Picturing Rural Communities: Using Photovoice in Community Development

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Outline

• **Snapshot on Identity: Women’s Contributions Addressing Community Relations in A Rural Northern Irish District**

• **Leaf Rapids: Through the Eyes of Youth**

• **Community Through the Eyes of Rural Youth**

• **Putting Photos into Action**
Snapshot on Identity: Women’s Contributions
Addressing Community Relations in A Rural Northern Irish District
Defining Photovoice

A process that blends a grassroots approach to community development with photography, photographic technique & social action
“Photovoice is a method that enables people to define for themselves and others, including policy makers, what is worth remembering and what needs to be changed.”

-- Caroline Wang
Goals of Photovoice:

1. Enables people to record & reflect their community’s strengths & problems
2. Promotes dialogue through discussion & photographs
3. Uses resident expertise to mobilize for change & influence policy
Process of Photovoice

• Identifies issues/topic
• Discusses ethics of photography
• Provides cameras for documentation
• Facilitated group discussion
• Plans for change
Contributions of Photovoice for Applied Rural Research

• Involves individuals as agents of community change
• Employs cameras as motivating tools
• Uses photographs as tools of communication
• Creates visual artifacts
Limitations of Photovoice for Applied Rural Research

Difficulty in analyzing photographs
Facilitation requires familiarity with context
Difficulty in reaching policymakers & translating into policy change
Potential for misuse
Relationship to Rurality

• Roots of documentary photography are in rural environments & experiences
• Effective tool for documenting rural lives
• Offers visions of future in rural communities
“Words and pictures can work together to communicate more powerfully than either alone.”

-- William Albert Allard
Leaf Rapids:
Through the Eyes of Youth
Leaf Rapids, Manitoba, north of 54°
Mine closure 2002
Town Council, Community Adjustment Committee & RDI work on community revitalization through community assessment & capacity building
Need to engage youth in community planning
Photography exhibit on display at Exhibition Hall
Exhibition Hall director eager to teach youth about photography as an art form
Natural partnership evolves, project to understand youths’ views of community, and engage them in planning processes through use of photography
The Project

- Communication with youth through posters by Exhibition Centre director
- Teacher gives classes on how to use camera, & composition at youth centre Saturday morning
- Consents required to participate and to use photos
- Youth grades 5-12 participate, younger students share cameras
- 20 cameras, 2 weeks, ~ 480 pictures
- Journals to describe content, reason for photo
- Interviews with youth to hear about pictures
- Each youth chooses picture for community display
- Duplicate photos given to each photographer
Challenges

- Building partnerships, school unable to partner
- Teaching students to take photographs
- Seeking participants, grade 5-12, younger students shared cameras (3 to a camera)
- Obtaining consents to participate & use photos
- Organizing camera distribution & collection
- Completing journals, students uncommitted to writing thoughts
- Conducting student interviews
- Analyzing photos & data
- Sharing findings at a community level
Benefits and Outcomes

• Youth engaged in thinking about their community
• Youth gained photography skills
• Themes identified of importance to youth
• Concerns of youth articulated & recognized
• Youth joined the community planning committee & engaged in identifying priorities & taking action
• Community recognized value of youth involvement and contributions
Themes

- Importance of people and place, people in relation to place, and their connection to their environment
- People – family, friends, roles in the community
- Community structure – the town centre, residential areas, community services and transportation
- The “big back yard” of trails, bush and rock gardens
- Culture and history
- Appreciation for the natural environment
Community:
Through the Eyes of Rural Youth
The Genesis

- Rural researchers intrigued by the connection of northern youth with the land
- How do agro-rural youth think about community? What are their relationships with their environments?
- Fran called Joy, rural EDO, who asked youth and other community partners if they were interested in finding out
- Souris is situated in the southwest Manitoba & had keen partners - Souris School, Souris-District Community Development Corporation, Souris District Art Council, & Souris Beautification Committee, to work with researchers
- Partner planning meetings, organizing sessions with teachers eager to include grades 4 to 10, 245 students
- Goals: to give youth opportunity to look at their community through the use of photography, to gain understanding of youth perspectives of community, to engage youth in local community development and to seek other uses for their photography
The Project

- Communication with youth through classroom
- Rural photographer gives classes on how to use camera & composition at school
- Youth grades 4-10 participate, younger students share cameras
- Consents required to participate, to use photos
- 100 cameras, 3 weeks, ~ 2400 pictures
- Journals to describe contents and reasons for taking pictures
- Interviews with students to hear about pictures
- Students get duplicate photos, teachers and other partners to decide on initial displays
Challenges

• Large number of students involved, worked through the school, many consents, many journals, many interviews
• More difficult to involve large number of younger students, returning consents, completing journals
• Teachers eager to take ownership of project but May-June timeline a busy time of year for them
• Sudden death of high school teacher stunned community and ground project to a halt
• Timeline even more tight regarding plan for developing display at school before graduation
• Summer lag for various partners to move forward on community displays and other uses for photos
• On hold for analysis until pictures returned to BU
Family
Friends
Roles in the Community
“Big Back Yard”
Areas to Improve
The Leaf Rapids National Exhibition Centre in partnership with the Rural Development Institute of Brandon University presents:

**Leaf Rapids: Through the Eyes of the Youth**

This photographic exhibition illustrates how young people view their community, the people, places and things that they find interesting and important to them.

On display from November 24 – January 4, 2005
Putting Photos into Action
Benefits and Outcomes

- Increased understanding of how rural youth perceive community, their connection with the land
- Students from Souris School enjoyed the project, gained some photography interest and skills
- Some teachers incorporated project into curriculum
- School display for graduation and year end awards ceremonies to instill school pride – and it did!
- Pictures being displayed in the school on a rotating basis as well as on school website
Benefits and Outcomes

• Community display being developed for use in local restaurants
• Photos will be used for promotion of town for various bids such as sporting tournaments
• Photos to be used for community website and promotional material
• Youth justice will use material for presentation to instill community pride and reduce vandalism
• Photos to be used in various ways for Souris Homecoming 2006
• Caution regarding student disclosure of personal issues or concerns
A Selection of Photographs – Analysis to Follow
Souris Photo Voice

Community Through Our Children’s Eyes

For knowledge transfer purposes only.
This is a very interesting activity to do in this town.

Lyndon age 14
Sports are important to me and my community. They encourage people to come together and have fun.

Cassie age 17
My brother playing soccer

Soccer is something that is developing in our community. Souris used to be a hockey town but now there are so many more sports that people enjoy.

Natasha age 16
Feeding Calves

Its something you do to keep the animals alive.

Ben Age 11
My Dad and little Brother

They are looking for seed in the field; checking how the crop is doing. It shows how we keep farming (which is part of our community) going on and on throughout the generations.

Danielle
age 13
The Railway Tracks Leaving Souris

The trains bring grain into the elevators and farming is a large part of our community.

Erin age 17
Elgin Elevator
We used it a long time ago. The elevator is closed now.
Lucas age 9
Walter and Stu

These are 2 men that I wait on and see almost everyday I am working. These 2 men have been coming here everyday for years and each time they spend most of it staring out the window.

I can’t help but wonder how much they have seen that image or even how many ways they have seen the community change. Walter is 95 years old.

Nadine age 16
Without any bus drivers in our community, we wouldn’t have a bus driver to pick up all us kids in the country so bus drivers are a big part of our community.

Kierston  age 13
Run down buildings and their ugly store windows

It is something that could be fixed and made a little more attractive.

Rinuatta Age 14
This picture is something that needs to be improved because no one lives in the house and it needs some cleaning up.

Sheldon Age 9
A major activity in winter here.

People go through our yard on them and rip up the grass through the snow.

Chanel age 9
It shows how we can recycle to reduce pollution and litter around our town.

Kiersten age 13
In our community we like to share.

Cali age 15
The dirt road in front of my house

When I was growing up all the places on that road were my community. I can’t even count how many times I biked, walked or ran down that road going to my Grandma’s house. It means a lot to me.

Angela age 17
The Swinging Bridge

It is the longest suspension bridge in Canada and has lasted 101 years.

Cameron age 16
Hillcrest Museum

It looks really cool and reminds me of the past.

PJ age 15
If you have something wrong with your vehicle you can take it here.

Laird age 13
I was raised with these animals. They are how my dad makes his money. Katie age 17
Everyone goes and talks to God. People who are into drugs or something could pray to God to get them off drugs.

Tanya age 14
My brothers and I caught frogs in this pond every summer when we were young.  

Katie age 17
This is the bird sanctuary – a major tourist attraction. There were like 30. They were sooo cute!

Lisa age 17
I liked all the angles that were made from the wooden structure. The tower is where anyone can go to look at the entire town. It is beautiful.

Angela age 17
The river provides water to the surrounding area.

P J age 15
I enjoy living in Souris. It is a peaceful and quiet town.

Burton age 12
Souris Photo Voice

Community Through Our Children’s Eyes


