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The emotional landscapes of school:
Children's journeys through time and space

University of
HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

Innovative Research Methods with Children and Young People
School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University

25 April 2015

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Overview

- Children's voice – ambiguities, limits and silences
- *Portraits of School Life*: public engagement project
- Research methods – emotion maps
- Response to the critiques

Children's voice and 'new' social studies of childhood

Voice and the 'rights' agenda

- 'The rights of children to participate in decisions that affect them (Article 12...UNCRC) gives political and quasi-legal strength to the promotion of research which directly engages with children' (Holland et al, 2010: 361)

'Authentic' voices and methods

- 'what methods can most adequately elicit the voices of youthful participants' (Thomson, 2008: 3)

Critiques - research practices

Voice and the rights agenda

[there is] a strongly 'pro voice' climate to the extent that the promotion of 'child voice' has become a moral crusade. Research tenders will now often make reference to involving pupil or 'child voice' in a strong way, perhaps even involving children as co-researchers (Lewis, 2010: 15)

'Authentic' voices and methods

'...much of the discussion surrounding the question of how best to 'capture' children's voices is based on this putative assumption that it is possible to do so provided we figure out how: it is, in short, a methodological problem which could be solved by providing those conditions which would allow children to speak more and share more with us about their lives and worlds [...] [rather than situating] the production of knowledge through voice research in its proper interactional, institutional and discursive contexts (Spyrou, 2016: 8)

Critiques - concepts

‘[There is] a hidden danger that the very conceptualization of, variously, the “voices of children” or “children’s voices” risks glossing over the diversity of children’s lives and experiences [and uncritically] lumping together children as together as members of a category’ (James, 2007: 262)

‘I have observed particular understandings of the concept of “voice” as a relatively straightforward mental, verbal and rational property of the individual. [...] I found that a sociological deconstruction of children’s “voices” becomes necessary so that the notion of “voice” is understood as a multidimensional social construction, which is subject to change’ (Komulainen, 2007: 13)

Critiques – listening better and the significance of silence

‘A preference by children for silence, despite elaborate ethical protocols and careful procedures to facilitate their voicing of views, warrants more notice [...] Whatever data are collected and whatever conclusions are drawn, much remains undisclosed’ (Lewis, 2010: 18-19)

‘This process of listening [to silence] is not a desperate attempt to make something out of nothing, or [...] fatten up thin empirical materials, rather it is a means of research grounded in persistent belief [...] that we need to be carefully attentive to what is not spoken, not discussed, not answered, for in those absences is where the very fat and rich information is yet to be known and understood’ (Mazzei, 2003: 358)

Critiques – representing voice

‘Conventional, interpretive, and critical approaches to qualitative inquiry frequently privilege voice because it has been assumed that voice can speak the truth of consciousness and experience. In these paradigms, voice lingers close to the true and the real’ (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012: 746)

‘[There is] a particular version of a young (disabled or able-bodied) child’s “voice” [which] assumes a rational and autonomous “agent” as an intentional subject ... This perspective has the moral goal of giving rights to children; yet, when not clarified, it may dismiss the complexity of communication as a local interactional context’ (Komulainen, 2007: 25)

Voice: beyond the written word

‘Justifications for visual methods, for instance, seem at first convincing. Yet, as a single method they do not overcome the problems associated with representation and *remind us about the limits of voices* [my emphasis]. Whether it is researchers who create images and children are asked to comment on them or whether it is children themselves who create them, images are selections produced out of a number of possibilities and, like all other texts, cannot be authentic depictions of social reality’ (Spyrou, 2011: 154)

Public engagement project

Portraits of School Life

- University
- HudCRES
- Year 3 children
(Hillbank and Longstreet schools)
- Museum
- University archive/gallery



Programme of activities

Individual portraits and emotion maps



Music, poetry and craft activities



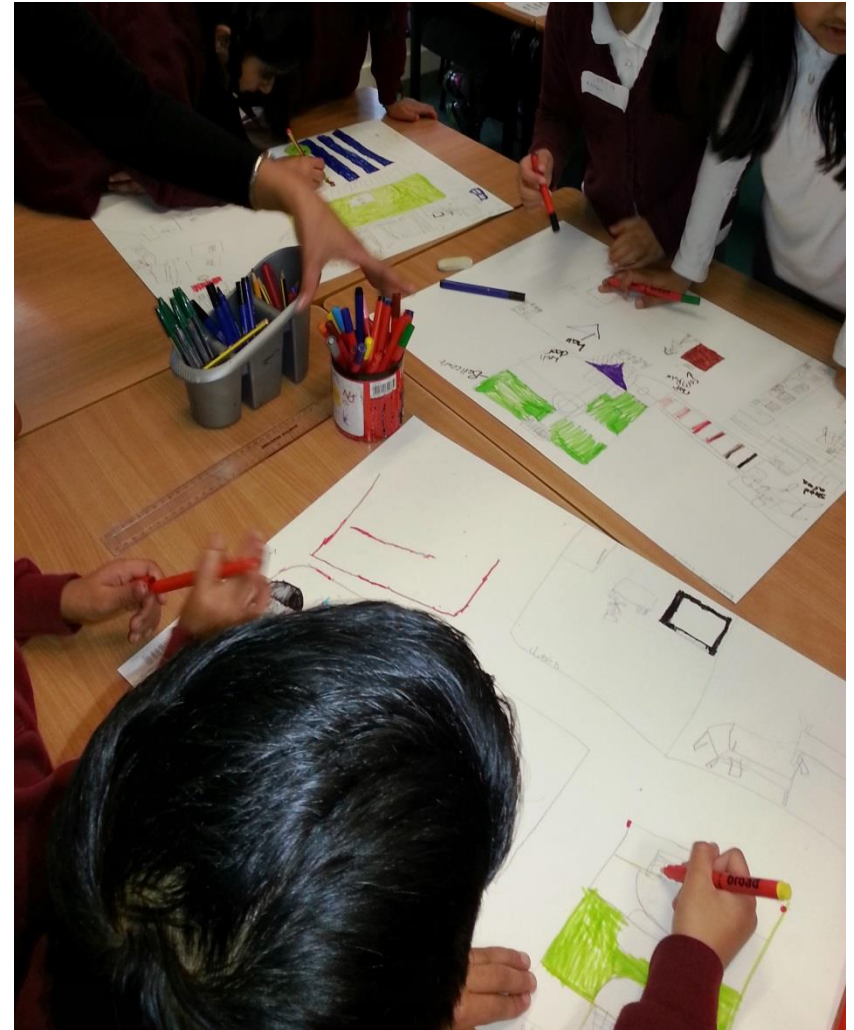
Victorian school day



Exhibition preparation and exhibition



Creating the maps of Hillbank and Longstreet schools



Data

Longstreet School

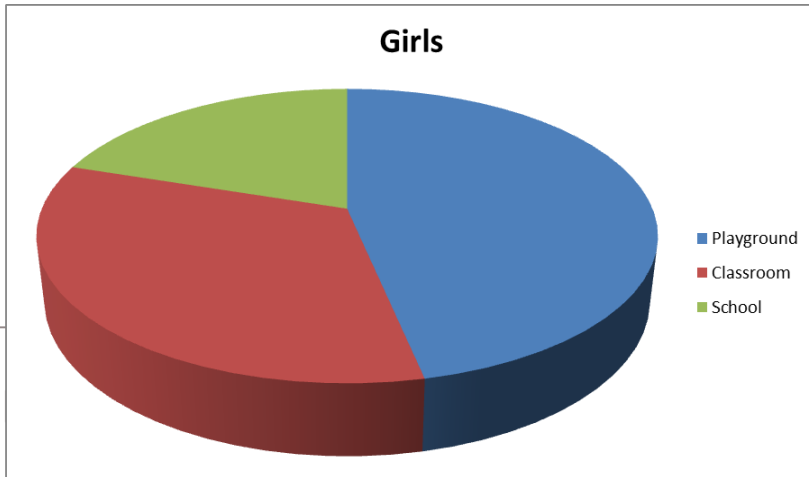
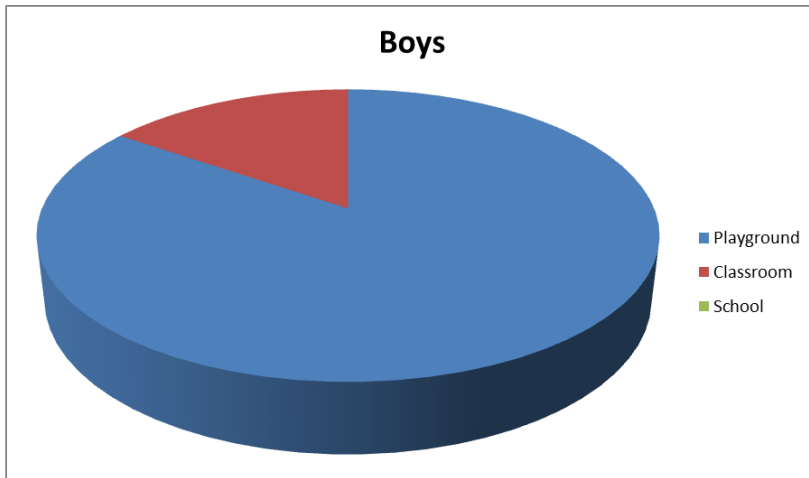
- 16 maps
- 28 written accounts of favourite places

Hillbank School

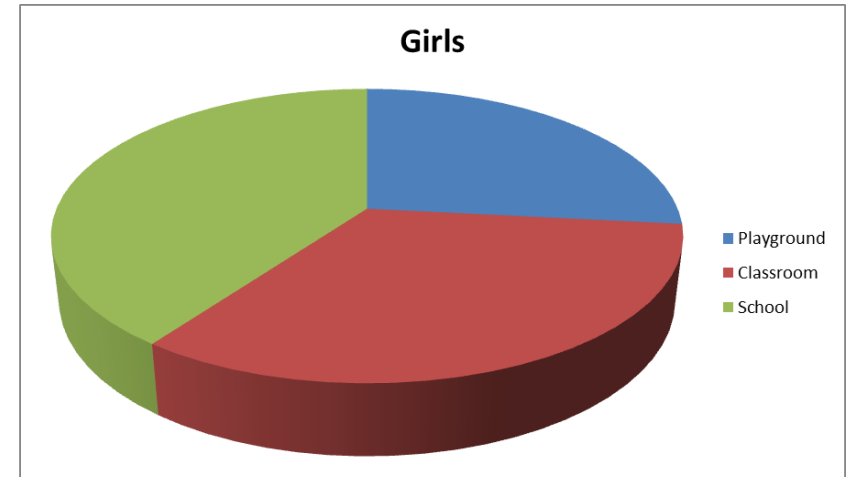
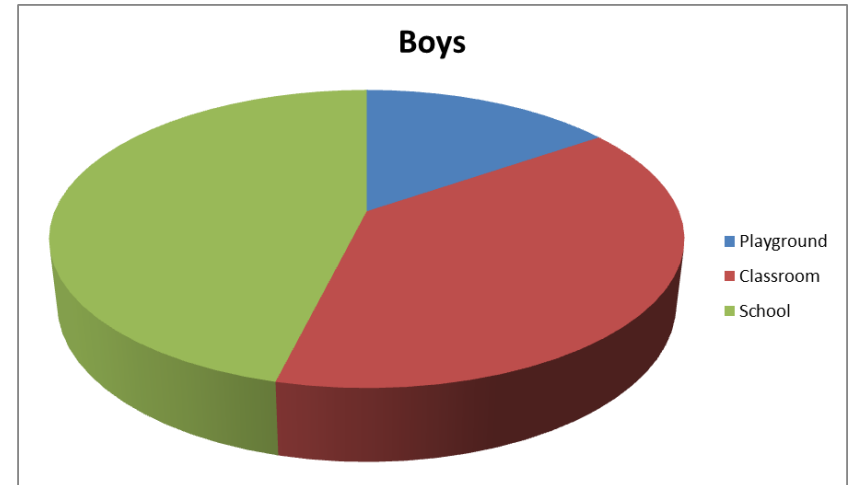
- 14 maps
- 29 written accounts of favourite places

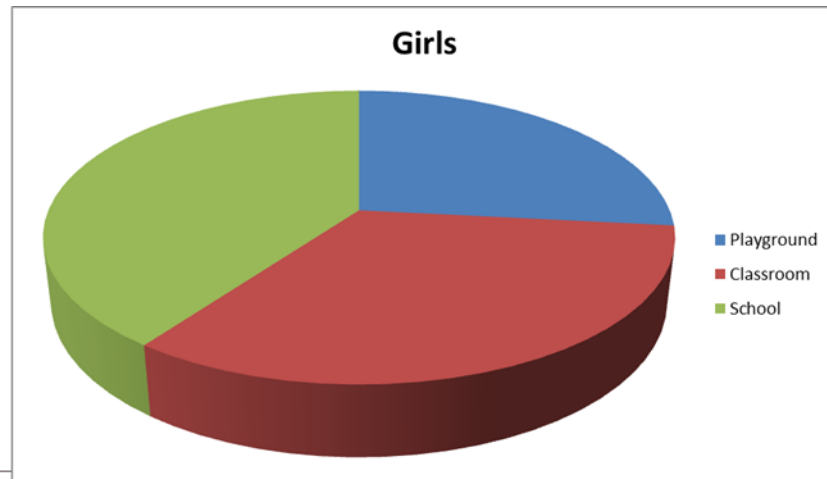
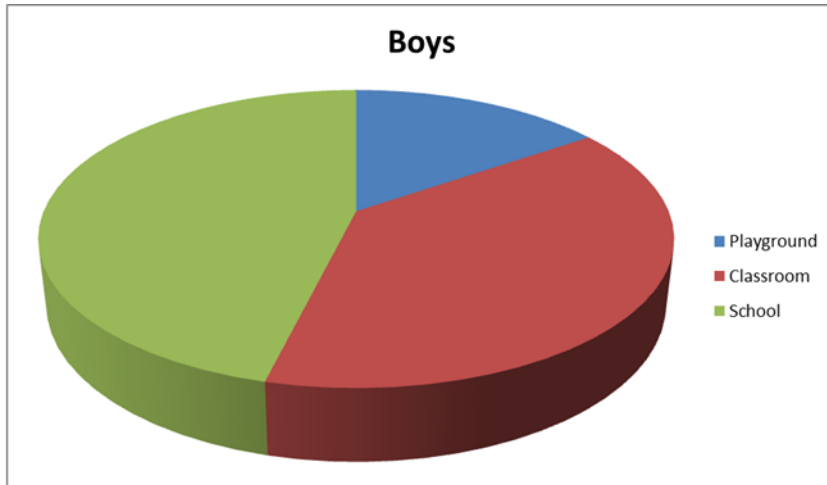
Favourite places: written accounts

Longstreet School



Hillbank School





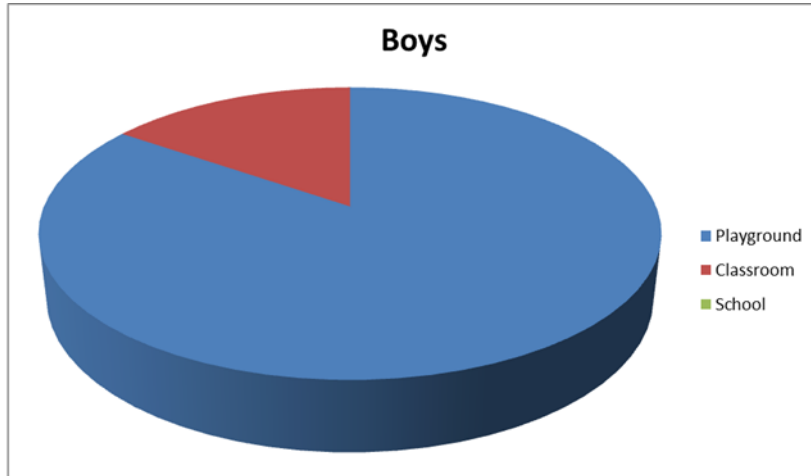
‘Year 2 was good until Miss Thompson left us’ (Harry)

‘I like our class because I like everybody ♥♥♥. I don’t like music because it’s loud’ (Alex)

‘Nursery is the best place because it was where I grew up and how I got all of my friends right now’ (Isabelle)

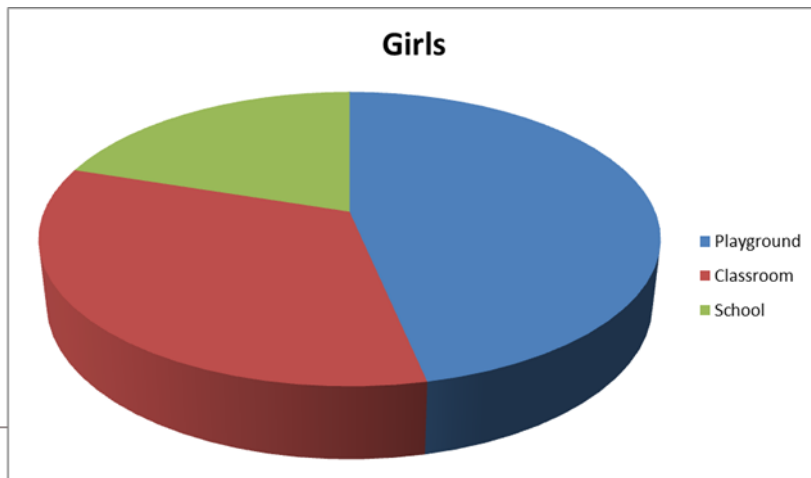
‘My favourite place is school in lunchtime because you can chill out. I don’t like playtime because some people are mean’ (Ava)

Longstreet



‘My best place is the ballcourt because I like football’ (Freddie)

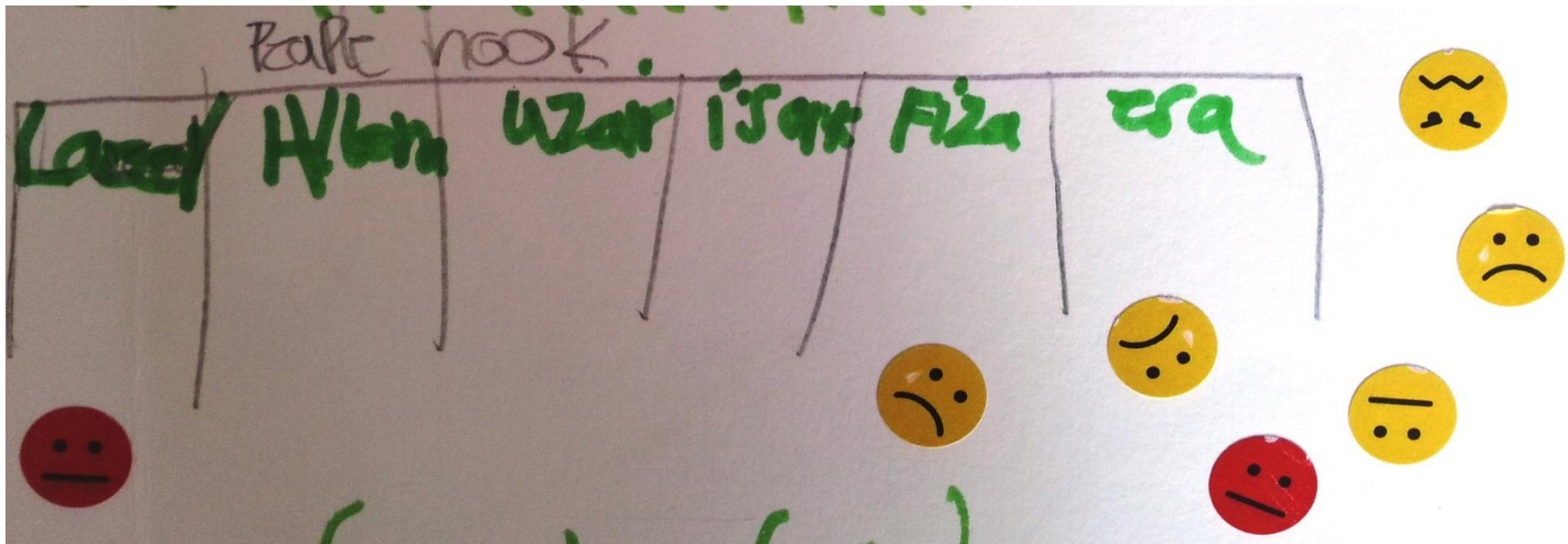
‘I like the classroom because you get to learn new things. I am not sure about the shed [in the playground] (Abdul Aalee)



‘I love Longstreet because it’s lovely and you can do lots of activities’ (Aminah)

‘My favourite place is the playground because it has fun games there’ (Safiyah)

Interactional contexts



Local institutional contexts



Micro-level contexts and multi-layered meanings



‘...it is not the situation that governs how we feel, but our own relationship to that situation and the people in it. This may create a clash [...] which places contradictory expectations upon us and causes emotional confusion or dilemmas (Burkitt, 2014: 135)

Educational discourses



Critique: listening better/differently (Mazzei, 2003)

- Polite silences
 - 'missing' teachers and teaching assistants
- Intentional silences
 - boys and the wider school environment
- Silence and power dynamics
 - in professional/researcher relationships
 - between different groups of children (class, gender, ethnicity, ability and emotional literacy)

Innovative methods and the ‘messiness’ of children’s voice

‘Through inviting and allowing the messy, children become the social actors that new childhood research strived to represent – simultaneously competent, agentic, vulnerable and dependent. And as such, children’s voices can challenge what is known. Science will always need the voices of people – small and large – who have been previously unheard. Not to represent something “authentic”, but to challenge the scientific imagination’ (Eldén, 2012: 78)

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