emerge and we would be creating a mess which would not fit the package deal of commonsense realism (Law, 2006). If we try to make students' voices fit to our assumptions then we will be missing out on important aspects of student constructed meaning of their experiences. Law argues that "incoherence is a common-sense 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, 2006, p. 605). Being conscious of the fact that students are protagonists in the knowledge building process (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999), we approach the research field without a preconceived motive but as listening researchers, open to students and their impressions about schooling. We are, particularly interested in their voices, and we conducted this study to create space where we can interrogate pedagogical practices and what it means to be a student or a teacher in a developing country.

By using auto-driven visual research approach which allows students to generate the image themselves we significantly reduce the power imbalances between the researchers and the students. In this way we improve our ethical and emancipatory practices (Brown & Jones, 2001). Through

visual images we identified and visualised the dominant school cultural forms and regimes which exercise power on students, which teachers and administrators have constructed and embodied, and we opened up opportunities for critical reflective practice that challenges these dominant cultures (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

The study

The study took place in Accra, Ghana, a country in West Africa with a current population of 23 million people, a GDP growth of 6.3% and per capita income of \$2, 963 (GOV, 2008). The official language is English and all lessons from kindergarten to university are taught in English while the local languages and French are studied as second languages in schools. Tribal and ethnic groups use their various local dialects for conversation in households and in non-academic settings. The 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 indicate the presence of 9,054 JSS with 7,122 public and 1,932 private ones (MOESS, 2007). Details on JSS school enrolment for 2006/2007 indicated the presence of 952,151 and 180,167 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).

The data for this research was gathered over a 12 week period in the last quarter of 2006 in Accra. Although the two other researchers were outsiders, the third researcher, Joseph, has been an insider of the Ghana Education Service for more than a decade, and has developed a long standing relationship with schools. This study was conceived out of conversations with the Director General of Ghana Education Service. Permission for this research was granted by the Greater Accra District Director of Education, and through formal letters, the head teachers of all the Junior Secondary Schools in the district were contacted. From 15 schools initially selected, we used purposeful sampling to select three schools that represented urban, semi-urban and rural locations (Deppeler, Moss, & Agbenyega, 2008). We then selected 20 students from each school using assigned random numbers. We reduced the numbers through a further randomization to nine students. The final sample comprised six males and three females whose ages range from 13 to 16 years and a mean age of 13.6 years.

Our approach in using the visual is based on the assumption that photographs have the utility to prompt deeper reflections that words alone cannot. The decision we made by giving voice and agency to children to take the photos was based on the principle 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 (Clark-Ibanez, 2007). Thus we used an inductive research approach where we asked the students to take their own photographs which we later used as the focus of discussion (Clark-Ibanez, 2007). We explained the purpose of the research and provided 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 but three of the students had used analogue cameras. We asked the students to take photos depicting practices in their schools that they disliked and or liked? Things that made them feel happy or unhappy? The type of school they would like to go or not go to and situations that depict how they would describe their teachers and school to friends. Students then break into pairs to take visual images during school times. Students were instructed to take notes and 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 on condition that they would have access to the photos that are taken and endorse it before they are processed for discussion and publication. Students, parents and teachers endorsed 28 images for inclusion and analysis and subsequent publications and images which were not endorsed were destroyed. After the endorsement students were engaged in photo elicitation during which time a member of each group wrote down summaries of their discussions.

We approach data analysis through systematic content analysis of visual data (Gottschalk, 1995; Holsti, 1969; Prosser, 2007; Weber, 1990). We adopted this approach because we view images as communication tools and that messages conveyed by images reflect the psychological state of the communicator and enacted practices (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005) within the school's environment. Communication in any form (visual or verbal) is central to human existence and its content represents data and units of analysis. We began the analysis with students by 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 we examined individual student's routine comments about the images they produced to see if they described themselves as victims and blame others or other factors for events. We juxtaposed student's representations with ours which led to generation of categories and themes. While doing this we were conscious of caution 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). Therefore the two themes, punishment and spaces of learning 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. In this paper we report on spaces of learning with a sub-theme, class size, pedagogy and identity.

Learning spaces

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.

Class size and pedagogy

Our findings indicated that class size was interconnected with pedagogy and teacher-student relations. Researchers have argued that class size differences alter classroom processes and the relationships between teachers and students (Anderson, 2000, Finn, 2003; Achilles, 1999).



Figure 1: Crowded Classrooms

For example, in this study we found that the multiple spaces in the schools that offer formal or informal opportunities for students to learn and develop were influenced by the resources,

management and the type of interactions that go on in these spaces. Much of the classroom space was managed by the teaching staff with limited opportunity for rearrangement and interaction. Students would love to be working in groups and be more engaged but they were not given the opportunity to do so because the classes were too large.

See how large this class looks...if you are sitting there you don't know, I think that is why our teacher never puts us in groups...yes 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...hmm, he is already suffering from this big class (comments from students in urban schools).

For the students, being in groups or getting assistance from peers is a valued endeavour, 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 next to them but this is not allowed as the teachers placed premium on individual achievement rather than on collective activity. This portrays that students are in competition with each other, they learn the information individually to be able to justify knowledge retention in response to tests and evaluations. In such a practice students who are not competitive enough may be excluded along the line.

Students were not only mindful of their limitations to participate in groups but were also aware of the difficulties their teacher faced as a result of the large classes. Although both the teacher and students are present in the classroom, the pedagogical practice traditions 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. We 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 model from colonialism which most adult Ghanaians and teachers have experienced. This is in sharp contrast to Ghanaian traditional living and learning culture which values shared endeavours (Agbenyega, 2005). This is not to suggest that learning does not occur in these classrooms; learning does occur but different instructional models involve different relationships for learners with their peers and teachers and to the information being learnt and how this are used in socio-cultural activities in later life (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996).

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

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. One thing annoys me when it is hot like that and the teacher keeps talking and talking, I don't even get it (comments from students in urban schools).

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 (comments from students in semi-urban schools)

These utterances 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, for how long can they concentrate? We argue that good school architecture enhances teacher student collaborations. Siegel (1999) emphasises 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).

Identity

It is argued that children’s environments have an effect on their cognitive and behavioural development and on childhood vulnerability (Ellis, 2005, p. 57). We see the evidence of this through the nature of student engagement and observation of the practice traditions in their schools’ spaces and how these spaces are at work as captured in their photos. These photos emphasised the notion that schools and classrooms are not just places students inhabit but also spaces that shape and describe individual identity and emotions. In our study we found that the school’s architectural space and teachers play a significant role in this identity construction. Analysing the students’ perspectives in relation to the practice traditions of the schools we were confronted with the images and students’ discussion of the dominant school practices, reproduction of power and marginalisation which construct for them subordinate identity forms. The classroom space needs to serve as a source of security, meaning and belonging where students can form positive identities. This can only happen when meaningful relationships are made possible by bonds students develop to school practice traditions. Instead of the live relationship connecting students and school places together and enabling them to define themselves positively, we saw the disconnection between students and their school and formation of estranged communities.



Figure 2: Teacher wielding power through canning

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 to tame and control their students. Mutually respectful student–teacher relationship is critical for good

teaching and learning yet we recognised how difficult it was 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. They don't care if you are with your friends...I feel shy and annoyed when that teacher treats me like a child...It hurts when we are treated like bad people. It is difficult to learn when the room is hot teachers shout at you when you talk. 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. We are too many all we do is to obey the teacher. It makes me dislike school...some of my friend too said the same thing...last time (comments from students in urban school).

Students develop identity through interactions with the practice traditions of their school spaces. The findings in our study suggest 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 we see the 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 (Keep, 2002; Higgins et al 2005; Lackney & Jacobs, 2004; Earthman 2004). Being in a good school was important for these students as good schools contribute to positive identity formation. The labels on schools determine the type of teachers they attract and retain. For the children in our research, their learning spaces were 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. If it rains for three days, no school for three days. Other students will do better than us because they learn more. 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. It is not good to learn like this... sometimes when we see somebody passing by we look at them... I don't understand some children are treated like this (comments from students in rural school).

These comments suggest that the spaces of schools and how teachers organise them can enlighten students much about adult expectations and power structures (Higgins, et al., 2005; 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 that their family is poor and that good schools are not meant for the poor but for the vulnerable – the ability to attend a good school is contingent upon economic and social status of one’s family composition. The identity of an unproductive or failing school invariably, may generate negative emotions and uncertainty in students which would affect their confidence to learn. In addition, their capacity to compete with other students from well endowed schools for entry into post secondary institutions would decline. This implies that class reproduction and powerlessness among the majority of Ghanaians will continue to exist as long as large disparities exist in the education system with disparate school practice traditions and distribution of resources. We implied from this research that increased access to appropriate school resources may increase positive student identity formation. But in this study we found that, access to permanent teachers and other school resources depend on one’s social class status and economic standing. We therefore did not see a new identity being formed for all students in the schools where this research was conducted, apart from what prevailed during the colonial period when education segregated and marginalised the majority of students and widened class boundaries.

What we learnt from the study

In our research we see teachers as occupying a very important role as parents and facilitators of knowledge. In this regard they need to motivate all students in a systematic and organised way by involving students in class activities and providing feedback. We acknowledged that this is difficult if classes are too large. Large class sizes can be spaces for increased diversity in student population and fertile spaces for misbehaviour. We are of the view that the way forward for effective teaching in classes as large as the ones in this research is to put students in groups. This can be organised in or outside the classroom. This will minimise disruptive behaviour and increase student engagement with their peers and teachers because it would be possible for the teacher to visit groups more frequently than individuals (Kowalski & Rizzo, 1996).

Organising students into effective learning groups will reduce oppressive pedagogy in the classroom and lead to transformational learning (Freire, 1973). Keddie and Churchill noted that authoritative school cultures constrain, frustrate and disengage students from schooling (Keddie & Churchill, 2005) and education as the practice of domination fuels the credulity of students and shapes them to conform to existing orthodoxies and oppression (Freire, 1973; McKenzie, 2003). This is counterproductive to knowledge construction and inclusion.

We also noted that to increase understanding of educational experiences of marginalised students we must shift our research methodologies from dominant approaches that look ‘tidy’ and are seen as the only way to objectify reality. Our approach to the research field without a preconceived hypothesis gave that openness to balance the power between us (researchers) and students so that they can freely express how they are represented in schooling in Ghana. As students interrogate the research field and the images they have produced they seemed to talk about many things which in traditional commonsense are messy... and we seem to be wavering in our approach to discover the real purpose of our research. Yet the research is for the students, and their voices count the most because our intension is to awaken in them the spirit to lead the emancipation struggle against unfair treatment and marginalisation. Warren (2005) sates, “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). As we engaged in this visual study we produced a refreshing flood of critical thinking disrupting the dominant paradigms and we did not consider the photographs as necessarily representations of empirical truth (Prosser & Loxley, 2007). As researchers we perceived the photographs as a process of expanding on questions that agitate our minds regarding what constitutes good practice for inclusion. Secondly, the photographs provided agency to students to communicate dimensions of their school lives. The study clearly indicated that there is wide spread inequalities and overwhelming control that transforms students into mechanistic receiving objects. A learning space 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.

Conclusion

This study focused on the potential use of auto-driven photo elicitation in uncovering the experiences of some students in a developing country. We appreciate Ghana’s effort of providing educational access to all children. Yet inclusive education does not work on one front. Resource mobilisation and equitable distribution, teacher training that recognises and legitimises positive student identity are indispensable constituents of inclusion. We reflected on our approach and found that auto-driven photo elicitation when used with other qualitative methodologies such as interviews with teachers and policy makers and observation would have illuminated dynamics and further insights and produced a flexible, contrastive and reflexive rhetoric (Prosser, 2007). A future study to examine the visual culture of schools in Ghana or elsewhere should endeavour to blend a visual approach with other qualitative approaches. This would enhance a dialogical engagement and which could lead to in-depth understanding of the problems associated with inclusive schooling.

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