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Lynnette Mawhinney  and Laura Porterfield

In the spring of 2019, we had the opportunity to team teach a doctoral course on Visual Ethnography. Most of the students came to the class because they were either intrigued by the concept of visual data, or the course just fit best with their schedules that semester. In short, we were working with graduate students who were a relatively blank slate when it came to visual research and visual methodologies.

Inevitably, when the class discussion focused on ethics, the students were always confused and fuzzy about how to approach visual research in education. This bewilderment, in part, comes from how modern (but especially Western) societies use camera-enabled cell phones in daily life. For example, many of us can go to the park and quite simply capture the moment by taking a picture of our child on a playground slide. Unbeknownst to us, there could be other children in the shot, hiding in plain sight in the background. Given that a photo like this could be taken in any public space, and given that it contains young people who have not given us their consent to capture or share an image of their likeness, how do we answer the ever-pressing 21st century question: should we share this picture on social media? Would it be unethical? Since ethics have to do with highly subjective moral principles we employ to govern our behaviors and decisions, it may or may not be unethical; this all depends on how we define and apply ethics to our dilemma. If this same photo was used in a research project with children, (how) would that change our answer?

To complicate matters even further, many visual researchers do not mention or address ethics in their work. Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) were the first to discuss the ethics of visual research in the public health sphere in their seminal study. Public health research is also where visual methods like photovoice were originally created (Wang & Burris, 1997), but visual studies, and photovoice in particular, has recently spread into the educational research world. This can obscure matters further, as educational research often deals with minors and in spaces where adults and researchers can easily disempower participants. This is why we wanted to create a

special issue explicitly speaking to the ethics and pedagogy of visual studies in education—and to push the conversation past just data collection.

The articles in this special issue intentionally unpack and complicate the ethics and pedagogy of visual studies in education. Specifically, this issue aims to creatively explore how visual culture in educational spaces, pedagogy, and learning can leverage the power of visual work without compromising the privacy, protection, and agency of young people and communities. As a whole, this issue considers the following questions around visual ethics in education with student and youth stakeholders:

- How do we ethically integrate students/youth into the visual research process, while providing spaces for power negotiations?
- What are the ethical issues involved in using students'/youth's faces in visual work?
- Where do we see students'/youth's agency surface in the research process beyond data collection?

The issue opens with a piece by S. Gavin Weiser called “Failing with proof: Considerations of queerly failing in visual research.” Weiser reflects on his work through the lens of ethics and aporia, “the praxis of stuck places,” with feminine-identifying college students (p. 184). Ze goes on to discuss implications of shared ownership in participatory visual research in an educational community and the considerations of failure in the experience. Amy J. Bach’s article, “Vulnerable youth in volatile times: Ethical concerns of doing visual work with *transfronterizx* youth on the U.S./Mexico border,” takes on the ethical question of what it means to share photos of, by, and with immigrant, border-crossing, *transfronterizx* high school youth during the current contentious political movements against them. Bach explains how sharing images out of context with others can be dangerous, and in fact a form of violence given the vulnerabilities youth on the borderlands face on a daily basis. Vivek Vellanki and Urja Davesar wrote, “(Re)imagining visual research beyond photovoice: Methodological explorations with a young photographer.” Vellanki, along with 13-year-old Urja, push against the practice and pedagogy of photovoice that merely looks at the picture itself. They argue for considering youth’s photographic practice with visual studies in education as a “thinking-making-doing” (p. 226) process in order to create a new visual methodology. Lastly, David Herman, Jr.’s article, “An ethics of participation: Spatial research with young children in urban spaces,” uses his photographic work in a visual literacy program with Black children and communities of Color to explore the ethics of participation, and what he calls the “pedagogy of the discontinuous,” in order to understand the role

of spatiality in research with preadolescents. Taking up both material and ontological spatiality, Herman's conceptualization of the pedagogy of the discontinuous offers us yet another lens through which to examine how to engage young people in telling, showing, and making meaning of their everyday environments and experiences.

It is our hope that the important discussions in these pages are a catalyst for a paradigm shift in visual research in education. We hope that more visual researchers take up the task of being forthright about ethics in their practice, while complicating the traditional pedagogies of visual work. It is through this paradigm shift that we can continue to do better and safer holistic work *with* and *for* youth.

Notes on contributors

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