

Photo Library

Summary

In this process, the child selects photos from the Photo Library to help them show and explain their answers to the research questions.

Also known as the picture library, this tool has been used in previous research with people that have cognitive disabilities.¹²¹ It's a useful tool to prompt children and adults, including those with cognitive disabilities or limited life experiences, about aspects of their lives, including those that they have not yet experienced (or may desire to experience) or may have difficulty articulating.

The photos are just a prompt to help the child talk or communicate about the research questions. There is no one right way to do this process, you can be creative. Choosing the photos can lead to other activities that might be useful such as:

- Taking photos of things the child wants to include
- The child drawing or writing more about the topics of the photos.

Making a Photo Library

1. Think about all the areas of a child's life that are relevant to the research question. This may include health, housing, play, social life (friends), family life, food and drink, education, safety, transport, holidays, work, communicating, culture, spiritual life and religion, money, animals, law and order, future aspirations, etc.
2. Travel around the local area and take clear and colourful photos that relate to the research question (considering a broad range of answers and areas of the child's life). Children may be recruited here to assist with taking photos of their world.
3. Laminate the printed photos.
4. Make a list of all the photos in order. Give each photo an identification number and a title (e.g. 1. Cooking at home).

Process

1. Explain that you are going to ask some questions and that the child might like to use the photos to help answer them.
2. Ask the research question/s
 - The child can answer this in any way they want, including telling you the answer. Offer the photos as an option to help them answer. Explain that the child might want to choose some photos that are relevant to them.
 - Lay out the photos in front of the child slowly, let the child touch, hold, look at the photos.
 - Give the child time to look carefully at each photo.
 - Tell the child they can choose as many photos as they like.
 - Lay each of the photos chosen aside into a separate collection – laid out so the child can still see them. The child can arrange them into groups or patterns if they want to.
 - Either while the child is choosing, or after the child has finished choosing, ask them to tell you about each photo they have chosen. Ask what it means to them, and why they have chosen it.
 - Use other prompts to expand their initial answers.

- Take notes of everything they tell you.
- Take a photo of the collection of photos and note the identification number of photos they have chosen.
- Be positive about the child's choices and what they are telling you.

Considerations

1. Photos need to be very specific to the local context and culture – generic photos will not be as successful or meaningful.
2. Having too many photos to choose from can overwhelm the child. In these instances, researchers can reduce the number of photos to be used by leaving out photos that represent similar ideas. Try to maintain as much breadth of topics as possible.
3. The child can be influenced by conversations and commentary of nearby adults – so you may need to keep adults at a distance (unless they are needed to assist the child to communicate, or support the child).
4. Photos can raise the child's expectations and so it needs to be made clear from the onset that children aren't choosing photos of things they would like, but things that are relevant to the research question being asked.
5. Photos are less suitable for those with vision impairment.

Skills of the researcher

1. The researcher must have patience as this activity can take some time.
2. Use open ended questions to prompt discussion of the photo. (Not all children understand the question 'why', e.g. 'why is this important', so other questions and discussion are needed to prompt around this).

Practice example

Sena is 18, has completed primary school and lives at home with her grandparents. The Photo Library gave us a shared task, helped put Sena at ease and opened up our conversation. Sena told us, 'I picked the picture of a young couple with a baby on the left [chosen photo shown below]. I want to have a partner. That's the only important thing in my life. The important part of my life is how I will look after myself in the future as a person with disability without depending on my parents.'

I am a grown up and need a partner. Getting married will make my life better and happier. The person I marry will help me to care for myself and support my family'.

