
Articles

“It was fun. . . I liked drawing my thoughts”: Using Drawings as a Part of the Focus Group Process with Children

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Little research in leisure studies has involved the use of drawings as a method of data collection with children. When involving children in qualitative research, one of the major challenges is for the adult investigator to capture the experiences and meanings from the children’s perspective. This article discusses four contexts in which drawings can contribute to the research process when conducting focus groups with children: 1) to facilitate a relaxed atmosphere, 2) to gain insight into the children’s perspective, 3) to provide structure and focus the discussion, and 4) to recognize and reduce the potential of group-think. The manuscript concludes by recommending that drawings can be used as a methodological technique to help elicit meaningful responses from children.

KEYWORDS: *Drawings, children, focus groups, qualitative methods.*

Introduction

Over the last decade, there has been considerable expansion with the use of focus groups in social science research (e.g., Bloor, 2002; Goebert, 2002). Nonetheless, Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell and Britten (2002) suggest the use of focus groups to study children’s experiences remains at an exploratory stage. Indeed, in the field of leisure studies focus groups are underutilized as a method of data collection, especially in research involving children. Further, virtually no published leisure research involves the use of drawings as a technique in the methodological process. The absence of such a technique is particularly surprising given its potential for eliciting meaningful responses from participants who are children.

Children have been recognized by several researchers as culture-producing agents who actively participate in the construction of their social worlds (Adler & Adler, 1998; Fine, 1987). As a distinct children’s culture is acknowledged, interpretative researchers are faced with the challenge of rep-

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resenting children's perspectives in their texts instead of imposing their own authority as an adult researcher. In my experience, drawings are one way of assisting researchers in this regard.

In this paper, I propose using drawings as a method of data collection for research with children in leisure studies. More specifically, drawings can be used as technique for eliciting information in focus groups with children. Van Manen (1990) argues researchers can learn about a phenomenon through visual imagery because "it is in this work that the variety and possibility of human experience may be found in condensed and transcended form" (p. 19). Drawings with children are used in other fields of research such as psychology and sociology. With respect to the former, children's drawings have been used to study the psychological development of children. Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget used drawings to study children's conception of space (cf. Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Psychologists today continue to use drawings as a method of eliciting information from children (e.g., Aldridge, Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Espen, & Bowler, 2004; Freidlander, Larney, Skau, Hotaling, & Cutting, 2000). As for the latter, sociologists typically use drawings with children to investigate their personal perceptions and experiences (cf. Schratz & Walker, 1995; Lykes, 1994). Both fields of study have given children a natural means of communicating their views of the world through drawings. This method of data collection gives child participants a voice and enables leisure researchers to better understand children's leisure experiences, based on the children's own observations and interpretations.

This article presents my experiences and reflections of using drawings as a part of focus group sessions with children. The focus groups were a part of my master's thesis, which explored the extent to which participation in a variety of leisure activities directed towards cooperation and effective communication affected the development of social capital and sense of community in a group of children at an international camp (Yuen, 2004). The purpose of this article is to share my experiences and observations of using drawings as a technique in conducting focus groups with children, and to illustrate the benefits of using drawings as a technique when conducting research with children. Specifically, I consider four particular contexts in which the use of drawings as a method of data collection contributed to my research: 1) facilitating a relaxed atmosphere, 2) gaining insight into the children's perspective, 3) providing structure and focusing the discussion, and 4) recognizing and reducing the potential of groupthink. The discussion is centred around my experiences with a number of focus groups that used drawings as the basis of their discussion and one focus group that did not include drawings as a part of the procedure. Excerpts from the conversation that occurred during the focus group sessions and some of the drawings by the children are used to help describe and illustrate these methodological issues. Pseudonyms, chosen by the children themselves, are used to help ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Background

This study involved 32 eleven-year-old children from various countries who participated in a summer camp in 2003. The name of the camp was Pangea Village. The summer camp is one of many programs organized by Children's International Summer Villages (CISV), whose aim is to promote peace and cross-cultural understanding through educational programs for children. The activities at a CISV camp typically emphasize "the development of lifelong friendships, effective communication skills and cooperative abilities" (CISV, 2002, p. 1). My official role at the camp was staff member. Staff members are in charge of the administrative duties of camp and generally participate in all of the camps activities with the children. That is, staff members, along with the counsellors and junior counsellors, both organize and participate in the activities with the children.

Data were collected throughout the course of the four-week-camp. Participant observation and focus groups were used as methods of data collection in the study. Participant observations occurred on a daily basis during the entire four-week period of camp. Both structured and non-structured activities were observed. Structured activities were the planned activities organized by the counsellors, staff members and junior counsellors. Non-structured activities were essentially any other interactions guided by the children themselves, such as the time in between activities, meal times, and the period before bedtime.

Focus groups and the methodological issues influenced by the use of drawings in the focus groups are the main premise of this discussion. The focus groups, which were used to provide an occasion for the children to formally describe their personal experiences, were conducted at the end of camp. The focus group discussions were based on pictures drawn by the children at the beginning of each session. Drawing was chosen as the main form of communication because it helped decrease the language barrier experienced by the majority of the children, as most of them did not speak English as their first language. Additionally, this creative self-expressive activity was common within the CISV program and therefore did not appear to be out of place in the context of the camp. Many of the camp activities involved drawing or other aesthetically-based activities, such as drama productions and the composition of song lyrics. For example, in one of the activities, the children created a massive puzzle to represent the International Charter of Human Rights. Each puzzle piece consisted of a drawing that represented an article in the Charter.

Participants

The international camp consisted of 48 eleven-year-old participants from 12 different countries. The participating countries, which were selected by CISV's International Office, were Chile, China, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the USA. As

required by CISV policy, two girls and two boys from each country were selected to participate. Out of the 48 children selected, there were 32 study participants (17 males and 15 females). Two of the children's parents decided they did not want their children to participate, and another fourteen campers did not return their parent consent forms and child assent forms. To comply with traditional CISV procedure, all of the children at camp were included in the focus group sessions. The analysis only included the data collected from the 32 study participants.

The children were assigned into six groups of eight (four boys and four girls in each group). Eight children in each group provided enough participants for a discussion, but not too many to hinder the voice and opinion of each individual child. The four children from each country were placed together because several of the children required translation. Although the counsellors from each country were present for translation, they were instructed not to provide any leading comments or suggestions to the children.

The focus groups also served as a method for member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, a part of the focus group sessions was used as an occasion for the children to comment and make additional suggestions based on some of my initial interpretations from the participant observations. Consequently, the focus groups were organized according to specific questions I had for certain countries. For example, I asked the children who were native English speakers (Great Britain and the USA) if they felt they had an advantage over the other children at camp in terms of communicating with others. The groupings were as follows: Japan and China, Sweden and Norway, Chile and Portugal, Israel and Korea, Great Britain and the USA.

Parental consent forms for the study were sent out to the parents via the counsellor of the participating delegates five months prior to the camp. Parents were reassured that the study was both approved and supported by CISV and the university with which it was affiliated. The letters highlighted that the child's participant status in the camp would not be affected if they chose not to participate or withdrew from the study at a later date. The letter was also addressed to the children to inform the participants about my research and invite them to be a part of the study. The children had the option of accepting or rejecting the invitation. The counsellors were asked to mail the parental consent and child assent forms to me before the camp began; however, some also brought them to the camp.

Methods

A pilot test of the focus group procedure was completed by four eleven-year-olds from Canada whom I took to another camp in July 2002. The original focus group question I asked in the pilot focus group was, "How do you feel about being at camp?" The children were asked to draw a picture to reflect how they felt about the camp towards the end of the first week. This procedure was repeated during the last week of camp. Following the com-

pletion of the second drawing, the children were asked to present both of their drawings to the group. After the pilot test, the children were asked what they thought about the drawing technique and if they thought other children would be willing to participate. The children were encouraged to provide suggestions for changes or improvements. When the children were specifically asked about the drawing component, their replies indicated they enjoyed the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences and share their ideas:

Facilitator: So, were the drawings okay? The whole drawing part?

Mystina: Yeah

Facilitator: Do you think other kids will like it?

Victoria: Yes

Frank: There's nothing wrong with it. . .it's cool.

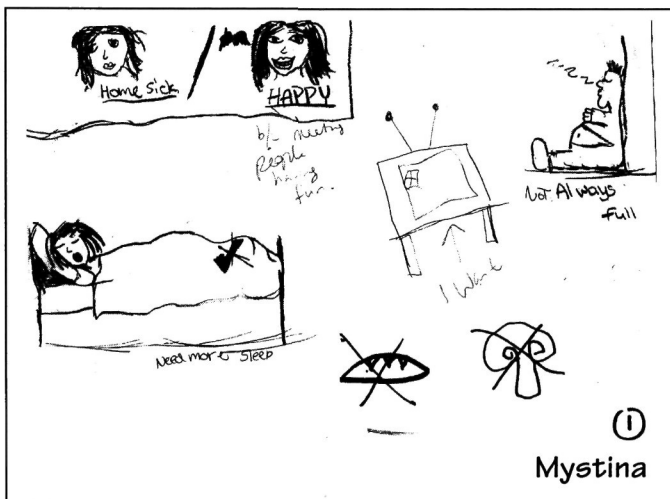
Facilitator: What about you Jason? I know drawing's not your favourite activity-

Jason: It was fun. . .I liked [drawing] my thoughts.

Mystina: It's like somebody's listening to us.

Essentially, the children felt that the drawings provided an enjoyable occasion to express themselves and perhaps more importantly, be heard by others.

Based on the pictures and discussion provided by the children in the pilot test, I felt that the question did not capture the purpose of the study (which was to examine the extent to which participation in leisure activities directed towards effective communication and cooperation affect the development of social capital and community in children). As demonstrated in the conversation and drawings below, most of the children's descriptions of their feelings were centred around friends and food. This conversation is in response to the question, "How do you feel about being at camp?"



Victoria: I miss my friends. . .I'm sick of bread. . .I miss, like, Canadian food.

Jason: Me too.

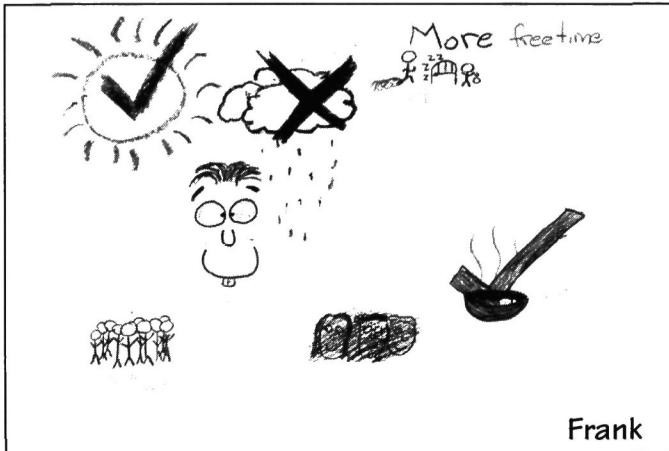
Frank: I want bacon!

Victoria: Yeah, I want bacon too! I want bacon and-

Jason: Eggs

Victoria: Scrambled eggs-

Mystina: But with no mushrooms in it.



Eventually, the question was changed to “What did you learn at camp?” for the focus groups in the primary study. Rather than having a drawing session at the beginning of camp and another at the end, as the children did in the pilot test, the children in the primary study participated in only one drawing session at the end of camp.

The focus group sessions in the primary study all occurred on the same day. While one group was involved in the focus group, the other five groups were participating in other camp activities. The duration of all but one of the focus groups was approximately 75 minutes. Due to time constraints, the last focus group session with the children from Great Britain and the USA did not include the drawing portion and the discussion was only 30 minutes. While I participated in the drawing activity with the children, I also observed the behaviours and interactions among the children.

Although the actual drawing portion of the focus group was not audiotape-recorded, the presentation of the drawings and the discussions stemming from the pictures were recorded. The recorder was in plain view, and the children were told I would be recording the session and that it was there to help me remember how they described their drawings. The tape recording did not appear to dramatically affect the activity, perhaps because I often carried a tape recorder with me during my participant observations. By the end of camp, when the focus group sessions occurred, the majority of the children appeared accustomed to the presence of the tape recorder.

I facilitated the focus groups myself. The three weeks I spent with the children prior to the focus group sessions provided the opportunity to establish a sense of connectedness and rapport with the children, both of which are important components necessary for qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1991). During the focus groups, participants were asked to draw four pictures based on four different questions: 1) How would you describe our camp community? 2) How did you communicate with others? 3) Think of the activities we did at camp and what you learned from them, and 4) Think about what you did during Free Time, what you learned and why it was important to you.

The participants were asked to place their names and pseudonyms on the back of the page for the purpose of analysis. Following the completion of the drawings, each child took turns presenting his or her picture to the group. After all the children presented their first drawing, there were discussions about the drawings, based around the first question (i.e., How would you describe our camp community?). After the discussions each child then presented his or her second drawing, and discussions related to communication occurred thereafter. Presentations and discussions related to the third and fourth questions and drawings followed in the same manner. During these presentations, any verbal descriptions from the children that increased my understanding and interpretation of the drawings were added to the pictures. Extra information provided during these presentations and my observations of the groups' dynamics were noted after the participants exited the room.

The children's counsellors and I also drew our own pictures and presented them; however, we presented last to avoid influencing the children's presentations. All of the adults generally participated in the structured activities at camp. Non-participation would have appeared unnatural.

Questions one and two were related to member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), while the last two questions were related to the focus group question, "What did you learn at camp?" Member checks are used as a technique for establishing credible findings and essentially involve the intentional testing of findings with the original group of participants from whom the data was collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Incorporating member checking into the focus groups provided the opportunity for the children to formally confirm, revise or reject my preliminary interpretations. I had already begun to identify themes and patterns related to community building and communication based on the data collected through participant observations. Consequently, I was able to verify my initial understanding of community and communication with the children and thus contribute to the credibility of my findings.

Other methods were also incorporated into the study to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of my findings. The prolonged-engagement of my study provided time to learn about the children's culture and to re-examine the information I collected for distortions (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also kept a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and incorporated triangulation into the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990).

Specifically, two methods of triangulation were used. Multiple analyst triangulation occurred as I presented and examined my findings with other staff members, counsellors, junior counsellors, and children. Data source triangulation involved comparing the data collected from both of my methods used (participant observation and focus groups). These methods of triangulation helped confirm the data collected from my difference sources.

Results and Discussion

I experienced several benefits when using drawings as a methodological technique in the focus group sessions. Essentially, the drawings contributed to the development of a relaxed atmosphere for the participants in the focus groups, helped me gain insight into the children's perspectives, provided structure and focused the discussion, and helped me recognize and reduce the potential of groupthink. These advantages are discussed in the following section by comparing my experiences with a number of focus groups that used drawings as the basis of their discussion and one focus group that did not.

The one focus group that did not include drawings was the focus group with children from Great Britain and the USA. While the drawings were originally included to decrease the language barrier for the children who did not speak English as a first language, the focus group with the children from Great Britain and the USA was intentionally organized to be last in the event that there was insufficient time. We only had approximately 30 minutes for this last focus group session because the entire camp was going to attend a banquet to celebrate the final night at camp. Notably, there are some limitations of this comparison between the focus group with the children from Great Britain and the USA, and the other focus groups that did the drawings. The children from Great Britain and the USA may have been more comfortable in expressing themselves than the other children because they were native English speakers. Additionally, the children's counsellors were not present at the focus group session because they were helping to prepare for the final banquet.

Using Drawings to Facilitate a Relaxed Atmosphere

In addition to the challenge of any interpretivist research—ensuring the participants' perspectives are reflected, research with children presents additional challenges because of the differences related to power between the adult researcher and child participant. This difference in power affects the entry of the researcher into the children's worlds, as well as the reactions of the children towards the researcher. Eder and Cosaro (1999) emphasize the differences in physical size and communicative ability that naturally exist between children and adults. Ultimately, these differences contribute to difficulty of adults being accepted into the worlds of children and understanding their perspective.

Mandell (1988) suggests adults can gain entry into the children's world by engaging in joint action with the children to create mutual understand-

ing. The presence of the drawings provided a common ground through which the researcher and participant could interact. As Mandell (1988) states, "people with quite different perspectives. . . can act together and in the same way [through a common object or experience] thus reaching immediate, shared understandings" (p. 436-437). Both adults and children created and presented their drawings in the focus group sessions. Participation in a common activity presumably minimizes the traditional status and role differences between the adults and children by contributing to the balance of power in terms of directing and controlling the discussions that occur (see Eder & Corsaro, 1999; Mandell, 1988). Thus, by minimizing the traditional hierarchical adult-children relationship, drawing as a shared activity has the potential to create a common ground and contribute to the development of shared meanings.

To fully understand another's perspective one must enter the world of that person. Gaining access requires time to establish rapport with the children based upon mutual trust and respect. Although I spent three weeks with the children prior to conducting the focus group session, the use of drawings as a common activity at the beginning of the focus groups may have helped to foster an open, comfortable atmosphere conducive to the dialectical process required in focus groups (see Frey & Fontana, 1991). For example, in one of the focus groups many of the children were humming and singing together while they were drawing their pictures. This laid-back atmosphere constructed by the children through their drawing and singing may have contributed to an environment that was more conducive to the discussion and sharing of ideas, which is essentially the goal of the focus group process. A certain level of comfort is required in focus groups as it contributes to the quality of discussions between group members as opinions "bounce back and forth and [are] modified by the group" (Frey & Fontana, 1991, p. 178).

While the children were drawing their pictures, they were given the chance to reflect upon their own experiences without having to consider the opinions of the other children, and without the pressure to answer immediately. Direct questions may have been perceived to be more intimidating by some of the children, compared to describing their own drawings after they had the chance to think about their answers. This may be one of the reasons why the children in the focus group without drawings took some time to focus on the question. Moreover, as Morgan et al. (2002) cautions, some children tend "to give monosyllabic answers to questions that they [do] not identify as relevant to their experience" (p. 11). Drawings can ultimately provide a natural and comfortable context where children can communicate the experiences that were important to them.

The process of understanding the children's perspectives through their drawings was easier than just using verbal interaction. The children in the focus group without drawings, such as Jason in the conversation below, required some time to settle and concentrate on the question asked.

Facilitator: So, do you think you had a great advantage over everybody here at camp [because they were all native English speakers]-

Wilson: Mm um [in disagreement]

Bev: No it doesn't.

Facilitator: You don't think so?

Jason: Um and ah, and ah. . .look at that bug!

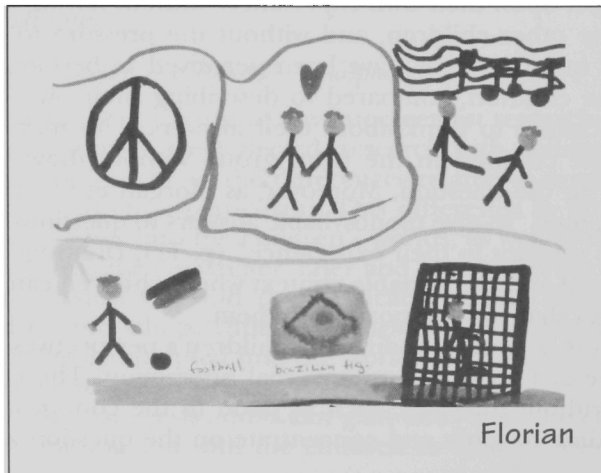
Everyone: . . .[discussion about bugs].

Facilitator: Um, I want to go back to the communication thing. So, you guys, you didn't feel like you had an advantage at all?

In other words, some of the children appeared to require a tool to foster interaction and establish a common starting point (e.g., icebreaker activity) before they felt comfortable sharing and discussing their experiences. In this particular instance it was a discussion on bugs. As the focus group continued, the children's discussion became less disjointed as they developed a conversational atmosphere. In contrast, the children in the focus group with drawing were generally observed to be more focused than the children in the focus groups without drawings. The time the children spent together creating their pictures in the focus groups with drawings provided an occasion for them to become more comfortable with each other while they participated in a common activity.

Using Drawings to Gain Insight into the Children's Perspective

An Alternative form of Communication. As with adult participants, encouraging those participants who are quieter than the others can be difficult. Schratz and Walker (1995) suggest that pictures can contribute to the discussions by providing a medium through which children who are not naturally talkative can use to relate to each other. Children who were more verbally reserved used their drawing as a vehicle for communication. For example, Florian's picture was quite descriptive even though he was not very talkative.



Jounis, who was also observed to be one of the quieter children at camp, drew a very descriptive drawing and became quite animated as he described his drawing to the group.



Jounis: *We made [the city]. And then you give it to the other group and ah, we have [another group's city]. . .and we have to decide if we are going [to] make it broken [have war], or not. We get [our city] back and it's broken and we must fix it. I've learned that you have to some peace for other country.*

By using Florian's and Jounis's drawings as point of interaction, I was able to elicit thoughts and insights that would have been lost if the drawings had been excluded from the focus group.

While some children are less verbally expressive than others in any type of setting, group settings may be even more constraining. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, "individuals may be stifled rather than stimulated by the group" (p. 185). In the focus group without the drawings, particularly for the question on what they learned on from the camp activities, some of the children did not want to repeat the activity that other children had mentioned, even though they had different perspectives on what they learned. It was only after I encouraged the children to talk about the activity, even though it had been mentioned, that the children proceeded to discuss their own experiences related to the activity.

Facilitator: *And what about an activity for you [Jennifer] and what you learned from it. . .?*

Jennifer: *Well, um, I learned a lot. The Peace War Peace Game um, it's not good for war. War isn't good-*

Ted: *First I was going to say about the Water one-*

Jennifer: *So was I-*

Ted: *-but Will said about that, and [now you're talking about] the War one.*

Facilitator: *It's okay, you can talk about it too.*

Ted: *It's like people were saying how they. . .Eliza was saying she's like upset when she got hers back and that it had been all destroyed. And I said think of people who are like,*

out in the real world and their whole family, their whole home has been destroyed and like their family has been killed and like and just imagine how they feel.

Children are often concerned with who said what first. Consequently, children in a focus group may not mention an idea, fearing that it might appear as though they copied one of their peers. The use of drawings may have helped reduced the concern for being a “copycat” in the focus group sessions with drawings as the drawings were obviously different. Even though the some of the children drew about the same activity, they were able to personalize their drawings with their own perspectives and experiences.

Describing Emotions

Researchers such as Shratz and Walker (1995) and Lykes (1994) recognize drawings as a natural means of expression for children. The children’s drawings helped stimulate descriptions of specific details, such as people, places or emotions experienced by the children. As demonstrated in the example below, a child’s drawing of a bear elicited a description of emotions that might have otherwise been lost:



Betty: *Um, [when I think of camp], I have CISV, peace, love, make friends, um, that’s it.*

Facilitator: *Yes, and let’s see. . .you have a bear there, what does the bear there mean?*

Betty (embarrassed): *When I was on my own, I always think about the black bears and stuff like that. . .I was scared, but I really wanted to see one.*

The bear Betty drew represented feelings and emotions that were perhaps not as easy for her to share the ideas she first mentioned (peace, love and make friends).

Describing emotions, particularly ones that involve a sense of vulnerability such as being scared, may be more difficult for the children such as Betty to express themselves due to feelings of embarrassment or shyness. As Schratz and Walker (1995) argue, “pictures can be used to cut through some of the levels of pretence, [such as] posing and editing self-presentation that frequently dominate our responses when. . .we are faced with completing a questionnaire, [or] being asked questions in an interview” (p. 80). Moreover,

as demonstrated by Lykes (1994), drawings can be used as an unobtrusive medium for communication where children can disclose some of their more personal experiences. In his study, he recognized that drawing could be used as a mechanism for children to communicate experiences that otherwise might have been difficult to express. Consequently, he incorporated drawings into his research methods to facilitate a space in which the children from Guatemalan Maya communities could express their experiences of war.

Probing and Clarification

The discussions with the children in the focus group that did not have drawings required more probing and clarification. For example, Jennifer required some simple questions to encourage her to expand on what she was trying to describe.

Facilitator: Okay, so the first question that I asked everybody was when [you] think of Pangea Village, what sorts of things do you guys think of?

Jennifer: Puzzle pieces.

Facilitator: Puzzle pieces?

Jennifer: The world and the continents and countries and cities and towns and rivers, and-

Facilitator: And what about all these?

Wilson: All joined, like, together

Jennifer: Yeah, joined together. . . like a puzzle piece.

Other times a child would forget what they were going to say. As demonstrated in the same conversation with Jennifer, on some occasions it was difficult for the researcher and even the children themselves to keep up with the direction of conversation:

Jennifer: Oh I had something to say and now I forget it, and now I thought I remembered it, but I don't.

Facilitator: Was it about communication?

Bev: Oh, we find out about things in translation time-

Wilson: before

Bev: -in like, before anybody else. We like- they do everything in English, whereas most of the time-

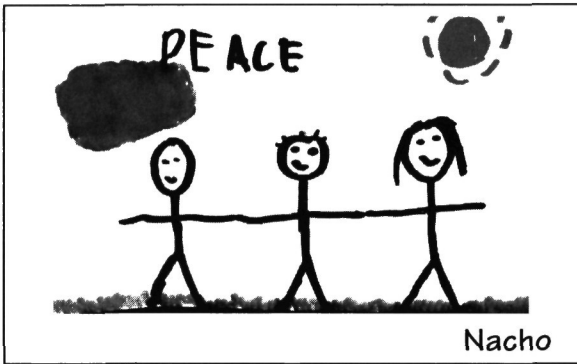
Wilson: Sometimes they don't, they did it in French first.

Facilitator: Jennifer, was it about translation?

Jennifer: I forgot again, it was about trading. . .

As was stated in the introduction, researchers have generally recognized adults and children as ultimately having different perspectives (Adler & Adler, 1998; Fine, 1987; Mandell, 1988). My participation in the drawing activity at the beginning of the focus group with the children and then the discussions with the children about our drawings provided me a better understanding of the children's experiences, which were previously based only on my observations. I often observed the children holding hands and assumed it was a sign of friendship. However, I could not be sure of the meaning the children attached to this action based on my observations alone. As dem-

onstrated in the conversation below, I was able to capture the meaning one child attached to holding hands with another person.



Nacho: Ah, I'm thinking peace; I draw ah, children ah, together with the hands.

Facilitator: Why are they holding hands?

Nacho: Because I think that's something that ah, showing [sic] peace.

As I elicited Nacho's perspective of what it meant to hold hands with another person through his drawing (peace), I was able to reassess my interpretation of the meaning attached to holding hands (friendship).

Drawings to Provide Structure and Focus the Discussion

In addition to helping the children communicate their ideas, the use of drawings also helped structure the focus group session. Each drawing served as a focal point for the children's discussions. Children have been recognized by some researchers to have a greater tolerance for chaos than adults (Adler & Adler, 1994). Speaking while another person is talking and talking about many things at once were common phenomena that occurred during many of the discussions at camp. While the children in the focus groups with the drawings were more cognizant of waiting their turn to speak, the focus group with the children from Great Britain and the USA was more disorderly. Although the children in the focus group without drawings made the suggestion to go around in a circle and share their thoughts, this process did not occur. Not surprisingly, the children would often interrupt each other and had to be reminded to wait their turn.

Facilitator: . . .and if everyone could just speak one person at a time that'd be great.

Bev: We go 'round sort of in a circle.

Facilitator: Yeah! So the question was, what do you think of when you think of Pangea Village? You can start (to John)

John: A puzzle. [laugh]

Jennifer: That's what I said.

Facilitator: A puzzle made up of what?

John: The countries or the continents.

Jennifer: Exactly what I said with the rivers in it and the sky and the clouds and the birds and people and trees, and-

John: and animals-

Jennifer: and animals-

John: and droppings

Facilitator: Okay remember what we said, one person at a time.

While interruptions from the other children may have contributed to the generation of new thoughts and ideas in the discussion, these remarks which generally occurred mid-sentence, often prevented the individual who was originally speaking to continue with his or her original thought. Specifically, John could have expanded on his idea of a puzzle in terms of diverse geographical or perhaps cultural entities; however, Jennifer (in her enthusiasm) diverted the conversation to more environmental aspects such as trees and rivers. The children in the focus groups without the drawings would often diverge from the topic being discussed and had to be refocused on several occasions. The following is another example where the flow of ideas was interrupted:

Ted: Um, [when I think about Pangea Village, I think about] people making friends.

Jennifer: Friendship, happiness

Bev: People running around together

Jennifer: Togetherness

John: Love.

Wilson: Fun, peaceful, having fun.

Ted: I'm not changed yet so- (the children had to change to more formal clothing for the final banquet)

Bev: I'm changed.

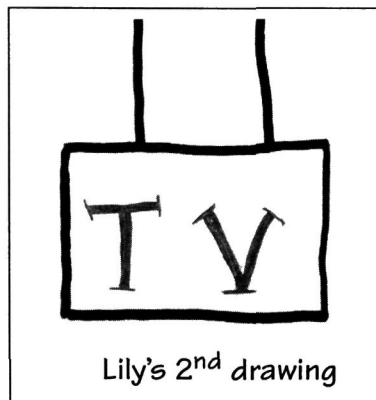
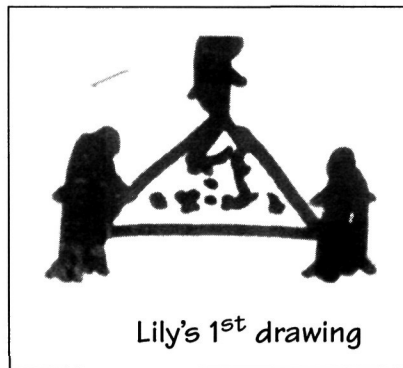
Ted's comment on friendship in the camp community created a new topic of discussion for the focus group as the other children began to explore the idea of developing friendships. However, this discussion was interrupted by Ted's sudden comment on having to prepare for the banquet. Nonetheless, the information provided by the children was rich and the chaos did not constrain the flow of ideas in the discussion—the experience was just more exhausting for the researcher!

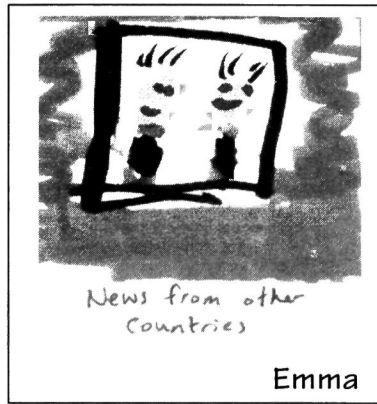
Using Drawings to Recognize and Reduce the Possibility of Groupthink

Focus groups are not only affected by the relationship between the researcher and respondents, but also by the evolving relations between the respondents themselves (Frey & Fontana, 1991). As Frey and Fontana (1991) suggest, the researcher “must be sensitive to group dynamics such as how the opinions of one member can sway others, or how relations outside the group influence response patterns within the group” (p. 185). Participants in a focus group can change and sometimes reverse their opinion after interacting with others (Krueger, 1994). This change of opinion may occur because group members experience the pressure to conform to the dominant perspective of the group. This particular form of conformity is referred to as *groupthink* (Janis, 1982 as cited in Brehm et al., 1999). Groupthink occurs when there is an excessive tendency for group members to seek concurrence. Under such circumstances, the opportunity for new or different ideas to emerge is greatly minimized. Drawings may help reduce the possibility of groupthink by providing a structure for the focus group to help

ensure that every participant has the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

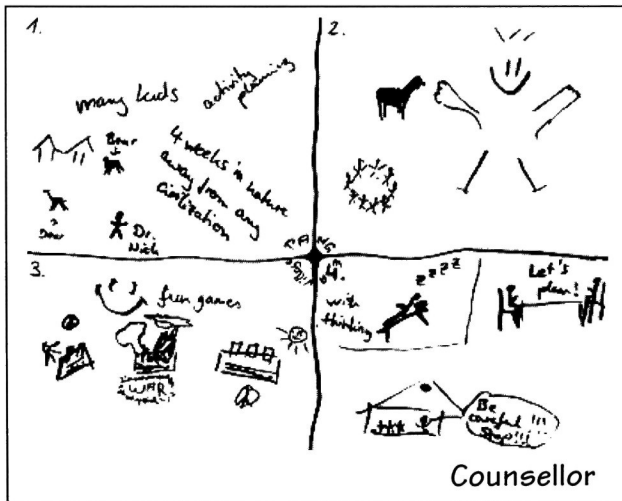
Recognizing that the children could have copied each other and/or their counsellors, the occurrence of groupthink may have been easier to detect because of the overt and tangible nature of this form of communication. Specifically, one can visually observe the creation and alterations made to drawings. Similar to focus group discussions, the participants' ideas and opinions may be modified throughout the creation of their drawings as they see what others are drawing around them. For example, Lily began drawing an activity which was different from Emma's, who was sitting across from her. After several minutes of drawing and re-drawing, Lily became frustrated with her original drawing and asked for another piece of paper and drew the same activity as her campmate. As I observed this process, I was later able to ask Lily to explain her original drawing. After telling me that the drawing was not very good, she proceeded to explain how she learned to cooperate with others during the activity:

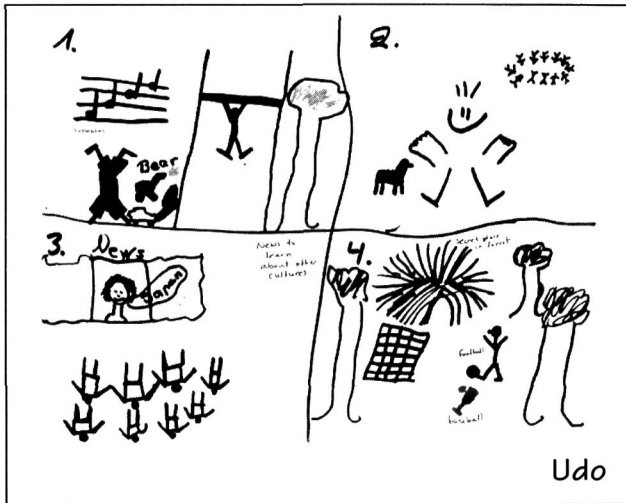




The children’s drawings ultimately captured their experiences in a concrete and non-perishable form that reminded them of an idea, and in this particular instance, enabled me to go back to an experience that was important to Lily. Whereas ideas presented in a purely verbal context are more easily forgotten when they are overshadowed by the more dominant and reoccurring themes in a conversation.

Observing the modification or assimilation of a drawing is more overt than listening to a discussion. Specifically, the researcher can see if a participant simply copies the drawing of another, or if other people’s drawings add to the participant’s perspective through an addition to their original drawing. In one focus group, during the creation of the drawings, I observed one of the children reproducing the drawing of his counsellor.





Facilitator (referring to quadrant two in the drawings below about how the children communicated at camp): Udo, you have exactly the same as [Counsellor]. Do you want to maybe explain this one (pointing to the drawing of the people holding hands in a circle)?

Udo: This is the picture from CISV (pointing to the CISV logo on my t-shirt)

Facilitator: And how does that relate to communication?

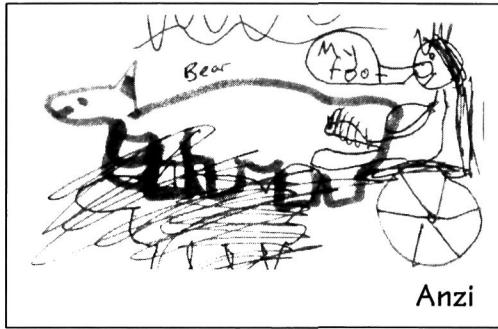
Lily: The children there, they speak together.

Facilitator: Yeah, it could be. . .and Udo what do you think?

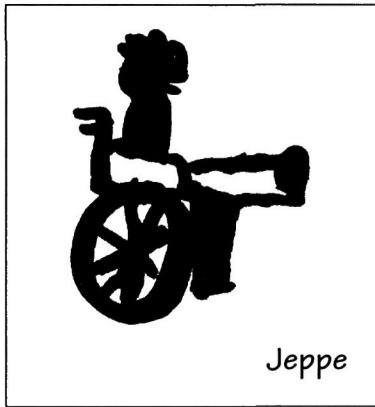
Udo: They hold hands.

Although I was not certain if Udo had merely copied his counsellor's drawing without any personal meaning for himself, or if his counsellor's drawing inspired the development of an idea for Udo, the drawings enable me to be aware of the possibility of groupthink and use the drawing as a outlet for Udo to construct his own meaning.

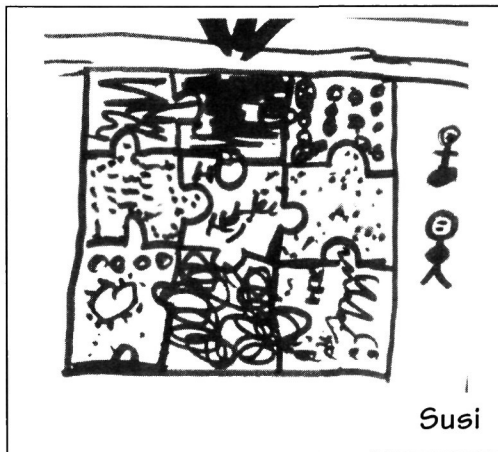
The following is another example where group conformity was recognized and averted. Most of the children in the focus group with Norway and Sweden drew pictures referring to the simulation game where they were assigned a disability. During the discussions, the children talked about gaining a better understanding of what it was like to have a disability. One of the children's drawings was different from the majority of the drawings. Her drawing represented a different activity; specifically a tower building activity. Interestingly, when it was her turn to talk about what she had learned from the activities, like the others she talked about the Disabilities Simulation Game. However, when I asked about her drawing, it was only then that the child presented her drawing and described how she learned to work together with others.



Anzi



Jeppe



Susi

Anzi: Ah I learned a lot about, about bears and um I have learned um, that it's not very easy being handicapped.

Jeppé: . . . it's very difficult to be handicapped. . . Life is not so easy.

Susi: Yeah um, [I learned] how it is to be handicapped.

Facilitator: What, and what about your drawing there?

Susi: I draw [sic] the ah, puzzle, the big one (that the entire camp constructed to represent the Charter of Human Rights).

Facilitator: Um hm.

Susi: I learned cooperation from it.

Facilitator: Cooperation- how did you learn it?

Susi: We talk in a group and then agreed what to write and draw.

Limitations

Based on my experience, I believe using drawing in focus groups with children is a methodological technique that is beneficial to the research process in leisure studies. Given the subjective nature of leisure and the various contexts it can encompass (i.e., "people's behaviour, the setting in which the behaviour takes place and their mental experience" Mannell & Kleiber, 1997, p. 56) children, like adults, may struggle with defining and describing their leisure experiences. Ultimately, drawings can be used to help facilitate and enhance the children's verbal descriptions of their leisure experience. However, while there are many benefits to using drawing in research with children, researchers need to be aware of possible limitations of this technique.

Incorporating drawings into the focus group procedure is very time consuming. In this particular study, half an hour was used for the creation of the children's drawings, and approximately 45 minutes were used in the actual focus group discussion. Researchers must allow adequate time for the drawing portion of the focus group in order to facilitate an enjoyable experience for the children. Originally, I had only budgeted 20 minutes for the children to draw and 40 minutes for the discussion. However, it was obvious by the first focus group that the children would require more time. Because of the extra time used by the other focus groups, I decided to omit the drawing portion for the last focus group with the children from Great Britain and the USA as English was their native language and they would have less trouble communicating.

For some children, drawing may be a barrier to the flow of ideas required for discussion in focus groups. There may be children who do not like drawing or feel that they are not good drawers. Consequently, the children might become preoccupied with their dislike or perceived inability to draw. For example, as previously discussed, Lily did not initially share her first drawing with the focus group about the triangle-cooperation-game because she did not feel her drawing was good enough.

For some researchers, drawings may also be a barrier because it is difficult to draw emotions and multi-sensory experiences. For example, Betty did not actually draw that she was scared; rather she drew a bear to represent

an emotion that she later described. As in any research, the method should be based upon the research question. When the question requires the description of one's emotions, it may be advisable to use other forms of visual elicitation such as photographs. Notably, this article discusses the use of drawings as a method used *in conjunction* with verbal interaction to help ensure that the researcher's findings are representative of the children's perspective. In the focus group sessions, the children were given the opportunity to elaborate upon their drawings and solidify the depictions of the experiences represented in their pictures. In other words, the children's drawings were not used as one distinct method of data collection.

Summary and Conclusion

Drawing is recognized as a natural form of communication for children. Integrating this activity as a medium for communication in the focus groups sessions provided the opportunity to better understand the children's experiences from their perspective. Firstly, this activity helped create a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere for the focus group discussions by facilitating a common starting point. Additionally, with the creation of drawings prior to the actual discussion, there was the potential to encourage the formation of different ideas as participants were given the opportunity to reflect upon their own experiences without having to consider the opinions of the others and without the pressure to answer immediately.

Secondly, this shared activity between the adult researcher and children helped me gain insight into the children's perspectives by providing an alternative form of communication as I used the drawings to help clarify and/or elicit further descriptions of the children's experiences. The pictures also provided a medium through which the children could express themselves and share some of their more personal experiences, which may have been more difficult to share by verbal description alone.

Thirdly, the overt nature of the drawing also contributed to my ability to recognize and reduce the possibility of groupthink. While the children were creating their drawings I could visually observe the replication or convergence of an image type. Furthermore, each drawing captured and preserved an idea or experience, making it more difficult for a certain perspective to be lost or overshadowed by others.

Lastly, the use of drawing also helped focus the discussion as the drawing provided a structured process through which the children could describe their experiences. A discussion based on each of the children's pictures required the participants to take turns presenting his or her drawing.

This is but one analysis of using visual imagery as a method of data collection with children. Further comparisons between focus groups with and without drawings may increase understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of using drawings in focus groups with children. Specifically, a study where there is more than one focus group that does not have drawings in the procedures. Future research may also want to include other types of

personalized visual imagery, such as photographs of videos and events, used to elicit meanings and experiences of children. Clearly, more research is required to further examine the benefits and limitation of using drawings with children as visual research becomes increasingly recognized and acknowledged in the field of leisure studies.

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