

Creating Dialogue on Inclusion in Vietnam

Girls with Disabilities Exhibit their Work

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Introduction

Although the issue of social inclusion in general is of great significance, here our concern is particularly with inclusive education given the Education for All (EFA) movement of the World Education Forum in Jomtien in 1990, reconfirmed in Dakar in 2000, and recently in Incheon, Republic of Korea, in 2015. The Incheon Declaration, “Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all,” clearly pushes a vision of transformation through inclusive education so as

to transform lives through education, recognizing the important role of education as a main driver of development We commit with a sense of urgency to a single, renewed education agenda that is holistic, ambitious and aspirational, leaving no one behind. ... It is inspired by a humanistic vision of education and development based on human rights and dignity; social justice; inclusion; protection; cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity; and shared responsibility and accountability. ... [E]ducation is a public good, a fundamental human right and a basis for guaranteeing the realization of other rights. It is essential for peace, tolerance, human fulfilment and sustainable development. We recognize education as key to achieving full employment and poverty eradication (UNESCO 2015: para 5).

With this vision of inclusion in education in mind, in this visual essay we focus on how we used visual participatory methodology to enable girls with disabilities¹ in Vietnam to reflect on and express how they are included (or not) in education and how their voices are helping to create and sustain a dialogue on inclusive education.



The idea of all girls being “present, strong and vocal characters with opinions and ideas to share” (Magno and Kirk 2010: 16) is a key aspect of working with visual methods. As researchers we have a responsibility to make sure that the productions of girls, perhaps particularly those excluded because of their disabilities, are actually shared with the intended audiences. Holding exhibitions of these productions is one way of ensuring this. We therefore addressed the following questions: How can the exhibition of the works exploring the notion of inclusion produced by girls with disabilities lead to dialogue with policy makers? How might the power of the visual be used to persuade policy makers?

Vietnam: the Context, the Participants

According to the statistics published by the World Health Organization (WHO), 15.3 percent of Vietnam’s population lives with a disability (National Coordinating Council on Disability 2010) and 75 percent of these disabled people live in rural areas. Children with disabilities do not attend school at the rate of non-disabled ones (UNFPA 2009).

Disabled people often live on the margins of society, do not have attention paid to them, and are often excluded from everyday life, including attendance at school, and this renders them invisible in and to society (see Nguyen et al. 2015; Stienstra 2015). Our research² with girls³ and young women with disabilities in Hanoi, Vietnam, focused on exploring with them their own lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion through visual participatory research. We worked with them over several days. The participants were 21 girls drawn from Tu Liem district of Hanoi ranging in age between 10 and 25. Their disabilities varied: eight girls are intellectually impaired while seven have mobility impairments. Two girls are visually challenged and one has an auditory impairment while three live with other disabling conditions.

Visual Participatory Work with Disabled Girls

Drawing on what we see as the power of visual research to enable participation and the articulation of issues that are difficult to express and talk about, we engaged the 21 girls in a range of visual methods—drawing, photovoice, and the making of policy posters. The girls worked in seven groups, each of which had a facilitator who was a disabled woman who had been recruited

and trained to perform this function. In order to encourage the girls to reflect on their context they were asked, following Theron et al (2011), to draw a picture that could be called “Me and my Community.” The 21 drawings showed what their lived experiences in their school and community and with their friends and family looked like. These drawings also depicted their hopes and dreams of not being left behind. Then, to create an opportunity for the girls to talk about their experiences of exclusion we used photovoice as a method (see Wang 1999; De Lange et al. 2011; Mitchell 2011) and so, with camera in hand, the girls could each take one photograph of “feeling included” and one of “not feeling included” and write a caption for each photograph. The 21 sets of photographs depicting the relationships between the girls and their families, schools, and communities revealed stories of discrimination and inequality, but also stories of what it might look like to be included in school. Having thought about themselves in their community and their lived experiences of exclusion from school, but also about the change they wanted to see, the girls went on to create policy posters, each with photographs, drawings, and a message or slogan. The seven policy posters included messages about the need for schooling, the role of the teacher, the role of friends, and suggestions about how to enable the inclusion and success of disabled girls in school (see Nguyen et al. 2015).

The work with the girls over several days provided them with an opportunity to reflect on and discuss their experiences and to represent these in a collection of visual productions—drawings, photographs and policy posters—that could be used to stimulate further dialogue in the community and with relevant policy makers.

Creating Opportunity for Dialogue

It is a powerful experience for participants to represent and/or articulate the issue of inclusion and exclusion through their visual work, but if no one is looking or listening there can be no use made of an opportunity to effect social change. An example of using just such an opportunity effectively comes from gender scholars in South Africa who have used what they term Feminist Dialogues to open up (and also to extend) the debate around gender-based violence (Mitchell and De Lange 2015). Young women university students, themselves affected by gender-based violence on campus, engaged with more experienced feminist scholars and disseminated their work. This encouraged them to initiate dialogue with relevant

policy makers at the university and thus position themselves as activists in addressing gender-based violence on campus and in other spheres of their lives. Moreover, they did not stop there, but have gone on to seek out other policy makers and stakeholders to engage in dialogue, determined to do so “over and over and over again” (Mitchell 2015: 52) until the message is heard by as many audiences as possible and the necessary steps are taken to address their concerns.

In Vietnam we set out to facilitate dialogue in a similar way and, by exhibiting the visual work of the girls with disabilities in different spaces, enable them to engage with different audiences. Exhibiting the work took on different forms, ranging from several different exhibitions through to a printed 70-page colour exhibition catalogue, as well as a professionally created video.

Through Exhibition

Dialogue One: Exhibition in Hoang Cau in Cau Giay, Hanoi

Immediately after the fieldwork with the girls had been completed, the productions (21 drawings, 21 sets of photographs and 7 policy posters) were exhibited in Hanoi, on 10 February 2014. Several government officials from the education sector, members of the local and international NGO



Figure 1: The girls look at their own work.

community, and researchers were invited to look and listen. The girls looked at their own work but also saw how others looked at their work.



Figure 2: The girls see others looking at their work.

Dialogue Two: Exhibition at a primary school in Hanoi

The second exhibition, *Our Voices, Our Hope: Girls with Disabilities Picturing Inclusion*, held on 6 February 2015, included the collection of images in the first exhibition mentioned above as well as visual work produced with the same girls a year later. The second fieldwork session focused on deepening the participatory analysis with the disabled girls themselves, but also on further exploring more specifically, through drawing and photovoice, the change they wanted to see. From the new drawings that responded to the prompt, “What do you want your community to change?” it became clear that they wanted the community to be inclusive, to support equality for people with disabilities, to enable accessibility to school and an inclusive school culture, and also to promote a sense of care for people with disabilities. The new photographs in response to the prompt, “Where can women and girls with disabilities participate?” showed that they wanted to participate in school activities, in social activities of women and girls with disabilities, in activities to protect the environment, and in the dialogues surrounding the display of their visual work. The extended collection vividly showed the girls’ expressions of their recommendations for change in the community, as well as images of how they envisaged their own participation.

The school space was deliberately chosen for the exhibition so that the teachers and students, all of whom were invited, could engage with the girls and their work, and, in so doing, raise awareness of inclusive education for girls with disabilities.



Figure 3: The school provided the space and opportunity to look and discuss.



Figure 4: A boy takes a close-up look.

Dialogue Three: Exhibition at Hoang Cau in Cau Giay, Hanoi

The third exhibition was held in Hanoi from 7 to 8 February 2015 to continue the dialogue on inclusive education with staff of the Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences (VNIES). This opportunity for dialogue was collaboratively created by departments and centres of the Ministry of Education and Training, including the Centre on Special Education in the VNIES, and Action to the Community Development Centre (ACDC). This exhibition set the stage for all partners, including policymakers, Disabled People's Organisations (DSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and academic institutions, to participate in more inclusive dialogues in relation to disability issues and inclusive education.

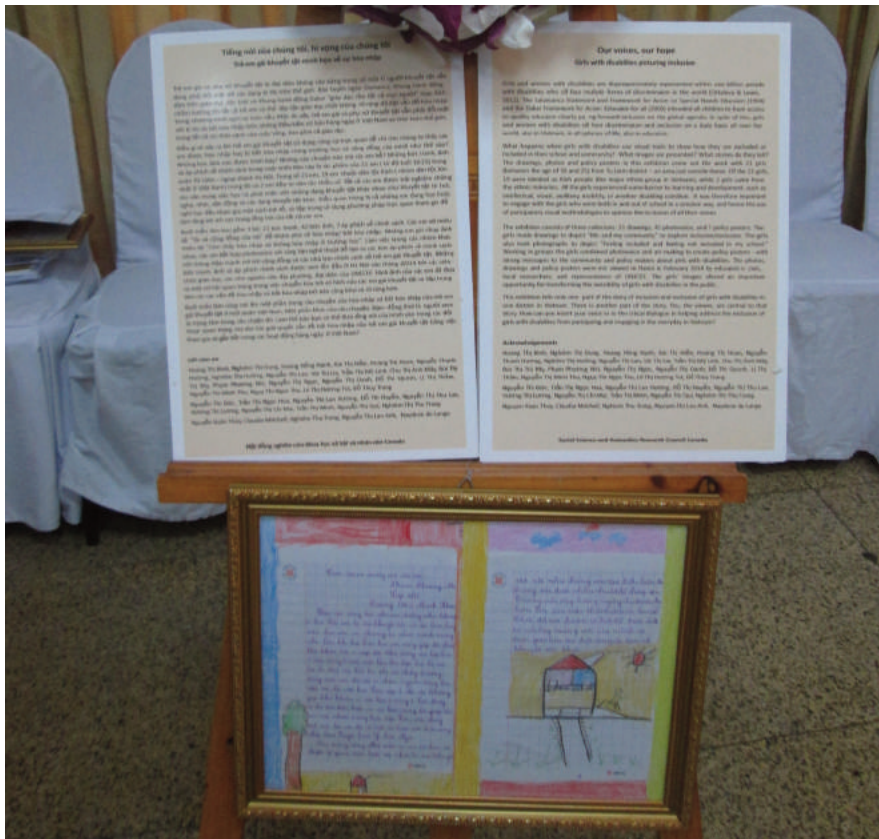


Figure 5: Curatorial statement in English and Vietnamese and drawings with figures



Figure 6: Looking, listening, and discussing

Dialogue Four: Exhibition in Guest House of National Assembly Office, Tu Liem district, Hanoi

To continue the dialogue the local community, parents, leaders of institutions where the girls lived, studied or worked, and representatives of DPOs, NGOs, local authorities, and the principals of local schools, were invited to an exhibition in Tu Liem district in Hanoi, on 8 August 2015 to engage with the disabled girls and their work. This was an important event that allowed the local stakeholders to see depictions of the lived experiences of the girls with disabilities, and to better understand their significance.



Figure 7: Looking with a view to understanding

Through and Exhibition Catalogue

Since it is vitally important to continue the dialogue about the educational rights of girls and women with disabilities in Vietnam, we published *Our Voices, Our Hopes* (De Lange et al. 2014), a catalogue which introduces the project and its focus, and contains copies of the drawings, sets of photographs, and policy posters. Having the catalogue meant that the girls, each of whom received a copy, could not only look back at what they themselves had produced but could also look forward to how they might continue the dialogue so as to make themselves seen and their voices on their educational rights heard. Several copies of the catalogue were given to UNICEF, VNIES and DPOs for further raising of awareness and the mobilization of knowledge.



Figure 8: The catalogue



Figure 9: The girls look at their catalogues.

Through Video

A video, *Picturing Inclusion: Voices of Girls with Disabilities*, created as a digital tool, was professionally produced, with a soundtrack, to provide a brief overview of the project, the process, and the productions of the girls. The video was intended primarily for use with the girls to deepen further analysis of the data and to extend the dialogue. This digital tool, left in the hands of the girls who had created the drawings, photos, and policy posters, is a powerful way of extending the reach of their work and enabling dialogue in their community and with other audiences. It is now publicly available on YouTube.⁴ We cannot track the use of the video on YouTube, but what is significant is that the video is in the public domain to be seen and heard.

Through Mass Media

The visual participatory research with the girls caught the attention of the media and the project enjoyed coverage on national television in Vietnam,⁵ thus extending the dialogue further into the public domain. The broadcast emphasized the importance of visual methodology as an innovative and effective way for girls with disabilities to share their lived experiences and promote their own educational rights. In the broadcast some of the girls had the oppor-

tunity to share their views on inclusion and education, and also on what the project had meant to them. One of the girls, speaking about her drawing, My Teacher and Friends, said, “My drawing shows my dream of an inclusive school where all students with disabilities can go to. They will not be discriminated, and they shouldn’t be considered as a burden to the society.”



Figure 10: A screenshot of the television coverage showing a girl’s drawing, My Teacher and Friends

While the media coverage was a once-off broadcast, we wanted the Vietnam public to continue to be able to engage with the visual artefacts and the messages of the girls so we developed a new media space on the popular Facebook⁶ platform. Here, of course, we can monitor the *views* and *likes*.

Conclusion

Central to making voices heard is that it has to be done repeatedly, as explained above, and through a variety of media forms until the message is

understood fully and, most importantly, acted upon. In this research project, the girls had opportunities to share their lived experience with local community members, teachers and students, district officials, and national policy makers. They also had the opportunity to hear the policy makers comment on the situation of disabled girls nationally and globally. As we have shown in this visual essay, the productions of the girls were exhibited several times. They were assembled for viewing in formal exhibitions, they were taken up in a catalogue, and they feature in a video, all of which can elicit dialogue with various audiences. The national television broadcast reached a vast audience. We believe that the power of the visual to persuade goes a long way towards making the voices of girls with disabilities heard and their work seen. However, we must remember that we need to continue to circulate their visual work, whether on exhibition, or in a catalogue or video, in different places and spaces, to different audiences, if we are to ensure that girls with disabilities speak for themselves and are not spoken for.

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NGUYEN THI LAN ANH has taken up various leadership positions to enhance the social movement of persons with disabilities in Vietnam, some of which are Vice Chairwoman of the Club for Women with Disabilities in Hanoi, Deputy of the Mobilization Board for the establishment of the Association of Young People with Disabilities of Vietnam, and Assistant Chairman and Steering Committee Member of Foreign Affairs of the Vietnamese Federation on Disabilities (VFD). She has had 10 years' experience in managing projects on sustainable earnings for persons with disabilities.

In the four years since its formation, ACDC has undertaken several projects and touched many lives.

NGHIEM THI THU TRANG is interested in applied linguistics, inclusive education, participatory visual methodologies, and international development. She is a member of several organizations of people with disabilities in which she also plays a leadership role. She currently works as a research assistant in the Monitoring Educational Rights for Girls with Disabilities project.

Notes

1. As Deborah Stienstra has pointed out: “[w]hile in North America people-first language is preferred, for example, *girls with disabilities*, this is contested in other parts of the world ... where using *disabled people* or *disabled girls* reflects the belief that we recognize the socially constructed nature of disability.” We have chosen, as did Stienstra, to alternate “between the two usages, recognizing the importance of each” (2014: 67).
2. This is a Canadian funded research project, *Monitoring the Educational Rights for Girls with Disabilities in Vietnamese Schools*, with a transnational research team headed up by Xuan Thuy Nguyen, with Claudia Mitchell and Marcia Rioux (Canada), Nguyen Thi Lan Anh (Vietnam) and Naydene de Lange (South Africa). Ethical clearance was gained from the University Ethics Board.
3. The girls with disabilities participating in this study were located through the ACDC.
4. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7R2z0_DcOo
5. See coverage on VTV4 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED5nKSC6-AE> starting at minute 22:26.
6. See MRDG Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/850343171675631/?fref=ts>

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