NJMR NORDIC JOURNAL OF MIGRATION RESEARCH

Norlund, A. 2021. Using Photo Elicitation Interviews to Explore Newly Arrived Pupils' Social and Academic Experiences. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 11(2), pp. 202–219. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.410

RESEARCH

Using Photo Elicitation Interviews to Explore Newly Arrived Pupils' Social and Academic Experiences

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This article aims to shed light on the spatial experiences of newly arrived pupils in relation to both their social and academic life at school. Data is derived from an on-going municipal project and includes 90 photographic images taken by nine newly arrived pupils as a basis for auto-driven photo elicitation interview methodology. The study draws on analytical spatial concepts and is placed within a theoretical frame contributed by the geography scholar Doreen Massey and three propositions. The interviewed pupils express mainly positive experiences. The findings also reveal the complexity of space in school.

Keywords: Newly arrived pupils; Equity; Photo elicitation interviews; Space

Introduction

The growing number of pupils who move between schools in different countries or continents is an issue of great concern for migration researchers and for educational professions. Transition raises challenges not only for the individual pupil but also for municipalities and their respective schools. Also, teachers and the recently emerged education-related occupations, such as that of study tutor, face challenges associated with fulfilling their ambitions to ensure good conditions for the newly arrived. Thus, more knowledge is needed and this article aims to investigate experiences of the newly arrived pupils with regard to their social and academic life in school.

Sweden is an excellent example of the transition phenomenon because of the large influx of immigrants and refugees in 2015, which, at the time, represented the highest number of newcomers per capita in Europe. The presented research is the joint effort of a municipal project management team and a research group to which the author belongs. The municipality had only scarce experience of welcoming pupils from other countries and thus turned to a nearby university and asked for support. The project management team were primarily interested in obtaining knowledge about the perspectives of the newly arrived pupils so that they could secure their well-being and explore whether they had experienced benevolent conditions for learning. According to the experiences of the researchers, this objective represents a common ambition of the collaboration between researchers and municipalities, and, as such, demonstrates how the present study could be valuable for a broad audience.

In this article, I first present previous research that highlights the importance of space and then the methodological choice following logically from this overview. Then the findings are presented and organised according to three theoretical aspects of space: space as a product of interrelations, as a sphere of the co-existence of multiple trajectories and as always under construction. In summary, the article shows material and visual aspects of the school setting that may be important for municipalities, headmasters, teachers and others when receiving the newly arrived pupils and, moreover, argues that it is vital to take such aspects into account when doing research in the field of (geographic) school transitions.

Previous Studies on Pupils and Space

To capture the perspectives of the pupils, the researchers chose to conduct photo elicitation interviews (PEI). The pupils were asked to take images of places 'where you like to be', 'where you think that good things happen or have happened' and 'where you learn/have learnt things'. This circumstance naturally evokes a spatial focus. The choice of a spatial focus was further supported by several studies that have identified a relationship between space and experiences for social and academic achievement.

For instance, in a study of undergraduate students, one student showed a photo of a staff corridor and commented that it was very quiet, which made the pupil feel like an intruder (Cox 2011). Prosser and Loxley (2007) have previously discussed the notion of *pupil space* – a non-teaching area where no formal teaching takes place. Pupil space turned out to be one of the spaces where bullying occurs (see Prosser & Loxley 2002). These studies clearly show that certain spaces can be linked to negative experiences. In contrast, Prosser and Loxley (2007) revealed that other spaces, e.g., playgrounds, may be places that are linked to positive experiences. Another study by the same authors — which focussed on English children 4–11 years of age — revealed that playgrounds can evoke a feeling of being empowered. Research among university students found the library space to be a site for identity building (Voela 2014). All of these studies focussed on spaces outside of the classroom. However, Burnapp (2006) investigated whether the classroom evokes certain experiences. In this study, international Master's degree students living in the UK commented on the layout of the classroom; for example, a Chinese student commented how the layout produced certain unfamiliar types of communication patterns as well as an unfamiliar distance to the teachers. The study of Burnapp, it should be noted, was performed within an intercultural frame. Together, these examples provide support for the assumption that spatial aspects are related to (in-)equality and the degree to which pupils feel (un-)comfortable with their surroundings. I argue that this interest in spaces establishes a sound methodological basis for investigating the experiences of the newly arrived pupils with regard to their social and academic life in school. Thus, an extended aim of the present study was to investigate how school spaces produce certain experiences of social and academic life among the newly arrived pupils and how the same pupils produce space themselves. Such a focus enables us to draw conclusions about how the current environment either helps or deters pupils in their academic progress and social life.

How the Pupils' Experiences Were Captured

Harper (2002), in his widely cited overview of photo elicitation, places PEI studies within qualitative research (see also Clark-Ibañez 2004), more precisely, in the postmodern sociological and ethnographic field. Harper touches upon studies connecting to 'ethnically different immigrants' (p. 18) and argues that '[i]t is also possible to use images as bridges between worlds that are more culturally distinct' (p. 21), which is relevant to the scope of this article.

The PEI method is recognised as participatory and collaborative, that is, pupils are given the opportunity to be co-constructors in the interview process by letting them share pictures of places in their school surroundings and having them tell their own experiences (see Cappello 2005; Harper 2002; Macleod, Lewis & Robertson 2014).[1] The PEI method was also chosen because some of the pupils had limited knowledge of the Swedish language. Although study tutors helped in translating, it was assumed that images would reduce the verbal burden on both the pupils and the study tutors. Furthermore, both the pupils and the interviewer could benefit from the fact that pupils could point out specific objects or areas in the images. Both materials, visual and geographical aspects, will be included within the category of 'space' in the following parts of the article.

The Project and its Context

The two-and-a-half-year-long municipal project aimed at securing good conditions for newly arrived pupils from other countries, with most arriving from non-European countries. The project was managed by a team that included a municipal middle leader (i.e. the project leader), a social pedagogue, a second language teacher and a special needs teacher. A foundational idea was to double the time that study tutors spent with pupils, from two weekly hours to four. The study tutors supported their respective pupils with both academic and cultural knowledge.

The project team turned to us, a research group, so that they could implement a scientific approach. The collaboration consisted of us following the project, reporting back to the management team and sometimes challenging the team's actions and assumptions. We, the research team, enabled the project team to identify issues that were relevant to equality among pupils. The research team was free to suggest appropriate strategies.

Selection of the Schools and the Pupils

The project manager provided us, the researchers, with the names of three study tutors. This approach determined the selection of schools, and the research team had no influence on this outcome. All three municipal public schools shared similar characteristics; for instance, newly arrived pupils in every school had been equipped with a tablet. The municipality as a whole is characterised by high socio-economic status and a homogeneous population; hence, the municipality had no previous experience of receiving newly arrived pupils.

Each of the three study tutors taught three pupils at their school; as such, the final group of participants included nine pupils. Pupils of different ages (from grades two to nine, with predominantly older pupils) and from various parts of the world (Afghanistan, Slovakia, Syria/Greece and Thailand) are represented in the data material. No differentiation is made in the following text between unaccompanied minors, refugees or other types of migrants.

Ethical Approaches

Ethical issues were carefully considered during the research design phase and when drafting the letter of consent, which the project manager sent to the guardians of the pupils. This letter provided a detailed description of the background and study objective, as well as clearly

[1] Participatory and collaborative methods can be contextualised in several fields of qualitative research, such as childhood and youth studies and anthropology. Since at least the 1960s, researchers — especially those working within the visual sphere of anthropology — have discussed participatory methods and tried out different techniques. For an exhaustive and critical discussion on participatory methods, I recommend: Campbell, J. 2002. A critical appraisal of participatory methods in developmental research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology,* 5(1): 19–29.

outlined that the pupils would be expected to take photographs, and any discussions about these photographs would be audio-recorded. The guardians were encouraged to get in contact with a member of the project team if they had any queries, and detailed contact information was supplied. No such queries were expressed. Once the pupils and their guardians had given their consent, the research team contacted the study tutors and the pupils. Introductory information was sent to the pupils via the study tutors. The pupils were informed of the questions and procedure, as well as of the context. In some cases, a photograph of the interviewer was included in the information letter, whereas in other cases this information was provided during a personal meeting with the pupil. In the latter case, a standardised manuscript for oral meetings was used.

The pupils were informed that no people should be included in the photographs that they took (cf. Richard & Lahman 2014). All of the pupils were anonymised in this article to guarantee that their identities would not be revealed. Although each image cannot be linked to a specific pupil, the spaces might still be recognisable, a matter which the researchers discussed thoroughly before using the images publicly. The researchers eventually came to agreement, with the consensus being that the images should not contain sensitive content that could harm the pupils. Furthermore, the chosen methodology emphasises spatially oriented *relations* rather than focusses on the individual. The study adhered to the Swedish Research Council (2011) endorsements with regard to confidentiality, sufficient information about the study being provided to the participants, the gaining of the consent of the participants and the use of data only for research purposes.

The Interview Design and Process

In preparation for the interview, the pupils were each asked to take 10–12 images on their tablets showing places 'where you like to be', 'where you think that good things happen or have happened' and 'where you learn/have learnt things'. The decision to ask for 10–12 images was based on a research by Epstein et al. (2006), who reported that although 13 images were brought to each interview, often only eight of them were actually investigated. The decision to start from a positive angle, that is, to ask where *good* things happen, was motivated by the results of a previous official report; it had been shown that newly arrived pupils are often met with a 'Mother Teresa attitude', which implies that they are suffering and should be felt sorry for (The School Inspectorate 2009). Thus, the research team considered it advisable to use *good places* as a starting point when instructing pupils about what to take photographs of. Furthermore, the team hoped that this approach would avoid a perspective too focussed on misery. To still allow the pupils to address negative experiences, a final question was added: '[i]f you had a magic wand, what would you change about it [here: the school]?'. This decision was inspired by the research of Epstein et al. (2006), who posed a similar question in their study. The research team also prepared an interview guide with further questions so that it would be easy for interviewers to ask for more information about the pupils' social and academic conditions. For example, the prompt 'Where do you think that good things happen or have happened' included sub-questions such as 'Has anything happened there recently that you would like to tell me about?' or 'Do good things often happen at this place?'.

A little more than a week after the instructional information was sent out to the study tutors and the involved pupils, the research group (including a representative from the municipality) met with the study tutors and their respective three pupils and conducted interviews based on the pupils' photographs. The study tutor helped translate their pupils' responses during the interviews, which were audio-recorded. Each interviewer was responsible for transcribing his/her own interviews. During the transcription procedure, some notice was given to iterations and pauses, but these phenomena were not given detailed attention.

The photographs served to stimulate the pupils to talk and discuss their experiences; the collected data consist of about 90 pictures and just over 40 pages of transcribed interview material. Because of a problem with the audio-recording, the data for the pupil Nikola include only images (without the corresponding interview transcription); for this reason, there are no excerpts from her. Some of the collected pictures (albeit very few) were of poor quality and could not be inserted into the following results section although they were informative and representative.

Theoretical Approaches

All the three main questions to the students started with 'Where…' and, as such, naturally evoked a spatial focus. Interestingly, the interviewed pupils talked about spaces in such an engaged way that space seemed to matter more to them than what was initially expected. As a consequence, the initial reports that were handed over to the project team showed that applying an analytical tool with a strong spatial focus was appropriate for the study objective.

During the second processing phase — during which both transcribed material and the collection of images were analysed — it became obvious that certain areas were not only synonymous to confined spaces but also to spaces that were linked to national (see the Christmas sweet example in the results section) and global (see the map example) phenomena. This observation was of particular interest to an analysis of how newly arrived pupils experience social and academic life in their new schools. Furthermore, this observation reflects the ideas of the geographer Doreen Massey, who has contributed to the field of social theory through her work on the poststructuralist perspective (see Cox 2006). According to Massey (2010), place:

> … is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus./…/ Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a larger proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent (p. 7)

Several basic assumptions connected to Massey's spatial theory are supported by the earlier quote, namely, space is (1) a product of *inter-relations*, (2) based on *co-existing trajectories* and (3) *always under construction.* The *Findings* section will present the obtained results according to these three assumptions.

The Newly Arrived Pupils' Experiences of Social and Academic Life in School

The results of the analysis will now be presented according to the three categories mentioned earlier. The data processing also included a categorisation of the material according to the three aspects of space described by Massey (2005). A couple of ethnographic quotes from a study tutor and teacher will be included for clarification. It should also be noted that I will provide practical knowledge of the notion of 'academic life' in parts that are relevant to the pupils' curriculum.

Space as a Product of Interrelations

Massey refers to space as a *product of interrelations*, which implies that spaces are neither fixed nor closed but rather 'constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny' (Massey 2005: 9). My first example of the relevance of space as a *product of interrelations* is home classrooms, which appeared to be much appreciated by the participating pupils. Mária was one of the pupils who chose to include the home classroom among her images:

> This is my classroom and that's where I have almost every subject, except Textile crafts and Home Economics, so that's where I spend most of my time (Mária).

The pupils often described the range of subjects that were taught in this room and pointed out where their own desk was located. In addition to 'my classroom', students also frequently mentioned 'my class', which indicated that the space was part of a collective experience and linked to the *social life* of the pupils in school.

Vanda reported that she and the other two pupils who received 'study tutoring' (including mother tongue and Swedish as a second language education) in a smaller room were sometimes disturbed by classmates in the adjacent ordinary classroom (**Figure 1**).

The following quotation supports that, under some circumstances, the pupils felt a distance between them and their classmates:

> Sometimes it is a little loud, if your friends [those who are not in the small group] do not go out during the break. Then, they sometimes play music very loud and that's disturbing./…/ Well, if I have a break at the same time as the others and they put on loud music, then it's fun. But otherwise … (Vanda).

The home classroom is the place where Vanda joins the class and where *social* activities also occur. The home classroom is linked to the smaller group activity room used by Vanda, her friends and her study tutor. The smaller room is sometimes noisy, a fact that is 'shaped by decisions made in other times and places' (cf Burnett 2014: 198), in this case, by the ordinary teacher (or potentially the teacher team or the headmaster), who might have once decided to let pupils use the classroom during breaks or once decided not to object if they did so

Figure 1: A photograph of the small group activity room.

without permission. This seems to negatively influence Vanda's possibilities for learning and her experiences of *academic* life in school.

The newly arrived pupils also spoke about experiences that occurred in spaces other than the ordinary classroom. In fact, the pupils showed many images of spaces other than the home classroom during the interviews. Rooms for school subjects with a physical or practical/aesthetic orientation are well represented in the material (**Figure 2**).

The spaces for Textile crafts were also recurrently mentioned in a positive light:

> **Dominika:** Textile crafts [shows a picture of the door to the Textile crafts classroom]. It's a very practical subject and I like it a lot because I think that I've learnt an awful lot there. With sewing and all sorts of stuff.
> **Interviewer:** Is that maybe where you feel that you have learnt the most?
> **Dominika:** Well, no, maybe not, I have learnt a lot from experimenting in the Physics lab and with you [the study tutor]. Now I'm making a pillow there and before I sewed a panda.

The mentioned interviewer presupposed that Dominika was primarily attracted to the practical/aesthetic parts of her education and implied a division between theoretical and practical school subjects, In the study by Preston (2014), tertiary students showed the same dichotomous beliefs about theory and practice by separating indoor activities from outdoor activities. The results indicate the usefulness of the spatial theory of Massey, as Dominika not only explicitly challenges the division of theory and practice but also confirms the inter-relatedness between two types of spaces (as well as the importance of two different spaces for her *academic* learning). Similar experiences were implicitly expressed by Mária in her comments about a physical education (PE) area:

> This is the football area … and that's where we do outdoor PE activities. That's where I learnt to separate 'left' from 'right' (Mária).

Figure 2: A pupil's photograph of the physical education (PE) hall.

This quote suggests that areas designated for outdoor PE activities not only result in PE achievements (practical) but can also facilitate general language knowledge (comprehending 'left' and 'right').

Interrelatedness is also a matter of places being situated in 'ever widening concentric circles' (Burnett 2014: 203). For example, Tasanee showed an image of the room for Home Economics:

Tasanee: You learn to cook there.
Interviewer: Say something that you learnt there recently?
Tasanee: Julknäck [a typical Swedish Christmas confection].

Tasanee reports that she recently learnt how to make 'julknäck', a very popular Swedish Christmas sweet. Thus, the Home Economics classroom belongs to circles linked to Swedish culture and academic learning. Moreover, one of the photographs shows a map (cf Massey 2010 for a discussion on the globe or Burnett 2014 for another example) of a certain part of Asia that is connected to Vanda's geographical origin (**Figure 3**).

The significance of the map is that it extends the space (classroom) to an internationally oriented circle. In other words, the pictures pupils show contain various material objects that are related to diverse contexts: the map represents a pupil's heritage, whereas the classroom itself is linked to the context of a new school or new environment. It should be noted though that the traditional, paper-based map challenges a potential globally oriented circle, which could have been presented using digital maps found on the internet. Still, the map had been given a central place in the small group activity room that was used for lessons.

The map is found in the previously mentioned small room used for tutoring. As such, the map constitutes an artefact within the group activity room, which constitutes a space 'within

Figure 3: A pupil's photograph of a map of Asia from the small room where study tutoring takes place.

the school within the locality within the country within the world' (Burnett 2014: 203). It makes it possible for the group of three pupils who spend time in this room to learn about the traditions of the new country as well as geographical (*academic*) facts about their home country. This observation serves as a conclusion for this section on how space is a product of the interrelatedness of the social and academic lives of the pupils.

Space as a 'Sphere of the Co-Existence of Multiple Trajectories'

This section will present findings that draw on the idea of Massey that space is a *sphere of the co-existence of multiple trajectories*. The section starts with an example in which multiple trajectories co-exist *through time*, namely, the home classroom. Surprisingly, spending time in home classrooms seemed to be common for pupils from grades seven to nine. This organisation based on home classrooms constitutes a shift away from the traditional organisation in which seventh- to ninth graders formerly meet in subject-specialised rooms. The municipality was also conducting a project addressing increasing neuropsychiatric disorders among pupils in parallel with the study on the newly arrived pupils (see Timimi 2017 for a critical discussion on a potential overdiagnosing). The physical rearrangement reflects a widespread wish, which is supported by national policy that schools should better serve pupils who may be confused by many physical movements during the school day (author and co-author, year). Another reason for this new home-classroom-based organisation that is especially relevant for the older pupils relates to contemporary discourse on 'security' (see author et al. year for a critical discussion on the safety discourse), which implies that the pupils do not feel safe if they have to move between various classrooms during the day. As such, the home classroom example represents the co-existence of two contemporary discourses that challenge the traditional spatial arrangement of specialised classrooms. Although the interviewed pupils seemed to appreciate the rearrangement, the change entails certain risks for both the newly arrived pupils and their classmates in terms of *academic* achievement; author and co-author (year) highlight that pupils may lack the support of content area-specific artefacts if the space for these specialised artefacts is significantly modified.

Another aspect of the category discussed in this section is the phenomenon of *hybridity* and *fluidity* (see Massey 2005). This aspect relates to how locations can serve as arenas in which various experiences come together. Some of the pictures that the pupils presented during interviews were connected to hybrid experiences. For instance, the pupils talked about common recreational or seating spaces in a way that conveyed the idea of competition, that is, some pupils made sure that they themselves were given priority as far as access to certain places is concerned. One of the interviewed eighth graders described limited access to a separate space at the top of the stairs, reporting that 'Most often the ninth graders take it'. The second floor stairwell was also shown and described to normally be a 'no go' area as the ninth graders often occupy it (through a sort of *squatting*). Thus, these areas were not accessible to younger students because they 'belonged' to the ninth graders. This is an example of the phenomenon of 'hierarchical space' (see Westlund, Rutten & Boekema 2010), that is, a cultural barrier constructed by older pupils that demonstrates the significance of identifying yourself according to the grade you are in and the need for constructing feelings of belonging in a dynamic way positive for one's own group, whereas negative for other groups.

Limited space constitutes a practice that negatively affects the pupils' chances of making new acquaintances and/or engaging with the pupils from other grades. However, this did not seem to trouble the pupils, as differentiation based on grade appeared to be a cultural barrier that was accepted with little resistance. Atypically for Sweden, some of the pupils involved in this study were one-year older than others in the same grade, so the spaces described were not an issue of differing ages but different grades.

Although the space was inaccessible from a *social* perspective, it turned out to be accessible in an *academic* sense, indicating that the space has a hybrid function. In connection to the same picture, Vanda mentioned that she sometimes does academic tests in the same space:

> **Interviewer:** So why aren't you taking the test in the classroom?
> **Vanda:** Because we don't study at the same pace. I do the maths tests with the class but most often the other tests with the study tutor. Because then I can ask questions if I don't understand.
> **Interviewer:** Okay, but you told me that it wasn't at the same pace?
> **Study tutor:** Yes, exactly, because sometimes they might not … the class took their test last week, chemistry test for instance, and we hadn't been able to go through it all. So we came to an agreement with the subject teacher that it was okay to do it the week after.

In the provided excerpt, the pupil reports sitting there only when other students are taking tests in the regular classroom. This means that Vanda and, most likely, other newly arrived pupils neither study in the same pace as other students in their class nor share the same test dates. This, it may be claimed, risks difficulties for her and other newly arrived pupils to follow the class and take advantage of potential collective learning opportunities. Thus, the location represents a space where two co-existing trajectories meet, namely, Vanda is provided opportunities to catch up *academically* in the short term, but the disruptive nature of the space heightens the risk of pupils falling behind in the long term.

Photographs from Shemal provide a similar example. Shemal reported recurrent negotiations with his teacher. Every now and then, Shemal reported that he was successful in receiving permission to leave the classroom and work somewhere else. However, when the interviewer and the pupil happened to walk through this alternative place — mentioned by Shemal as the space he preferred — it turned out to be just as noisy as the classroom. Thus, Shemal's successful negotiations with his teacher are counterproductive to his long-term academic prospects because he disconnects himself from the potential support of the teacher. This is another example of how co-existing trajectories, in this case, based on a teacher's decision-making, can come together in a space.

The interviewed pupils frequently commented on how the locker areas were associated with friendship as they had to come to these areas to pick up or drop off private possessions for schoolwork or private life.

The left photograph in **Figure 4** was reported as being important and described in the following way:

> You can keep your things in the locker, books and bags and … like that. And sometimes when the benches outside the classroom are occupied, I stand by the lockers with my friends and hang around. (Dominika)

The locker areas turned out to function as a fixed point to which pupils returned several times a day. The quotation reveals meanings ascribing the locker area as a place where *social* interaction is put into practice or, in other words, this space has additional functions than just storing school-related materials. Moreover, the analysis of the interview material suggested that the locker area supports pupils' chances of engaging in the social part of educational life and serves as an area where pupils of different ethnicities can make new acquaintances. Thus,

Figure 4: Pupils' photographs of the locker area.

it could be argued that the locker area is marked by hybridity, as this space merges practical storage and social functions.

A teacher in one of the schools informally told the researchers that the most recent newly arrived pupil had grabbed an empty locker as her first act on her day of arrival. This affirms the particular significance of the lockers and that a pupil needs to make sense of this space. Darcy (2015) previously studied about kindergarten children who spent time in a hospital for cancer treatment. The results showed that it was essential for the children to keep their own coat hook in the hallway while being absent. Darcy suggests that this might be highly important for a child, even if it seems insignificant to adults. This previous finding corresponds to how the studied newly arrived pupils had a need to spatially marked belonging, as well as their own private space.

One of the study tutors clarified the earlier comments from Dominika by stating that 'You don't have those in X-country'. This demonstrates the intercultural significance of locker spaces. In Sweden, the locker space is traditionally an architectural part of any school, but it is important to remember that this tradition may not be familiar in all parts of the world.

A further example of the hybridity of space is the location of a collection of timetables:
One of the pupils commented on **Figure 5** as follows:

> On the wall, or on the glass, they put the timetable so I go there to check my timetable./…/ I only check my friend X who is in the same grade but in another class (Petrus).

Petrus confirmed that the timetable is important for two reasons and, as such, demonstrated that the timetable collection shows hybridity, that is, it provides information so that the pupil can be in the correct space at the correct time for both *academic* and *social* activities (i.e., staying in contact with a friend).

In conclusion, the analysis of spaces as a *sphere of the co-existence of multiple trajectories* identified spaces that were keys to social activities, yet also revealed the disconnection between newly arrived pupils and other classmates. Most importantly, some of this disconnection could lead to long-term differences between the newly arrived pupils and the native students in academic performance.

Figure 5: A pupil's photograph of a timetable collection.

Space as Always under Construction

This section will use evidence from the interviews to show how space is *always under construction*. As such, the examples will show practices through which the newly arrived pupils attempt to maintain or change spaces to make academic progress possible and social life satisfactory.

Photographs depicting the school library were frequently shown during the interviews. In terms of spaces as always under construction, the newly arrived pupils wanted to maintain the tradition that the library is a quiet place for reading, a space where 'they sort of don't scream' (Shemal). Other spaces were *altered* into something that might not have been the initial intention of the school architect. For instance, the toilets were not only used for sanitary reasons but also for jokes. As Tasanee reports, she and her friends sometimes hid the cleaner's trolley and tools in the toilet room.

Although the photographs of the younger pupils primarily showed places for play, the photographs of the older pupils represented seating areas where they regularly waited together with classmates. These spaces, shown in the montage (**Figure 6**), seemed to be essential in inviting the pupils to participate in *social* activities.

The 'magic wand' question revealed that more recreational places were desired:

> Magic up more tables and chairs like those in the hall. Last year we had a sofa and we were there, and it was cool (Dominika).

The students occasionally used their own abilities (rather than a magic wand) to conjure up new spaces for social purposes. **Figure 7** shows such a place.

The place was described in the following way:

Figure 6: A photomontage of outdoor recreational areas.

Figure 7: A pupil's photograph of an alternative recreational area.

> I often play here. ... if the other spaces are occupied (Fabia).

This description is an example of how '[c]hildren and young people occupy and respond to designed spaces' (Burke 2007: 362); in this case, the pupil responded to the space appreciatively. Hence, the interviewed pupils overcame the obstacle of other places being occupied by creating new spaces themselves, and this may have forged stronger social connectedness within the social group. Furthermore, this exemplifies how spaces are always under construction.

Similar experiences of both access and a lack of access to recreational areas were reported by several pupils. The photographs presented in the interviews revealed that recreational areas exist outdoors as well as indoors. In the case of the latter, hallways and stairwells could be recreational areas when they were furnished with benches, tables and chairs (one could also sit on the floor) (**Figure 8**).

Students often spent time in these interspaces before a lesson or during a longer break. These spaces have an important function for *social* experiences during the school day, as demonstrated in the following quote:

> I sit here on the stairs with a friend sometimes. For instance, if the teacher is late or whatever, we sit here talking to each other (Amiya).

The interviewed pupils seemed to take advantage of existing interspaces and use these spaces to make new acquaintances. However, although these spaces seemed to be common, the popular spaces were often reported to be 'squatted' by others. In fact, the pupils shared quite a few images of locations which they referred to as being less accessible:

> There are seats but sometimes pupils who don't have class come here and sit, and then there isn't enough space for us so we go and sit by the radiator. But it's a good place anyway (Dominika).

Figure 8: A representative photograph of an indoor recreational area.

My final comment refers to the fact that the studied schools had diverse spaces for play and social activities, and that the interviewed pupils had taken numerous photographs of these areas. However, the newly arrived pupils also showed photographs of various ‘no go’ areas that were often occupied by other students, a finding which agrees with Massey’s suggestion that places are ‘full of internal conflicts’ (2010: 8).

Discussion

The presented research aimed to investigate how space produces certain social and academic experiences for newly arrived pupils and how the same pupils produce space in the school environment. I argue that such a focus will facilitate comparisons of whether the newly arrived pupils are at an advantage or disadvantage in academic progress and social relations relative to the native students.

With regard to the aspect of social life, the interviewed pupils gave the impression that they were the members of smaller groups as well as their respective classes. It also became apparent that the pupils had access to a variety of locations in the schools and that they were part of social communities in which they interacted with other pupils as well as teachers. Moreover, the photographs taken by the newly arrived pupils showed that when they experienced a lack of access, they modified another space to be an alternative area.

The analysed interviews also shed light on academic experiences among the newly arrived pupils. The pupils only talked about obstacles to learning to a limited extent. However, some results concerning certain aspects of academic life were worrying, for example, the apparent weak boundaries between places for work and places for play could be potentially detrimental in the long run. This observation is wholly dependent on decisions made by teachers and/or headmasters and, as such, should prompt some contemplation among staff. Tutoring for newly arrived pupils (which had been doubled from two hours to four hours per week) often occurred in small group activity rooms. Based on the analysis, this was helpful, yet not totally unproblematic, as the newly arrived pupils could still be disturbed by the students in the adjacent room.

The analysis exposed the complexity of space, including the various materials, visual and geographical resources that form a school. This finding is in line with Massey’s (2005, 2010) view of space as constellations of various interwoven relations (e.g., the relation between space and decision-makers or the relation between space and interculturality) that are mutually connected to time (e.g., links between a space and contemporary discourses), constructed, non-fixed and non-neutral. Furthermore, the presented results supported Massey’s view of space as being interconnected with change and power, as the interviews chronicled migration of young students to another country, and thus, connected space to a broad geographical perspective.

The experiences of the pupils were explored via a data collection process that heavily relied on the pupils’ photographs of places and spaces in their schools. Our findings demonstrate how the applied data collection process can be used to draw a rich picture of individual experiences, which, when considered together, constitute a constellation of collective experiences. It could be argued that the approach of asking for images of places where good things happened risks leaving out negative experiences. The research team also considered the implications of the applied approach and decided to include the ‘magic wand’ question to allow students to highlight areas in school that could be improved. Several students brought up less positive experiences in other parts of the interviews.

Burke (2007) and Cappello (2005) highlighted the need for more knowledge about the importance of material and visual aspects of the school setting, and encouraged turning to pupils for insight. Holt (2003), along with Prosser and Loxely (2007), emphasised that more studies should address space and its relations to inclusion. Philo and Parr (2000) have urged researchers to investigate geographies within schools. Cox (2011) contended:

> For although metaphors of space are very powerful in educational discourse, until recently the nature of the relationship between space and learning has not been greatly studied.

The presented research attempted to address this flaw in research. Higher education students have been identified as a group that can be used to gain insight into the intercultural aspects of a school environment (see Burnapp 2006; Cleveland & Kvan 2015; Cox 2011; Kanyal 2014; Voela 2014). However, the younger pupils, especially those who have arrived from another country, represent an under-researched group. Hence, the research presented in this article focussed on the newly arrived pupils at ages corresponding to compulsory school.

The results of the performed analysis clearly agreed with a statement by Cox:

> … how institutional structures shape space and are also made visible when we begin to look closely at our everyday environment (Cox 2011: 197).

I decided to closely study the everyday environment of a school so that the results would be relevant to many specialised groups (e.g., municipal project managers, school architects, researchers). To conclude, I hope that the presented results will spur further researcher into using PEI to describe the experiences of pupils and look forward to reading future studies of spatial experiences among different pupil groups from a variety of contexts in connection to equality (cf. Harper 2002).

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Norlund, A. 2021. Using Photo Elicitation Interviews to Explore Newly Arrived Pupils' Social and Academic Experiences. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 11(2), pp. 202–219. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.410

Submitted: 11 October 2018 **Accepted:** 03 November 2020 **Published:** 04 June 2021

HUP HELSINKI UNIVERSITY PRESS

Nordic Journal of Migration Research is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Helsinki University Press.

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