'Back off Ma this is our project': Youth Photovoice research in Clendon and Mangere

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Summary

The *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* encourages good quality research upon which to build meaningful programmes within the policy framework.

The report covers rationale, method, findings and meta-view of youth photovoice research projects in Clendon and Mangere in South Auckland.

Photovoice is an innovative approach to social science research that combines photographic images and participants’ explanations to document social issues.

At Clendon and Mangere the research team from Whariki Research Group worked with groups of young people to gather images, articulate their significance and create powerpoint presentations for use with community and policy audiences.

Key points focus on good qualities of the neighbourhoods and ways in which they are positive environments to which the young participants are happy to belong.

They also point to aspects that could be improved, particularly environmental features such as commercial outlets and marketing of alcohol, fast foods and gambling, prevalent with the neighbourhoods.

The young people participated in the Ministry of Youth Development Research day on 26.6.06, presenting their powerpoints and appreciating both the opportunity and the positive feedback from the meeting.

Both groups will make further presentations of their work at Community Board meetings and other relevant local fora, and continue to work with community adults to use their research to achieve positive changes within their neighbourhoods.

The projects show that photovoice is an invaluable research method with inherent attractions to young people’s participation and inclusion in social issues.

In terms of process our work entailed the setting up of safe environments in which the young participants could carry out the research, the fostering of critical reflection on the issues to hand and efforts to empower the participants through the work.

In terms of impacts we saw competencies in terms of technical skills and presentation developed, critical awareness emerge and the creation of resources of value to the community for its own purposes and development.

These findings are very much in tune with the emerging academic and other literatures on photovoice and participatory research, particularly with young people.
Introduction

The Youth Development Strategy for Aotearoa (YDSA) emphasises the need for ongoing research to ensure evidence-based approaches to enhancing the wellbeing, vitality and constructiveness of young people in our society. One of the principles of the YDSA is that policy and action intended to enhance the development and wellbeing of young people must be informed by innovative research and evaluation of the highest quality, a point strongly evident in the international literatures on the topic (Kerr et al., 2006, McLaren, 2002). The strengths-based philosophy that underpins the YDSA encourages researchers to think in terms of increasing youth participation in research for youth development and in particular to examine ways in which youth-oriented and led research can contribute.

The current project represents a modest contribution toward these aspirations, inviting young people in two south Auckland communities to participate in and contribute to the design, data collection, analysis and presentation of research into youth issues in their neighbourhoods. The work undertaken in Clendon and Mangere has been a collaboration between youth focussed community organisations and young people in each area, and Whariki Research Group (see Appendix 1) at Massey University in central Auckland.

Background

Whariki Research Group has been engaged in research with and for young people in south Auckland at the specific request of community organisations since 2001. We have built relationships in the communities we have worked in and specific research partnerships with the Clendon Community Support Group (CCSG) and Nga Manga o Mangere (Nga Manga). Within these partnerships we have generated applications for major funding from the Health Research Council and to the Foundation for Research Science and Technology, for evaluation research and practice around demonstration research projects of positive youth development interventions in the two communities. We have also sought smaller-scale support from a range of funding organisations including the ASB Trust, Vodafone Foundation and the Ministry of Youth Development for resources and research around the planned youth development initiatives.

The photovoice projects reported on here are at once an orienting exercise, an effort to increase youth participation, and a process of capability-building with both young people and their communities. For our ongoing research partnerships at Clendon and Mangere these projects bring youth perspectives of strengths, challenges and issues that young people live with within these neighbourhoods. These insights are needed for the formative stages of the demonstration research projects we are developing and will invaluably complement the plans and directions currently developing within CCSG and Nga Manga.

The projects were set up through negotiations between Joan Sykora of MYD and Tim McCreanor of Whariki with the aim of supporting a youth oriented needs assessment.
that would contribute toward the larger research projects referred to above. The idea that local young people would have direct input into the shaping of these projects by way of photovoice research and presentation was welcomed by the communities and embraced by a number of young volunteer participants. An additional strand, with merits in terms of capability building and experience for youth, was subsequently added in the form of an arrangement that the youth people would present their work to an MYD gathering in Wellington in addition to local presentations of their findings to peers, community and local decision-makers.

The broad aims of the research were to advance understandings of neighbourhood level youth issues from young people’s perspectives and to study the potential of the photovoice technique for enhancing youth-oriented research and participation. More specifically from the point of view of Whariki, CCSG and Nga Manga their aims were to generate a specific youth view of issues in each area and to build capability particularly among young people. We begin with a brief review of published and other materials on the use of the photovoice as a research tool both from the international and local settings.
Photovoice

Photovoice is a relatively new research method in New Zealand although of course both informally and formally amateur photographers have been recording and discussing images for a wide range of purposes for many years. In the contemporary setting photovoice is evident in popular media (Salamon, 2004, Sherman, 2004) and there are a growing number of internet sites devoted to the technique as a public action method (eg http://www.photovoice.com; http://www.photovoice.org) working for grassroots social change.

Within the domain of social science research, photo-voice is an innovative, participatory approach to knowledge creation and action processes, pioneered especially by Wang and her colleagues in China and the US (Wang et al., 1996, Wang and Burris, 1997, Wang et al., 2004), as a way of including often marginalised or disempowered voices into social analysis for social change and positive social development. The techniques have emerged from earlier strands in diverse disciplines such as anthropology and sociology where photonovella and photo-elicitation practices have gained credibility (Wang and Burris, 1997). Photovoice is particularly prominent in the realm of community psychology, where it uses a combination of photography and interviews or discussion of the resulting images, to articulate participants’ experiences and views on a topic. As such it is well-suited for gathering data that highlight issues or features of value, importance or concern for communities in a robust and arresting manner. In keeping with the disciplinary base, many of the published reports to date emphasise social action outcomes (Prilleltensky, 2001) designed to improve community wellbeing. This often involves using the data and analyses to work with policy-makers and other authorities to push for changes and improvements to institutions, neighbourhoods or environments (Foster-Fishman et al., 2005).

Photovoice in action research

Photovoice has been taken up and adapted in research on a range of topics within public health, ethnography, health psychology, education and youth development among others. Existing studies include homelessness, family health, school readiness, children and physical activity, and rural Chinese women’s community action. Radley et al. (2005) used photovoice to document the experiences of homeless people in their efforts to survive and to belong on the streets of London. In northern California, Wang and Pies (2004) used photovoice methods in association with local Maternal and Child Health agency professionals. They demonstrated effectiveness of the technique for engagement of community members in needs assessment, community strengths evaluation and project planning, and as a tool for grounded policy development. Photovoice was used as one component of a multimethods approach (McAllister et al., 2005) to understanding the readiness of young African Americans to start school in Pittsburg, illuminating the social and emotional dimensions of the transitions for both parent and child. In Adelaide, MacDougall et al. (2004) used the technique to investigate the difference between children’s theorising of physical activity and what they tell adults about the topic. For example they found considerable divergence between the participants’ use of the term “play” as basically child-centred,
while “sport” was seen as an adult-controlled activity, and argued that the method could usefully inform strategies to increase activity levels among Australian children.

Key pioneers of the technique, Wang and Burris (1997) summarise the learnings from their work with rural Chinese farming women in terms of the potentials of the method and its implications for action research and social change agendas. The use of participant generated images mediates researcher and audience access to their worldviews in ways that mean they retain strong control of data that they provide to any project. While photographs and their interpretations are clearly socially constructed, placing both facets in the hands of participants adds rigour to the accessing of community views. Similarly in terms of defining and describing community needs, the critical image has a particular potency which is resistant to discounting or undermining by existing power structures that have a vested interest in the status quo (Streng et al., 2004).

In addition there is an inherent respect for the strengths and assets of community worked into research at the methodological level that promotes the voices of often disadvantaged or marginalised participants. Wang and Burris (1997) noted the richness and diversity of the data generated, the elevated levels of community ownership of the research and the way it contributed to the evolution of existing community projects. The embedding of the method into the emancipatory, Freirian theoretical base of community psychology has also stimulated community problem-solving and tangible gains for communities in terms of health, resources and wellbeing.

**Photovoice with young people**

Research using the techniques with adolescents and young people include studies of youth sense of place, adolescent motherhood, at risk adolescents, youth violence prevention and a specific examination of the impact of photovoice in work with young people. A study of the potential of photovoice approaches with young people was based in a community development project based in an ‘after-school’ youth centre in Baltimore (Strack et al., 2004). The research found that the technique worked very well to highlight community issues from youth perspectives, impacted immediately on policy makers, generated high levels of youth participation and satisfaction, and contributed to youth empowerment. They concluded that photovoice has enormous value for engaging young people in shaping and improving their social and physical environments.

The use of photovoice in a community wide campaign against youth violence in Flint, Michigan is reported by Wang et al. (2004). In this project four groups of participants representing different sectors of the community – youth, adults, community leaders and civic leaders – all contributed to the photographic data gathering. The collaborative analysis process that followed has amounted to a community action research project that has brought stakeholders together on the issues, built community capacity for problem solving and enhanced social cohesion. As a result a range of specific actions have been taken to strengthen safety for citizens of all ages and reduce violence by and against young people.
As suggested by Wang and Burris (1997) experiences, the technique seems adaptable to work with different cultural groups and settings. Streng et al. (2004) report on a project on Latino youth experiences of immigration into the US in northern California. They used community based participatory research that included photovoice to explore and expand on the young peoples’ skills for adaptation and building quality of life in their schools and communities. The photographic exhibition mounted from the project illustrated systemic discouragements to latino student achievement within their schools and prompted resistance from some staff, but pro-development reactions from other staff and community people. The project also surfaced facilitators of adjustment to migration including learning of the successes of positive role-models, the value of good adult-youth partnerships, a sense of shared latino identity and the opportunity to contribute to a broader community action project.

In another example of use of photovoice with young people at risk, Kroeger et al. (2004) worked with six middle school adolescents who were bordering educational failure in Ohio and found that images, for example of pets or other domestic objects, created dialogue and interaction that was absent in sessions without photographs. Illustrating the enabling role that the technique carries they report that one student’s photograph of her home elicited spontaneous information about how often she had moved house and how little time she had spent in any one community. Once the photographs had made their contribution to the establishment of rapport, further interview stages were particularly effective and provided a very strong basis for differentiated learning solutions that worked from individual’s strengths to produce positive educational outcomes for the young people. The photographs provide a material item that while representing data in its own right, is even more important as a catalyst for discussion that narrates and elaborates the significance of the image and the contextual issues it evokes. It has been found in a range of projects on both mundane and apparently sensitive topics that the ‘ice-breaker’ effect of talking about a photograph can, with skilled and appropriate facilitation, lead to intimate and insightful disclosure of related issues that can be of considerable relevance to understanding and in some instances changing things for the better.

Stevens (2006) describes the use of photovoice with adolescent mothers to reframe their status from marginalized toward being healthy, through a process of facilitated strengthening of young people under stress. She worked with the participants to produce images of self-care, stress reduction and accessing resources in ways that communicate the expertise and agency of these young women in their health and that of their baby, to healthcare professionals and service providers. The findings are presented as a challenge to relevant healthcare professionals and institutions to better contextualise their understandings and programmes around young motherhood to be less blaming of those in difficulties and more innovative in searching for systemic solutions to the problems young mothers face.

Working with young people in hard-pressed communities in Battle, Michigan, Nowell et al. (2006) used photovoice to develop dialogue about the meaning of place/neighbourhood to the young participants. Resulting outputs communicated personal histories, the value and character of particular communities, articulated local social norms and marked sense of identity, belonging and possibility. This effective sharpening and strengthening of community identity is seen as an example of
small/quick change that can inspire hope and build momentum toward broader development of distressed locations.

Foster-Fishman et al. (2005) reflecting on a particular photovoice project with young people and adults, sought to answer the questions

- What are the impacts of participation in photovoice?
- How does photovoice create these effects?

In terms of the first question they report their analyses of the research process in terms of increased self-competence, emergent critical awareness and the creation of resources for social action. They argue that photovoice produces these effects through empowerment of participants as expert on their lives and community, through encouraging and supporting serious reflection on local conditions and issues, and through the provision of safe and supportive climates within which to explore meanings.

**Photovoice in Aotearoa**

In this country the photovoice technique has been applied to an analysis of environmental hazards to primary school age children, a health promoting schools project and a youth development project. A masters study from Auckland University (Mitchell, 2005) worked with primary school aged children to attempt to understand their perceptions of danger in their everyday environments. Photovoice was found to be an excellent medium through which to obtained a mediated access to participant worldviews (for example what the road to school looks like from a one metre elevation), freshly challenging established perspectives on both child safety and the narrative and analytic skills of very young people.

The health promoting school project was operated under Toi Te Ora Public Health as part of the Bay of Plenty District Health Board. Shaffelburg and Oliver (2001) report turning around a programme that was languishing by use of the photovoice techniques as a needs assessment tool to bring pupil concerns to policy and decision-makers in the school. As a result students, teachers and school trustees began to work together to make the health promotion aims of the programme more real and effective.

Whariki participated in a project that used the technique in a recent Ministry of Social Development project in Northcote in Auckland (Ministry of Social Development, 2005). In this research Hector Kaiwai and Victoria Jensen worked directly with a group of young local residents to photograph aspects of the local environment that were of concern or interest to them. The photographs were analysed in the group with the researchers and built into a powerpoint presentation. The presentation was delivered to an audience of local authority and ministry staff and gave rise to prompt action to improve a local park which was much used by local youth.
Key points

The understandings reported above supplemented by our first-hand experience of the technique, underpinned and informed the ways in which we approached our specific photovoice projects. The main points that we have taken from these sources are:

- Photovoice is a tool for understanding and social change
- Photographs are both data and stimulus to articulation of meaning
- Quality community relationships ground and add value to the research
- Photovoice works with marginalised voices including young people
- Photovoice works through empowerment, serious reflection and safe process.
- Photovoice produces competence, critical awareness and change resources

With this background in hand we turn to describe our use of the technique in a youth oriented needs assessment that will contribute to ongoing positive youth development projects that we are working on in Clendon and Mangere Central in South Auckland. These projects have arisen from our long association with these communities, initially established through a Health Research Council funded investigation of youth wellbeing from 2001. Through this work we have established community-research partnerships formalised in memoranda of understandings and through which we have planned the research programme, made applications to external funding bodies (HRC, FRST) and obtained grants for community development through charitable trusts.
Method

For the current research, we worked with networks of young people, introduced to us by our community partners, CCSG and Nga Manga (represented by Kimi Dennis and Raewyn Cook respectively), to consider the possibilities for youth development initiatives in their locations. The participants were members of youth action groups working to improve conditions for young people in their neighbourhoods and were self selected for participation with active support and encouragement from community mentors. The majority of participants were secondary school age Maori and Pacific young people, resident in Clendon or Mangere and both community organisations are Maori and Pacific led. Ongoing support for the participants is available through the already establish relationships they have with CCSG and Nga Manga.

Ethical approval for the project was sought and granted from the Massey (Albany) University Human Ethics Committee on 10.5.06. Victoria Jensen and Hector Kaiwai, both of whom are long-time residents of south Auckland, initially met with groups young people, assembled by Kimi Dennis in Clendon and Raewyn Cook in Mangere, to explain and discuss the project, answer questions and recruit participants. From these first meetings twelve participants from Mangere and five from Clendon agreed to participate by taking photographs of attributes that made their neighbourhood a good place to live in, or in some way in need of change or development. In other words to gather images of the location that had particular meaning or in some way represented their community or experience.

At a second meeting in each location, participants received instruction on the use of disposable cameras and basic information on effective photography. They also took part in a discussion about what kinds of photographs were sensible to include with an emphasis on safety around risky subjects, a preference for not identifying people or locations specifically in such instances and about asking for permission where photographs did include people. Participants were asked to record their thoughts at the time of taking each photograph in a notebook which was provided with each camera.

The actual photography took place over two weeks in May/June 2006 and presented few difficulties to the youth participants, who reported being challenged in having to think carefully about what to photograph, but greatly enjoying the task. Technical faults with a small number of cameras resulted in some pictures where the quality was too low for presentation and caused brief delays while replacement cameras were used to re-photograph particular images.

Two copies of the photographs, one for the participant and one for the research team were printed. Participants were requested to make a selection of six photographs from their set of those they were most keen to have included in the analysis of the data. Selection of photographs for analysis was driven by participants’ interests and opinions supported by discussion with other participants. The photographs for each group were rendered digitally and projected for facilitated discussions with the researchers, with the aim of articulating the significance of features of the local environments. To meet the first broad aim of the projects, the analyses were oriented toward use within the community (albeit that were first to be aired at the Ministry of Youth Development Research Day on 23.6.06, to an audience of policy makers, youth
workers and researchers. These discussions, aided by participants’ field notes, were iteratively worked into the power point presentation prepared by each group. Two group members were chosen by their peers to travel to Wellington with the researchers, where the findings were received by an appreciative audience to considerable acclaim.

Findings

The next two sections report on the specific findings and insights from each location. For each community we provide a brief introduction, an outline of who was involved and the research process, followed by the main research output, the youth-developed powerpoint. These sections are brought together with a commentary that draws out common themes and some divergences as well as providing project specific insights on the use of photovoice.

Photovoice in Clendon

The young people from Clendon who worked on the project were Taryn Ball, Edwin Solia, Michelle Rawiri-Wilson, Ryan Ball, Tim Dennis in association with Hector and Victoria. The working group was supported by Kimi Dennis and other parents as well, ensuring that participants were well fed and generally looked after in the meetings.

Aside from the introductory sessions mentioned above a series of four meetings was held at Clendon to do the analysis and create the powerpoint presentation for the Wellington meeting. In the sessions the group worked actively to describe the significance and meaning of each selected photograph and to articulate these in a suitable form for the powerpoint. The participants were ‘hands on’ with the writing, layout and overall design of the presentation and the adult researchers strove to remain supportive but not directive of the participants’ efforts. The whole effort was carried out under considerable pressure with short timeframes and the juggling of numerous other commitments by both the participants and the researchers. Despite the challenges the finished presentations were ready in time for MYD to scan them prior to the research meeting.

The actual Clendon presentation fronted by Taryn and Edwin and focussed on the group experience of life in their community. There was a balance of criticism and approval of the neighbourhood represented by a number of key themes.
Clendon and Young People
Our PhotoVoice Research

Who are we?

► Who?
  ▪ We are group of young people who live in Clendon

► What we did?
  ▪ We went around Clendon and took photos of places where we hang out and go

► Why we did it?
  ▪ We want to try and improve things in our community
School

Army Academy...

James Cook High School has a army academy for students who are focusing on careers in the sporting industry. If we didn’t have this academy many of these students would muck around...
Security at school...

Local high school students in our area are not placed where they would like to be. We have security guards patrolling the gates all hours of the day which shows that school staff are insecure towards their own students. It seems like the security guards and security gates seem to encourage more trouble.

After school...

This picture shows the School children that hang out around in Mountfort Park after school hours to smoke, fight, etc... It’s a good place because its big. Maybe we can find a more positive way to use the park...
People and Places

Shopping...

Clendon Shopping Centre contains a number of stores, by being cleaned up the center's presentation will be improved...
Diversity...

This is one of the very many churches in the Clendon area. Many churches hold their services at school halls and Community Houses & halls and the local Community Centre. This has a positive effect on our community as it brings a sense of belonging and spiritual development. At churches there is also a lot of social interaction that goes on.

Recreation...

Te Matariki Clendon Community Centre is a good place in our community because it is catered for the youth of Clendon, which means that it keeps the youth off the streets.
Social Workers...

Even though the Child, Youth and Family facility is a good place for youth who have behavioral problems it isn’t as good as being in a family environment. This can be improved by having more Social Workers in our community.

Environment and Safety
Underage drinking...

This is a picture of one of the many liquor stores in Clendon. There are so many liquor stores in the Clendon area at least one in every corner store. These liquor stores are not at all needed in a family environment. If you take all the liquor stores away then maybe their wouldn’t be a problem of under-age drinking.

Dogs...

There are a lot of Dogs roaming around the streets of Clendon, it’s very dangerous for little children as they are defenseless...
Pollution...

This is a picture of the sign in our only beach in Clendon - Weymouth Beach.

It would be a lovely beach to swim in if we could swim in it.

The pollution in the waters needs to be dealt with because a good thing is going to waste the longer the council waits and does nothing upon this issue.

Tagging...

There is a lot of tagging in Clendon. It makes Clendon look messy and a place where people don’t want to be...
Housing...

These two pictures show two houses that have been tagged on. It doesn't really look good at all but this is the reality we live in today in Clendon.

To fix this problem it would be great if the Housing Corp people could get in there and fix this problem because it doesn’t look nice at all.

Traffic...

This picture shows the traffic flow on one of the main roads in Clendon.

The island in the middle of the road needs to be removed so that there is two lanes on each side of the road.

This will help with all the traffic that passes through on this road.
Photovoice in Mangere

The young people from Clendon who worked on the project were Rolande Lafaele-Pereira, Joseph Langkilde, and others in association with Hector and Victoria. The working group was supported by Raewyn Cook and parents of participants as well, helping to ensure that everyone was well looked after in the meetings.

Aside from the introductory sessions mentioned above a series of three meetings was held at Mangere to do the analysis and create the powerpoint presentation for the Wellington meeting. In the sessions the group worked actively to describe the significance and meaning of each selected photograph and to articulate these in a suitable form for the powerpoint. The young people were ‘hands on’ with the writing, layout and overall design of the presentation and the adult researchers strove to remain supportive but not directive of the participant’s efforts. The whole effort was carried out under considerable pressure with short timeframes and the juggling of numerous other commitments by both the participants and the researchers. Despite the challenges the finished presentations were ready in time for MYD to scan them prior to the research meeting.

The actual Mangere presentation fronted by Roland and Josef and focussed on the group experience of life in their community. There was a balance of criticism and approval of the neighbourhood represented by a number of key themes.
A youth’s perspective of Mangere.

Roland La faele-Pereira
and Joseph Langkilde
Wellington June 2006
What’s ‘cool’ about Mangere...

Diversity

“Mangere is like a rainbow of different cultures and ethnicities”

“There is a great sense of community and unity with the people.”

“Everyone knows each other”

“Proud”
Groups

“Mangere has heaps of churches, youth groups and sports teams”

“There are 45 Christian churches, 2 Muslim/Hindu Congregations and 9 Marae. There are heaps of opportunities to come together to work, we just need to do it”

“You have a sense of belonging to the different groups, like my basketball team. You won’t feel left out”

Talent

“Our schools take out regional and national titles every year in sports and drama productions e.g. Bring It On 2006”

“Our youth have heaps of talent, and we express it in different ways”
What’s not so ‘sweet’...

Health and Environment

“It takes such a long time for our rubbish to be collected”

“We need more rubbish bins around our community coz the only place you’ll find them is in our local town centre”
Health and Environment

“There’s a certain perception that Mangere has a problem with obesity, gambling, drinking and drugs, but when it’s in your face, what do you expect?”

“Most liquor stores are around our schools. For example: Robertson Rd Primary, Jean Batten Primary and Koru Primary. Do those in power have kids at these schools and are we alone in thinking that there’s a problem?”

Health and Environment

“I reckon there’s too many liquor stores coz there’s liquor stores across the road from each other. There’s like three in one block.”
Safety

“I’m too scared to go out alone, so I go with my whole family only to get hassled because people think we’re a gang.”

“I’m worried about the little kids of our community because they’re gonna be influenced by their older siblings, and maybe try and imitate them.”

Safety

“We are isolated from the decision making... meanwhile... this is the playground we get to play on.”
How could we improve Mangere to benefit it’s youth?

Better youth facilities

“There are many different facilities and activities for youth, but they only cater to a select few. We need more facilities to cater to a wider range of young people.”

Better use of space for youth

“We have a lot of space, we need like a hall or something to hold dance classes or something... there’s heaps of street kids with nothing to do but walk the streets. We need a wide range of sports, music, art, drama production activities.”
Commentary

Clearly a number of common themes run through the two research projects and the presentations developed from them and while there are differences, we concentrate on the similarities as set of messages to policy makers responsible for these locations. At a high level the broad aim to record and report youth perspectives on what made the neighbourhoods good or not so good places to live, produced a focus on built and social environments.

Both presentations highlight the prevalence of liquor, fast food and gambling outlets in their communities as contributory to challenges that they face over the health and behaviours of their residents. The clustering of such health-demoting businesses close to schools and in other public spaces used by youth, was highlighted in photographs and text, signalling concern at the influence that they could have through access and promotion on young people. This view is strongly congruent with public health approaches to harm reduction from problematic consumption, which seek to regulate and reduce the density of outlets particularly in impoverished neighbourhoods.

The large number and wide diversity of churches in each location was commented on favourably by the presenters. Churches were seen as community spaces in which important social activities and relationships were featured, as well as signs of spiritual health and help in times of trouble.

There was an important focus on the appearance of the community with graffiti and rubbish seen as negative indicators of the state of social relations. The existence of
specific public locations (such as the Clendon Community Centre) that were free of
tagging was noted and represented as signalling that community control of this
problem was possible.

In both presentations there are photographs and text that show concerns over the state
of the physical environment either about pollution or about the poor quality or
rundown state of facilities such as playground. However both groups saw these
concerns as prompts to action to improve or develop local amenities, such as parks
and other open spaces, rather than as a cause for despair. This theme also extends to
existing opportunities although there is a divergence between the groups on this point
with Mangere suggesting that work is needed to expand the appeal and accessibility of
it facilities to cater for a wider range of young people, while the view from Clendon
was that Te Matariki (the community centre) was working well for young people.

Photographs of social service centres such as Work and Income New Zealand and
Child Youth and Family acknowledge the hardship present in the communities. The
comment in the Clendon presentation about the need for more social workers
indicates the need but also signals an orientation to community rather than
institutional solutions.

The insights from the young people give some strong directions to the communities
and those responsible for the wellbeing of people in these neighbourhoods. We have
learned important things about youth lives in each location that bear with considerable
significance on the formative stages of the main research projects. There is
considerable sense of belonging and pride in the locations expressed and this builds
into an optimism, commitment and energy that supported and guided can be a crucial
part of the actions that help to lift and develop these locations. We note that, as
intended, these projects have a life beyond the presentations to the MYD research day
although amongst other things this has raised the possibility of the groups taking them
to Involve 2006 in Christchurch in November. Several further rounds of presentation
in south Auckland are planned, firstly to CCSG and Nga Manga (including their wider
youth memberships) and after that to the community Boards for both Clendon and
Mangere. This process will entail debate and deliberation out of the first meetings as
the communities decide on strategy (and tactics) for the presentation to their local
representatives. It may result in modifications to both the presentations and the teams
presenting, all of which build capability especially among the young people to act and
problem-solve for better local environments.

**Insights from the projects**

In terms of engagement of the young people our experiences were mixed as might be
expected given the busyness of their lives and the short time-frame that we were
working to. Aside from the routine requirements of school, work, sport, church,
family and other social commitments, the period of the research coincided with a
major dance competition that both groups were participating in. While the participants
joined the research with their eyes wide open it was perhaps a revelation to them to
experience how much work is entailed in a photovoice project.
This is an important learning for the research team and we would allow for this by extending time allocation to better anticipate the level of commitment required. While there was full engagement from the Clendon team throughout the project, with all participants contributing to all stages, at Mangere much of the analytic stage fell to the two presenters. The Mangere group as a whole progressed as far as the selection of photographs from each participant’s full film and a number provided the presenters with rationale for the selection. In addition, Roland and Josef also chose to talk to other young people from the Mangere community to gain their perspectives on the selected photographs and some of these discussions were included in the powerpoint presentation. However the creation of the powerpoint fell to Roland and Josef who worked long hours beyond the others to complete it. The reason for this was the very tight timeframe we were working to.

While our projects have not at this stage involved adult data gathering and analysis, the nesting of the work in the community organisations and the broader research framework, is valuable. The agreement that the powerpoints will be presented to CCSG and Nga Manga, and the involvement of agencies such as Manukau City, Community Board members and a community police officer in the project underline the ongoing potential of the research to work for community level improvements is strong. The roles of community people and parents in particular were important and positive and Victoria and Hector invested quite a lot of energy in ensuring that young participants were well-supported. In one instance this entailed meeting with parents for a ‘cup of tea’ to ensure that questions they had about the project were fully answered. Other examples entailed being ‘on tap’ to chat with parents about progress and issues as the pressure built a little toward the presentation deadline.

The community adults were part of the project from the outset and were crucial to keeping each group, including their families, in the loop and happy with the project. This was particularly true for some participants where the norms and expectations for the behaviour of young people did not necessarily include working with university researchers and flying to meetings with cabinet ministers and government officials.

Relationships between the research team and the parents of the participants have been crucial in the ways reported above. The parents have as the youth feedback (and out report title) suggest been kept from ‘meddling’ in the research per se but have played vital roles as providers, advisors, supporters, and admirers throughout the project. The active engagement of the young people in the work was in large measure derived from the blessing bestowed on the project by the parents. The long slow process of building trust and good process over a number of years and multiple projects is beneficial to the researchers through providing us with opportunities and access that we would ever otherwise attain. We hope that the benefits are mutual with the building of skills and experience within the community repaying at least some of the goodwill we have experienced.

Kimi and Raewyn are experienced and trusted community figures who operate in highly sophisticated ways between community and outsiders like researchers, at once advocating for communities and ensuring their safety and wellbeing. Likewise the parents of participants work between the young people and the research to look after the community and family interests that they represent.
Another dimension of community involvement relates to the way in which the projects contributed to the youth dynamics in the two locations. There were incidental contributions of comments, ideas and even a group photograph (see Mangere presentation) from young people who were not specifically part of the participant groups. Similarly there was a considerable ‘buzz’ of interest around the work, with other young people interested in the outcomes, excited by the fact that their peers were going to Wellington, and expressing a wish to be involved in subsequent stages or projects. There was also an acknowledgement, passed through the community networks, that there were young people outside of the range of the groups that we worked with who knew the project and approved of the general aims.

Our communications with participants in both groups at the conclusion of the projects indicate that they enjoyed the work and felt comfortable with their sense of control over the way the research process operated. They were proud of their research and powerpoints but very nervous about the actual presentations which they “survived” to say they learned much in the process. We have received very positive feedback on the research process from the young people at Both Clendon and Mangere, via their parents and from Kimi and Raewyn. Parents in particular complimented the work for the way it had “empowered” the young people; Jaylene and Vivienne (Clendon parents) told of how they had been expecting to be involved with the work only to be told by their children to “back off because this is our project”. At Mangere, Raewyn reported similar comments from participants and noted that arrangements were now in process for the presentation by the young people of their powerpoint to the Community Board. Kimi reported that the young people had been greatly boosted by the project, were energised by the trip to Wellington and working eagerly towards the community presentations of their study. Raewyn has expressed an eagerness to incorporate the existing presentations into some funded youth activities that she is involved in organising as examples of how young people can get their voices heard and improve their local environments. She is particularly keen to develop photovoice projects with other groups of young people in different parts of the Mangere ward in order to increase the breadth of understanding that she has to work with and encourage development in multiple sites. Beyond the content and insight entailed in the exercises reported here Raewyn reported having learned a lot and found a technique in which her community has now developed some skills which can be transferred and built upon.
Meta-view of potential for Photovoice in youth development work

In research terms, each iteration of the application of photovoice tests the value and possibilities of the approach and increases the understanding that the research community has of its utility. As pointed out above in the discussion of the small existing literature on the technique there is considerable variability in application already and our firmly pragmatic approach adds to that. In this section we turn to consider general and particular understandings of photovoice available through the combined insights of the literature and our application of the technique reported above.

As noted above, Wang and Burris (1997) have provided a broad analysis of the impact and effectiveness of photovoice work with communities and this informs our critical reflection on our own research. Given the similarities of our work to that reported by Foster-Fishman et al. (2005), we propose to utilise their matrix to assess the impacts produced and processes implicated in the success of our projects.

**Impacts and processes in successful photovoice (Foster-Fishman et al., 2005)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impacts</th>
<th>Competency building</th>
<th>Critical awareness</th>
<th>Resource creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Processes</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Critical reflection</td>
<td>Safe discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of impacts, beginning with competencies we would argue that in both groups of participants, skills, knowledge and experience were enhanced by working on the projects. An early comment from the young people was to the effect that while they were happy to come to the initial meetings (especially attracted by the food and curiosity) that they did not have a strong idea of what it was they were embarking upon until the process began to unfold further. As a result a number of participants found themselves short of time as their many other commitments pressed in on their available hours. Some were content to pass up the project in favour of the other activities, but those that stayed learned a great deal about time management, collaborative process, (minor) conflict resolution and as deadlines approached, working under pressure. As can be seen from the presentations included above, with researcher guidance the technical skills developed or honed in the work, allowed the production of a complex, multimedia narrative.

As reported earlier, participants at the start of the photography stage of the project felt challenged and developed a discriminating eye for suitable images to capture. This critical awareness of conditions within each neighbourhood was fed by the discussion process discussed below, but also enhanced this reflection process in its turn.

The projects have created resources that have been acclaimed for their content (and delivery) by the sophisticated audience in Wellington. Equally significant is the contribution that these research outputs are having in the development of the Youth Zone at Matariki the community centre at Clendon, and to the redevelopment of particular resources such as the Moana nui a Kiwa recreation centre at Mangere. The presentation of the findings to the respective community boards can be expected to
yield other broader improvements to problematic aspects of neighbourhood environments highlighted in the powerpoints. Less tangible resources have also been created in terms of strengthened networks, youth-adult partnerships within CCSG and Nga Manga, awareness of change processes, and recruitment of new energy into working for community improvement. While the term “empowerment” is somewhat overused and may be regarded with a jaundiced eye in community quarters, it remains a fact that it was the word used to describe the young people at the end of the project by Jaylene, a Clendon parent. She stated that she was happy for me to use her comment that the photovoice process was “so awesome” for the young Clendon participants.

Reflecting on process, while research necessarily has a focus and method, keeping the investigative frame non-prescriptive and as open as possible is a crucial first step to achieving such desirable outcomes. Having autonomy over what to photograph and the selection from the raw data of the particular images for discussion, are important elements of the empowerment process. Working with skilled facilitators was vital to building collaborative relations that allowed individual voices to be heard, while pursuing the co-operative production of the presentations. As noted above while the photograph is not an objective record and is amenable to diverse interpretations, its stability is an important part of ensuring that it is the participants’ stories that are told. The Wellington experience clearly contributed to the empowerment process because the presenters were treated respectfully and appreciatively by their audience. The young people are clearly moving forward, keen to engage in further dissemination of their resources, confident that they will be heard and that their efforts will yield some gains for themselves and their communities.

It is clear that the critical process of selecting, describing, discussing, debating the meaning and significance of the images, has entailed participant investment in the work that adds value to the overall process. There is rigorous analytic effort embedded in the powerpoints as described above; the environmental approach to issues such as healthy eating, appropriate alcohol use, manageable gambling and safe, accessible recreation spaces, is not simply ‘commonsense’, it requires critical work.

The research team worked hard to provide a safe supportive environment for all aspects of the research process. As a result we have felt the growth and engagement of the young people involved in the work as they moved from tentative agreement to participate, through the work of carrying out the research and reporting the findings, and eventually to the action phases of community work that lie just ahead. They are proud of their efforts and determined to contribute to building the strengths and quality of the places they live in and love.

On the basis of our experience with the Clendon and Mangere projects, as well as our work at Northcote we believe that it is a tool that can add greatly both to our understandings of youth issues in specific locations, and to actions that improve the environments that impact on youth lives. We argue that the projects can be seen as contributing to the YDSA through all its major goals and especially via Goal 4, particularly as it relates to community settings, but also in relation to other social environments including peer groups, whanau and families. In addition the significance to community organisations, particularly schools and churches, local government and central government (for example via MYD) is also clear; youth voices can positively
ground and enhance local development. The projects have also contributed through adopting strengths-based approaches to research (Goal 1), by building youth capability and experience (Goal 2) and by enacting youth participation (Goal 3). The research has produced valuable knowledge about the experience of being a young person in the two neighbourhoods and also improved understanding of a technique that seems highly appropriate to inclusive research with youth.

Our projects have configured the basic photovoice format in ways that suited the participants and the locations we were studying with them. In particular our innovation of engaging the young people actively in the articulation of issues and their incorporation into the powerpoint presentations, departs from the more formal research-oriented processes such as those used by Radley et al. (2005) and Strack et al. (2004). We did not record the analyses worked through by young people as data for the study of the technique but rather followed the action research aims of the project that assumed the integrity of this work and focussed on its clear articulation in the presentations themselves.

So much for the strengths and positive outcomes of the work but it is clear that the process has not been without its discontents as well. Complex and potentially dangerous characteristics of their communities have been set aside as too risky to investigate by the photovoice method at this particular time. This disadvantage of the technique has been reported by other research groups (Wang et al., 2004) and we were alerted to it when we applied for permission proceed from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee where the issue of identifiable images of people, was raised. When we discussed this with our participants we cautioned against the collection of such shots particularly if it could represent a risk to either the subject or the photographer. This meant that genuine concerns around crimes such as vandalism, drug use, and violence were not canvassed.

Where such images were seen as potentially appropriate, we developed an informal protocol (polite request to take the picture) and a short ‘permission slip’ that participants could use when such photographs were agreed to. We were clear that this caveat needed to apply to other subjects (houses, cars etc) in order not to compromise either the community or the researchers. Obviously such restrictions limit the array and depth of potential issues that can be covered but in future contexts with different groups of young participants it may be possible to approach some very sensitive issues quite directly.

Another weakness, held in common with other qualitative research approaches lies in the realm of generalisability; how broadly can the ‘one off’ perspectives of a group of six or twelve represent the experience of a neighbourhood of thousands? Can the technique provide for ethnic diversity given the range of groups present in each neighbourhood? How are silenced and hard to reach groups best accessed and engaged? Again other researchers have grappled with these issues and like us been moved to acknowledge the limitations of such angled snapshots of life in a neighbourhood. Streng et al. (2004) make it very clear that their latino project speaks only for that group and those in school at that; Kroeger et al. (2004) likewise highlight the specificity of what they have found inside the school setting.
There is a real danger also that promoting photovoice as some kind of panacea to diverse social ills may create unrealistic expectations that when unfulfilled leave participants and communities disillusioned and feeling worse about their situation than before the research was proposed. Strack et al. (2004) make this point forcefully and it is implicit in the Freirian framing of photovoice by Wang et al. (2004) where attention to embedding the work from the outset in local political economies is advocated. All of the feedback that we have received from the communities indicates that the appropriate grounding of the projects in the local context has resulted in ownership and ongoing utilisation of the work of the young participants.

Another problem, again more generic to qualitative research, is that proliferation of photovoice assignments, even within the bounds of clearly defined needs assessments may lead to such diversity of views bordering the subjective or even self-expressive, to the extent that incoherence is the outcome. We would caution that the use of photovoice needs to be built within a planned and structured framework that can deal with diversity and has processes in place for promoting dialogue and coming to consensus about proper interpretation of photovoice data and actions built from it. Again Wang et al. (2004) with their multiperspective project on youth violence which included local authority personnel, citizen and youth stakeholders, all taking pictures and contributing to the research, have pioneered an informative framework in this regard. In the case of our projects the positive adult-youth partnerships engendered provide an ongoing avenue for discussion and debate that assist in developing consensus about the meaning and implications of the data, and the actions that should flow from the findings.

We concur with the other authors referred to above to argue that with all of these issues acknowledged, our projects and the photovoice technique as such, represent a potent addition to the tools available to needs assessment in real social settings, to advocate for public health and other public good, action-oriented research projects and to build capability within communities to achieve specific local development goals. In the case of our projects one of the key messages so iconoclastic to the broad negative views of Clendon and Mangere, is that these are good places to live in, that people have a strong sense of belonging to and that these views are manifest in a determination of the community organisations to work for their improvement.

The project provided a range of experiences to us as researchers on the broad issue of the participation of young people in research that can impact on policy and practice. We found the notion of a “ladder of engagement” (Gray, 2002) a helpful one in that it conceptualises a range of participation in decision-making (and research) by young people from youth-led or directed, through youth oriented to more conventional models of youth inclusion. In our project we found different levels of contribution for young people, community mentors (including parents) and the research team. In relation to young people, engagement ranged from those who simply knew of the project and in various ways signalled their approval, to those who contributed data and comments, and those who analysed, articulated and presented the materials with a high degree of ownership, leadership and empowerment.

For community adults, again there were a range of positions with parents for example approving participation, agreeing to the trip to Wellington, activating the youth networks to find participants, facilitating the establishments of the participant groups,
supporting the young participants in general ways and actively collaborating in the analyses. For the researchers there were also multiple factors to be managed, particularly around the tension between guiding and leading the young people, but also the working of the externalities such as timeline, presentation standard and keeping the new environment of the MYD research day safe and enjoyable for participants. In addition we put energy into obtaining parental permission to travel in particular, but also into debriefing with participants and the communities, and follow up in terms of future presentations such as those to the community groups and the possible trip to Involve 2006 in Christchurch.

As can be seen from this complex of issues and tasks the matter of good quality or successful youth participation in research is fundamentally about relationships and communication. We would argue that it is the years of building such connections that we have shared with these communities that made for the good outcomes that we have achieved to date.
Conclusions

Photovoice is a valuable tool for working with young people in positive strengths-based approaches that can build capability within youth communities to identify and engage with important social challenges. As with any approach, the context within which it is applied will greatly influence the experience and outcomes of its use. Within the framework of our projects the young participants honed skills in documentary photography (albeit in a minor way), experienced the focused attention required for coherent research and deliberated on questions about the experience of life in their neighbourhood in ways that are rarely possible in the routine bustle. Participants gained skills through the group work, the writing, design, creation and editing of the powerpoints, and from successfully presenting them to an interested and high-powered audience. The young people were also exposed to researchers who greatly valued their expertise, and through their presentations, added their often silenced voices to wider, community driven initiatives for youth in their locations. They experienced a level of leadership and representation of their community that provided them with resources and capabilities that they can continue to apply for the benefit of their peers and themselves. The research relates closely to existing literatures on participatory youth research, and photovoice in particular and contributes both in terms of content and process to the policy documents around youth wellbeing and development that MYD is working to.
References


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Appendix 1

Te Ropu Whariki is a Maori social science research group based in Auckland that operates in partnership with the Centre for Social Health Outcomes Research and Evaluation (SHORE) as an externally funded research centre of Massey University located on Symonds St in central Auckland. Whariki, led by Helen Moewaka Barnes has a fulltime staff of 15 along with a number of associates, and is involved in a range of researcher-initiated and contract research projects particularly in the fields of evaluation, public health and community development. Whariki outputs include a wide array of published papers, technical reports, conference presentations, community meetings and other forms of dissemination, a selection of which can be located at www.whariki.ac.nz We are also active in training emerging researchers and have 3 Maori PhD and three Masters students among our staff.