# Inclusive Classrooms
## The use of images in active learning and action research

**10-14 May 2005, Mpika, Zambia**

EeNET
Enabling Education Network

# Contents

# 1. Introduction

EENET has been supporting an action research initiative in Mpika, Zambia for four years. During the initial development of the action research approach it became clear that the use of images and non-verbal methods of communicating would be key to successfully expanding the approach to include all members of the school community. In September 2004, therefore, we carried out some school-based work. We used a range of image-focused activities with school children to test and demonstrate ways of engaging children (and parents) in action research. A side product of the activities was that participating teachers observed and learned about approaches that could form part of their efforts towards more active learning in their other classroom or extra-curricular work.

In May 2005 we conducted further activities in primary school classes in Mpika (with children aged approximately 12), with two main objectives:
1) to investigate each of the image-based activities tested in September in more detail
2) to further demonstrate the value of image-based activities within inclusive education work; partly for the benefit of participating schools and partly for a study tour team from Ethiopia who are relatively new to inclusive education.

The logistics of the latest image-based activities were influenced to a certain extent by the presence of the study tour team, and the need to ensure they gained access to observations and discussions beyond just the images work. We therefore reduced the number of schools we worked in, from an initial eight to five. Although this limited our scope for testing all activities in several different classroom situations, it had the benefit of providing us discussion time, during which the study tour team were able to offer insights and ideas to improve the remaining classroom sessions.

### *Why did we need to investigate each activity in more detail?*

In September we had used multiple activities in each class. This was so that we could test all our proposed activities in a very short time frame. We also did not know how each activity would be received. We therefore planned to have 'back-up' activities in case children completed an activity quickly, got bored, or did not respond well to a certain task.

The use of multiple activities in each class meant that we did not spend enough time observing and refining each one, but instead spent the time co-ordinating activities to keep 40-60 children busy throughout the session. Therefore, in May we aimed to find out more about each activity. For example we wanted to see whether each activity could be used completely on its own or whether it works better in conjunction with other activities. In September we had documented the outputs of children's work through capturing their semi-formal presentations at the end of the session. Due to the lack of facilitators

we had been unable to spend sufficient time talking with participants and observing/documenting their ongoing engagement with the activity. We therefore aimed to spend more time in May talking with participants to find out how they were responding to the activities and to see how to improve the management of the activities.

*Schedule*

| Date | Venue | Activities |
|---|---|---|
| Tuesday 10th May am | Musakanya Basic School | Photography project<br>Writing |
| pm | Chitulika Basic School | Drawing and story creation |
| Wednesday 11th May | Mpika Basic School | Drama based on photo-elicitation<br>Photography project |
| Thursday 12th May am | Peads Basic School | Observing drawing activities |
| pm | Chibansa | Drawing leading to photography project |
| Friday 13th May | Nyanji | Photo elicitation leading to photography project |
| Saturday 14th May | Institute of Christian Leadership | Exhibition of children's work |

## 2. Musakanya Basic School

### Photography

In Musakanya Basic School we decided to focus just on using photography projects. We had not visited this school in September, although some of the teachers have been participating in the action research over the last few years.[1] One of the teachers we had worked with in September has transferred to Musakanya this year. There was therefore a basic awareness of the approach within the school and an interest to find out more about using images to include children in research and in learning generally.

The children were divided into five groups of six to seven pupils each. Each group was given a digital camera and brief instructions (5-10 minutes per group) on using the camera. They were given the chance to test the camera. Groups were instructed to take pictures of places or people that make them feel welcome or unwelcome in school. They were asked not to 'waste' pictures just on their friends unless they had a good reason why this person made them welcome or unwelcome. They were also instructed to ask permission before taking a person's photo or before entering another class or office.


*Learning how to use a digital camera*

Each child was asked to take one picture. Ideally more pictures would be taken, allowing each child to photograph at least one welcoming and one unwelcoming item. Unfortunately we lacked the time to print large numbers of pictures during the session and could not return to the school for a second session, due to time constraints. Children were asked to discuss in their groups before taking each picture, to ensure everyone knew why it was being taken and agreed that it was a welcoming or unwelcoming thing.

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[1] See "Researching our Experience" www.eenet.org.uk/action/rsrching_experience.pdf

## Writing

During the September activities we had noticed that many children were writing quite detailed captions for their photographs. This was despite previous feedback from teachers that it was hard to get the children to write about their experiences of inclusion/exclusion as part of the action research process. We therefore introduced a brief writing activity in Musakanya to investigate further whether photographs offer a useful starting point for children's writing.

While the groups were waiting for their photographs to be printed, they were asked to write a short piece about their photograph: what it showed and why they had decided to take it. Some children were able to view the photographs on the digital camera to remind themselves. However, once the camera's data card was taken for printing this was not possible, which made it hard for some children to recall and write about their photograph. Nevertheless some good writing was produced.

*Examples of children's writing*

"I [took] this picture of x because she makes me feel good in everything she says. The second picture I [photographed] the ground where pupils like to fight there. The third picture I [photographed] a pit where the pupils throw dirty. They don't throw the dirty inside the pit. They throw any how."

 "I like x she is very good friend. She doesn't like playing everytime she is [meant to be] reading... if she have any problem she told me so that I can help her...she come at home and she read and so I make corrections for when she don't know so that we... If we are in our classroom and she wants to ask any question ... about what she knows... anything about what the class teacher is saying she raises up her hand and says..." [Note: gaps represent illegible handwriting].

## Discussions and poster projects

The first group to finish taking photographs was able to watch as their images were printed. This offered the facilitator an opportunity to discuss in a relaxed and informal way each photograph as it emerged from the printer: what was it showing, why had the child taken the picture, did his/her friends agree with the assessment of welcoming/unwelcoming, etc. The children were lively and talkative. Unfortunately the logistics prevented us from doing this with every group (we were using the photo-printer in the car, charged by the car's battery!). However, children from other classes gathered around the car during their break time, and the facilitator took the opportunity to show them the photographs and have some informal chats about what the pictures might be showing and whether the children liked or disliked what they saw in the

pictures. Although most of these children were very young and spoke little English, the images provoked lively discussions!


*A pupil writing about his photograph*

Once the groups received their printed photographs they began creating posters to display and explain the 'story' of the images. As the posters were being created one of the facilitators interviewed the children about what their pictures showed and why they had taken them. Many of the children, despite the instructions, had focused on photographing their friends. Some were able to provide quite detailed reasons for this, relating for example to how the friend encourages and helps them. However, many said they had taken the picture because they 'liked him/her'. The facilitator encouraged the children to explain why they liked the person, but was often unable to elicit more than 'because he/she is nice'. In order to elicit greater analysis from the children about why someone or something is 'nice' or 'not nice' required a great deal of persistence; asking a number of questions which each time elicited a little more information!

The relatively low level of analytical and critical thinking among the children (both in their decisions about what to photograph and in their answers about why they took the pictures) is in many ways a reflection of their educational experience. The children are not familiar with active learning methods or with the idea of working out their own answers instead of learning and remembering an answer provided by the teacher/text book. The children's responses to the activity in Musakanya confirm the experiences from September. **The introduction of image-based methodologies in education action research goes hand-in-hand with the development of more active teaching/learning practice in the classroom.**

# Lessons learned and recommendations/suggestions

## *Negotiation skills*

The extent to which negotiation took place within the groups over what to photograph is uncertain. The relatively high proportion of pictures of 'friends' suggests that there may not have been particularly lengthy or democratic discussions about what was welcoming and unwelcoming in the school. While it was not possible in the short timeframe available to us, we recommend that additional preparation work on the concepts of co-operation and negotiation should be done prior to starting a group photography activity. This could take the form of a short discussion about what the words mean, or could be a longer group activity designed to 'team build'. It should not be assumed that all children will automatically have the experience or desire to follow a request to negotiate with each other.

## *Stimulus for writing*

Photographs (whether taken by the children themselves or by others) can offer a useful starting point to encourage children to write about their experiences of education. It can be very hard to write from scratch – especially when writing about personal experience – but a photograph can provide the small amount of stimulus needed. The child may start by describing the photograph directly, then move on to writing about other thoughts or memories stimulated by the images. **Our experience suggests that writing-based action research activities with children should be preceded or accompanied by some sort of image-based activity where possible.**

# 3. Chitulika Basic School

This school had participated in September. When we arrived at the school we learned that the same class would be participating in the activities. This should offer opportunities to follow up previous work, although unfortunately because we did not know in advance we had not prepared the activities with that in mind! The chosen activity (drawing) may therefore have been a little repetitive for the pupils and teacher, although it was significantly adapted from September's activity.

The class was more subdued than in September. This could be due to a number of reasons, such as: boredom or disappointment at doing a similar activity (and no photography this time!); resentment at having voiced opinions before and feeling not enough had changed since; fewer pupils present to create a noise; all groups were doing the same activity, so there was less need to chat between groups to find out what the others were doing. Whatever the reason, it provided a challenge to the facilitators to encourage discussion and debate!

## Drawing

Children worked in small groups. They were asked to draw a picture of themselves doing something that makes them happy to come to school, and another picture showing themselves doing something that makes them unhappy to come to school. Although they were allowed to discuss with their group members, they were asked to make sure they did not copy each other – every group member must draw his/her own picture based on his/her own likes/dislikes, not copy from a neighbour.

To encourage more creativity and connection between the drawings and the school environment, the children were encouraged to find other materials to stick onto their pictures. They were allowed to leave the room and wander the grounds in search of material. However, not all children did this, and they had to be encouraged a number of times before they started to leave the room. This was one indication of the literal and conceptual separation between the inside and outside of the classroom. The concept of bringing outside materials, like grass and sand, into the classroom was unfamiliar for the children.

Those children who did use other materials in their drawings did so in a very literal way. For example, they stuck a flower to their picture and this depicted that they liked the flowers in the school grounds because they made the place feel welcoming. They collected leaves from a bush that was poisonous and put this in the drawing to explain that this bush made them feel unsafe about coming to school. The children did not use environmental materials as art materials (eg, colourful flower petals to make up the fabric of a dress).

Many of the children's drawings depicted similar scenes to last time, indicating their perception that problems have not changed. As this theme continued throughout the session, we ensured that towards the end we had a discussion about the changes that *have* happened. As 'outsiders' we presented our impressions of the changes that had happened since we last saw the school (classroom walls under construction have lots more layers of bricks, the compound now has a little 'garden' in front of school, with a low fence and flowers). We explained that these things were immediately obvious to us as we approached the school, and we were impressed when we saw them. We compared what we were seeing now, with the photographs they had taken the previous year. We explained that when you see something everyday you are less able to see changes (if they happen slowly). So you need to make use of images, etc, to help you to record things and compare things over time.

## Creating group stories

The second part of the activity was to use the individual drawings to create an overall story about the things that make the pupils happy and unhappy about coming to school. While individual drawings can help people to express their views on problems or solutions, they can also be used to stimulate the telling of longer, more complex stories. These stories might initially be inspired by the individual pictures, but then add extra layers of facts, feelings or creativity that cannot be shown just in the picture.



*Discussing how to create a story from individual drawings*



*An example of a group story*

We presented an example of four separate pictures drawn independently by the UK facilitators. We had chosen the theme "things that made us happy and unhappy about coming to Mpika". There were drawings of: a lorry crash; a person sweating in a car; trees and flowers; and someone driving very fast. Using our drawings we told a story (based on our real experiences) about

feeling uncomfortable in the car in the heat, so we started to drive faster to get more fresh air through the window. But then we saw a lorry crash and we began driving more slowly because we were a bit scared of having an accident. We felt uncomfortably hot again, but we realised we could see the beautiful countryside when we were not driving so fast, so this cheered us up. We used the example to demonstrate the idea that images created separately can be used together to create an overall story, even if the images were not initially prepared with that in mind.

Each group had four pupils, and therefore eight drawings. The pupils were first asked to discuss each other's drawings and decide which ones could best be used together to create a story about their experience of school. They had to select four out of the eight. They were given large sheets of paper onto which to stick the drawings and (if they could) to write the story.

The children found this activity very hard. As outside facilitators we were obviously not fully familiar with the children's experiences of story telling, although we were aware that the curriculum does not allow them a great deal of opportunity for this type of activity. We therefore underestimated just how difficult this activity would be for them.
We spent as much time as we could talking with the groups to help them find ways of connecting their four drawings together into one overall story. The majority of groups during their presentations, however, still described what the individual images were about, but did not connect the images together. The activity nevertheless enabled the children to convey a lot of information about their experience of school.

## Lessons learned and recommendations/suggestions

### *Use of examples*

We had hoped to see the use of environmental materials as art materials (eg, grass used to fill in the roof of a village house; twigs to make the limbs of a person; or red dust rubbed into the paper to give colour to something in the picture). However, as art is very rarely part of the curriculum (as a separate subject or integrated into other lessons) this was rather ambitious! When art is practised within schools it tends to be done in a European classical/traditional sense: that is, realist drawings which do not incorporate local materials. We had produced our own drawings which used environmental materials in a creative way, for use during the storytelling stage of the activity. In hindsight we should have presented our drawings earlier in the session to give the pupils more ideas about how they could use different materials in their pictures. We were, however, nervous about showing an example which becomes a blueprint (see section on Mpika Basic School for more on this). There is a need to find a good balance between not giving enough demonstration (as here with the use of environmental materials) and giving too prescriptive a demonstration (as with the drama in Mpika Basic).

### *Familiarity with storytelling*

It is a paradox that children from a predominantly 'oral culture' (which in the past at least would have had strong story-telling traditions) found the creation of a story so difficult. This could be because there is a separation between the experience of formal education and the experience of life in the community. The type of imaginative storytelling that children may experience at home in family gatherings, or when playing outside school, is not reflected in their education. The curriculum is perhaps promoting only the more formal styles of communication and is not embracing and building on traditional interactions and ways of conveying information.

**Our experience suggests that preparatory work with children on storytelling would make this drawing activity more accessible.** One option would be to start with a collaborative story telling game or warm-up activity. For example, the children stand in a circle and the teacher reads them the first line of a story (eg, 'one day a boy went for a walk and saw a dog…'). In turn, each child needs to create the next line of the story. They are encouraged to make sure their line links in some way to the previous line, but to be as imaginative as they want (the story can be realistic or far-fetched). An activity like this would create a more relaxed atmosphere and help develop a sense of enjoyment in creating a story. It would also help the children to experience how a story develops and how to think analytically to make connections or comparisons between things. Helping children to put their separate individual experiences together into a combined story is part of the process of seeing the 'bigger picture', which is essential for a successful education improvement initiative.

### *Using drawing in the classroom*

The classroom in Chitulika was quite well decorated with drawn images. However, the pictures were all part of the learning materials, and appeared to be prepared by teachers. There seemed to be very few child-produced materials on the wall. Although drawing is not a key part of the curriculum, we suggest that children could become involved in the process of making those teaching and learning materials which involve drawing. They could make the reference posters which are displayed on their own classroom walls, or could help make the educational posters for the walls of the younger classes. This would be a way of gaining practice in drawing/presenting information visually and of participating in the overall process of education.

# 4. Mpika Basic School[2]

## Drama

In Mpika Basic School our main activity was drama, based on an initial photo elicitation activity. We started by giving each group a photograph. The photographs had been taken by pupils in September. There were pictures of Mpika Basic School and of other schools in the district. They had been selected by the facilitators, but the only criteria for selection had been visual quality and clarity, and ensuring that not all images depicted the same school.

The groups were asked to look at their photograph and discuss what problem(s) they thought the picture was showing, and what solution(s) might be possible. They were given about 15 minutes for their discussions, and were allowed to work outside the classroom if they wanted to. Some groups made detailed notes as they discussed. All groups were observed to be studying and discussing their picture in detail, with everyone in the group having a chance to contribute.



*One of the pictures used in this activity*

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[2] There was again a relatively small group of about 30 pupils, which did not represent the total numbers of pupils in the class. We subsequently learned (mid-way through the session) that the whole class was not participating. Some children had chosen (or been chosen?) to participate. We were conducting our activities in the (empty) library, while the rest of the class were working in their classroom. Selecting smaller numbers of children may make action research activities easier to manage. However, there is an inherent danger that selection processes may exclude less able children, or those who show less initial enthusiasm for a task. Their views are equally valid, and must not be ignored if school communities are to develop holistic understandings of the challenges and solutions to inclusion.

The groups then returned to the classroom and were given the next instruction. They were asked, as a group, to create a short play about their picture. The play needed to show clearly what problem they thought the picture illustrated, and also what the solution(s) would be. The children were asked to think about the dialogue and characters, and to ensure that everyone in the group participated.

The facilitators showed the class a photograph of children in a crowded room with some sitting on the floor. They then performed a short play to demonstrate the activity. In September the drama activities had been well-received by the pupils, but several of the plays had been very short and basic. It was therefore hoped that a demonstration would clarify the activity. The facilitators also put a great deal of energy into the performance in the hope that this would encourage more lively acting from the pupils. The facilitators' play showed two 'pupils' fighting for a seat every morning. The same 'child' ended up on the floor each day and became very upset. Eventually the 'teacher' devised a solution and made them take it in turns to sit on the seat or the floor.

The groups were again allowed to work outside to prepare their dramas. The facilitators and class teacher observed the groups and also had discussions with them about what they were preparing.

The plays were all of a consistently good standard this time. Some had clearer messages than others, and some were more willingly acted – but on the whole there were no bad performances and some elicited laughter and comments from the class. Most groups had prepared props of some sort. For example, two groups had prepared piles of rubbish, and broken desks, which were central to their performances about the problem of an untidy, unwelcoming study environment. Other groups had prepared 'food' (stones in

a bowl) to help them tell about the local food sellers who sell dirty food to the pupils, making them ill and unable to come to school.

After each group performed their play one of the UK facilitators encouraged the whole class to discuss what they had seen and to ask the actors questions about anything they had not understood. Discussions were relatively lively, as the plays depicted situations that most children could relate to and offer opinions on.

## Photography

Even though the groups had spent much longer on their drama preparations than in September, and there were discussions about each play, the activity still did not fill a session. The groups therefore were given cameras. As in Musakanya they were instructed in the use of the cameras, and asked to take pictures of welcoming and unwelcoming places or people, following the same basic rules.

*'Spot-the-difference'*
Some groups finished their preparations more quickly than others. Those who finished were given a 'spot-the-difference' photo elicitation activity. In September, groups in various schools had been given photo elicitation activities: looking at a set of photographs and discussing what the picture was showing, what things in the picture might be unwelcoming, etc. In one school, however, the pupils treated it very much as a test – they all copied the answers provided by the brightest pupil. The facilitator devised an alterative activity to make each group go away and look again in more depth at each photograph. They had to place stickers on the photograph wherever they saw something that was the same as or different to their school. They had to discuss in the group before placing a sticker, and the facilitator interviewed each group briefly to find out their views on the pictures. This 'spot-the-difference' adaptation elicited much better discussion and analysis. It was therefore used again in most schools during the May visits.



*An example of 'spot the difference'*

There were not enough cameras for every group, so they took it in turns. While waiting for a camera some groups did 'spot-the-difference'. Other groups were able to look at the photo posters created by Mpika pupils in September. They were encouraged to look at the pictures and descriptions and discuss if they agreed with their schoolmates' assessment of the welcoming and unwelcoming.

> The head teacher had ensured that the September photo posters were kept safely, although there was little indication that they had been used by the class teacher or pupils in the intervening time. The posters had clearly been used by the head teacher as evidence of things in the school which needed changing. He explained about some changes he had already implemented, such as filling in an open rubbish pit near the library which the children had complained about.
>
> The head teacher also explained to one of the facilitators that photographs in Zambian society have tended to be used for remembrance rather than as focal points for critical thinking. However, he felt our methodology helped pupils to think more deeply about photographs (their own and other people's). He has been so impressed with the activities and the photographs taken by his pupils that he is going to purchase a camera for the school and use it to expand on the initial work.

When the groups received their own printed photographs, they were again encouraged to compare their pictures with the previous photo posters to see if things were the same still, whether anything had changed, or whether they disagreed with any of the previous analyses. Some groups compared their own photos with the 'spot-the-difference' pictures – again discussing similarities and differences between their school and the other schools pictured.

The facilitators discussed with the groups about their photographs. Each group had taken a larger number of pictures than could be printed in the available time. One facilitator therefore worked with each group to select which images would be printed (one per group member). As the pictures were printed, the facilitator asked questions about the meaning of the picture, why the child had taken it and what the others in the group thought about it. This offered a relaxed opportunity for talking. The children were also quite vocal, as they were excited to see their pictures printing.

Through these informal discussions it because clear that one girl had not taken any photographs because others in her group had already taken more than they were asked to, and she felt she could not break the rule and add another picture. She was given a camera at the end of the session and was able to take a picture (along with two other girls whose photographs had been spoilt by the accidental use of flash in sunlight!).

At the end of the session, a plenary discussion was facilitated on what the pupils had learned. At first the pupils were reluctant. They offered answers

around having learned to do plays or photography. However, by the end the class were discussing quite freely, arguing with each other, and even with the facilitator! One girl questioned the facilitator in front of the whole class about the effectiveness of having meetings with parents (about problems with school infrastructure) when the parents are not really interested. She was the only student in any school to directly challenge the facilitators.

Two pupils were debating about whether a particular photograph (taken by one of them in September) was good or bad. The boy had taken the photograph of a teacher he really liked. He explained that as he prepared to take the picture, the camera attracted the attention of a lot of pupils in the classroom. Some had stood up (behind the teacher) to be in the photograph. The boy explained that he had not been interested in photographing the students, just the teacher. The boy had put the photo in the 'good' section of his group's poster because the teacher was good. The girl who was debating the image with him thought the photograph should be in the 'bad' section because it depicted pupils standing in the classroom, which was naughty. The debate helped challenge simplistic notions of 'bad' and 'good'. The discussion showed a level of critical thinking and debate which was enlightening for the visitors and hopefully also for the pupils and teachers. The head teacher was present and he later mentioned how much he appreciated the pupils' level of discussion.

## Lessons learned and recommendations/suggestions

### *Using examples*

The use of examples can be problematic: while it can help clarify an activity it can also adversely influence the participants. With hindsight the sample play used in Mpika could have been better! It depicted the teacher coming up with the solution to the problem. As a result, several of the children's plays followed a similar formula: acting out the problem with enthusiasm, but not really acting out the solution – the 'teacher' in the plays simply stated the solution to the 'pupils'. The facilitators could have acted out a more in-depth process of developing the solution (eg, brought in another actor to be a second teacher discussing the problem with the first teacher; or to be a third child who is fed up watching the fighting and offers a solution). Particularly in an education system that does not routinely encourage independent and creative thinking, it is very important not to under-estimate the extent to which an example can be treated as a blueprint.

### *Observing the process as well as the output*

It was noticeable that some groups' rehearsals were more lively and inventive than their final plays became. This is possibly due to nerves during the final performance, or due to rapid re-writing of some parts of the plays having seen what they other groups had performed. Towards the end of the performances

a certain 'formula' was appearing, that had not been so obvious when observing the preparations and rehearsals.


*A group developing their drama*

This highlights the importance of observing and engaging with the children's preparation activities. They may well express ideas in this environment which, for whatever reason, do not get expressed in the final play. It would therefore be helpful to find out what does not make it into the final play, and to ask the pupils why certain issues were not performed (eg, for fear of punishment by the teacher; embarrassment in front of peers who may be bullies; dominant group members over-ruling others' ideas; copying an assumed 'correct' format due to lack of familiarity with independent creative processes, etc). This could offer more useful insight into the inclusiveness of the pupils' education experience than the play itself!

### *Engaging children with the production of photographs*

It is, of course, not always possible to enable the children to watch as their photographs are printed (or developed). But if it is possible, then it offers a chance for informal discussions and for the groups to be facilitated to negotiate which pictures to print (if time/resources don't allow everything to be printed). It also means that they can see why certain photographs cannot be printed (eg because a hand obscured the lens!). In September a couple of pupils were upset that their images had not been printed, but as they had not had an opportunity to review the picture before printing, they found it hard to understand the reasons why it couldn't be printed.

# 5. Peads Basic School

Peads is a small fee-paying school, set up and staffed by teachers committed to developing and demonstrating inclusive practice. We did not carry out activities here, but instead observed two classes (Grades 5 and 6) being facilitated by their teachers to do drawing activities. The Grade 5 class was drawing 'what we know about HIV/AIDS' and the Grade 6 class was drawing 'what we like/dislike about school'.

The Grade 5 pupils had been in the school since pre-school class, whereas the Grade 6 class had only just opened and so was made up of pupils new to the school. The pupils in Grade 5 had been studying for years within an environment that promotes children's rights and participation. They were noticeably more confident, spoke more loudly and clearly, and were more sophisticated in their drawings, commentary and level of analysis than the Grade 6 pupils, who were less used to the Peads approach to schooling.

Nevertheless in both classes the children were creating detailed drawings and expressing their reasons for the drawings very clearly. Unlike children in the government schools, the pupils in Peads were offering detailed analytical answers without prompting. For example, one girl had drawn a pregnant woman who is HIV positive. She offered, without prompting, a detailed story about how the woman had become HIV positive from her husband who went out drinking and was unfaithful. She embellished the story, possibly from her imagination or based on information gathered through school or media, taking the story well beyond what could be seen in the drawing, and offering her own opinions about where the problems and solutions might come from.



*Examples of children's drawings: 'what we know about HIV/AIDS*

We observed that pupils in government schools found it very hard to reach this level of analysis about their drawings. They would describe what was in the picture, but would need a great deal of support and questioning in order to explain their reasoning behind the picture, and to start talking about related information which was not necessarily visible in the picture. The approach taken by the Peads teachers was clearly part of the reason for the increased confidence and analytical skills among their pupils; the teachers were willing to listen to all children's views. As a result, during the drawing activities the children clearly did not feel that there was only one correct answer that they must find/draw (regarding what they knew of HIV or what they liked/disliked about school). Instead they felt more secure that if they could explain what they had drawn and why, then it was a valid answer, which would be respected by the teacher and other pupils.

It is of course hard to make direct comparisons between Peads as a fee-paying school and government schools, as so many other social and financial factors at home, in the family and community could also influence the children's levels of confidence and critical thinking skills. Nevertheless, the observations made in Peads again suggest that action research for school improvement (via written or visual methods) needs to work hand-in-hand with changes towards more active teaching/learning practices. Action research with children will be more effective if, in class, they are already becoming familiar with expressing personal views and opinions; and classroom practice may be influenced ('democratised') by action research approaches which demonstrate how to help children express their views.

# 6. Chibansa Basic School

We had not visited Chibansa in either July 2002 or September 2004, although the Zambian facilitator has been working with the school in his capacity as in-service provider.

The class in Chibansa was again much smaller than expected (about 25, with another ten or so arriving late). Many of the children have to travel long distances to school, which again combined with the fact that it was the first week of term, meant the class had far fewer pupils present than normal.

## Drawing

During the activities in schools, the Ethiopian study tour team acted not just as observers, but as 'critical friends' and co-facilitators. They offered feedback on the activities and suggestions for adaptation, based on what they had observed and on their previous experiences in their own context. Following their feedback, therefore, a slightly adapted activity from that initially planned was carried out in Chibansa. The study tour team suggested that the use of cameras, as a new technology for the children, was potentially distracting them from thinking more about the issues under debate (eg, what is welcoming/unwelcoming about your school). They therefore suggested that drawing activities might offer a way of getting children to start thinking about the issues, before the potential distraction of the technology is introduced.

Children were put into groups, but were asked to undertake the initial activity individually. They could discuss with the others in their group, but must not copy each other. They were asked to draw a picture of themselves doing something that makes them happy about coming to school, and another one showing themselves doing something that makes them unhappy about school. They were also encouraged to put other people in their pictures if possible.



*A group of pupils drawing, Chibansa*

Of all the classes we worked with (in May 2005 and in September 2004) the class in Chibansa was the most reticent. They were clearly very nervous about ensuring they got the activity 'right'. Their drawings were often very small (taking up just a corner of an A4 sheet), perhaps because they lacked the confidence to commit their ideas to paper in a bigger way, in case they were wrong.

Other teachers from the school were in the classroom initially, as they wanted to observe the activities. However, we felt this was adding to the tension and making the session more intimidating for the children, so we asked the other teachers to leave the room for a while. When they returned we gave them paper and asked them to do the same activity as the children.

The facilitators and study tour members talked to the children about what they were drawing and why. The drawings were very basic and very few told an obvious story about what made the child happy/unhappy to come to school. Most drawings were of individual people or objects, but very few children had tied these together into a scene, which might help explain the story. One boy had drawn a child squatting. He explained that he did not like the toilets at the school, although the picture did not show a toilet, just the child. It is possible that the instructions were interpreted very literally. When asked to draw themselves doing something that makes them happy/unhappy, they literally just drew themselves. This probably reflects the children's lack of familiarity with art and with creative activities: the idea of embellishing a drawing with scenery would have needed to be explained and demonstrated more explicitly.

The process of discussing the drawings with the children was very difficult. Some would choose to say nothing rather than risk saying the wrong thing, even when reassured that there was no right or wrong answer and we just wanted to hear their personal opinion. As facilitators we adapted our body language and speech in an attempt to appear less intimidating: we knelt on the floor beside the desks and spoke slowly and gently. (Later on we even tried some clowning around and also the idea of a competition to see which group was discussing the loudest when we re-entered the room.) Nevertheless a common response from the children to a question about their drawings would be to rapidly say 'yes', even if the question could not be answered with yes/no! Not one child felt able to admit if they had not understood the question (via the translator), even when their 'yes' answer clearly showed that they had not understood.

In this particular situation the drawing activity did not seem to help children to think about issues before moving on to using cameras to capture their ideas. However, they were a particularly shy and nervous group of children. In a class this reticent, the introduction of cameras earlier on might have been the stimulus we needed to break the ice and get some chatting going.

## Photo elicitation

As the children began to finish their drawings, some groups were taken outside to begin the photography activity. As there were not enough cameras, those remaining in the classroom were given photos to look at until a camera became available. They were asked to 'spot the differences' between their school and the schools in the pictures.

As with other classes, this activity did stimulate some discussions within groups, although the children did not always work together as a group to decide what to label. When talking to the groups about why they had placed 'same' or 'different' stickers on certain parts of the photograph, several children stated: 'that child put that sticker on the picture, we didn't do it'. There was not much sign of collective responsibility for the decisions taken in analysing the pictures. But neither did the children debate with each other in front of the facilitators to explain why they did not support the position of a sticker placed by another child, or to defend their positioning of a sticker. This again possibly reflects the children's experience of schooling in an environment of right and wrong answers, and the natural reaction to distance oneself from others' answers given in an unfamiliar 'lesson', in case they are wrong.

However, the photo elicitation did help to get the children talking more than the drawing activity (even if they were unwilling to present a united response or a debate to the facilitators). It also enabled them to begin thinking more analytically about their experiences of school, and how their school compared with other schools. Each picture used in the 'spot the difference' activity had many stickers placed on it, suggesting that the children had looked very closely at the pictures to find as many similarities or differences as possible.

## Photography

Each group was given instructions in using the camera. The facilitator took each group outside of the classroom. This was done so as not disturb the rest of the class, but also in an attempt to interact with the students outside of the 'formal' classroom environment, in the hope that they might feel free more willing to express their perspectives and imagination. However, this was not entirely successful, as the children still seemed quite reticent. This may have been due to their discomfort with or fear of the unfamiliar, foreign facilitator. The children were shown the basics of using the camera and each encouraged to take a practice shot. The facilitator also spent some time encouraging the children to jump up and down and make some noise in an attempt to break through their reticence, an activity they did seem to enjoy. The groups proceeded to take pictures of things they liked and disliked in the school. One group explained that they did not like fighting and so were encouraged by the facilitator to photograph this. They created a very clear posed picture of two boys fighting.

Once the children's pictures had been printed, they were returned to the groups. The facilitators asked them about their pictures – what they were depicting and why they had taken them. They also asked the children to look at their own pictures and compare them with the photo elicitation pictures, to see what was the same or different.

Most of the pictures depicted infrastructure. There were some excellent pictures taken, some of which could be considered photographic art, such as a close-up shot of a pile of stones.



*Examples of photographs taken by pupils at Chibansa Basic School*

The children were able to offer quite detailed explanations of why they had taken their pictures. For example, children enjoyed playing on the pile of stones, but the photographer considered this dangerous and thought the teachers should do something about getting them moved. When asked if there was anything they could do as children to prevent the stones being dangerous, they replied that all they could do was ask the teachers to get the stones moved.

Other photos depicted guava bushes which the children liked because of the fruit they provided; and toilets. The stories about the toilets were somewhat confused. Several pictures showed locked gates across the latrine entrances. The children said they used the latrines, and when asked about the locks said the key could be obtained from the head teacher, but this was contradicted (even by the same child later on) with information that the key could not easily be obtained. It is of course possible that translation problems created the confusion, and there was a much more logical story to be told about the toilets!

The session in this school was shorter than in other schools: many children had a long journey home and so we needed to finish by 4pm instead or 5pm. There was not time for the children to create photo posters to display and explain their photographs. However, the children were clearly tired by the time their pictures were printed, and so any further activity might not have been possible anyway.

To stimulate some level of discussion the Zambian facilitator asked the whole class to say something about why they had taken their photos, whether they wanted to keep them (and if so why), how they thought they could use the photographs in the future. After a slow start, children gradually began to speak. They certainly all agreed they wanted to keep the photographs to show to other people.

We left the drawings and photographs with the teacher and made some suggestions about follow-up activities that could be done with the children to get them to display and continue talking about their pictures.

## Lessons learned and recommendations/suggestions

In a group that is clearly nervous and reticent, the first activity needs to be something that will break the ice and encourage talking. Although the introduction of new technology like cameras could be a distraction from the 'serious' business of thinking about the topic set by the facilitators, it does act as a good way to engage children and get them interested. It is not therefore always appropriate to introduce a more familiar activity prior to introducing the cameras.

Facilitators working in classes that are very reticent, even frightened, of speaking out need to be particularly inventive and responsive: finding ways to reassure and encourage the children. Class teachers also need to be encouraged to observe and practise participatory and active methods of communicating with their pupils, so that the image-based activities can truly help to give children a voice in action research and in their own education, and not simply reinforce traditional didactic practices. Teachers did observe the activities, and the Zambian facilitator explained the processes to them. But we did not have time to discuss the activities as much as we would have liked, or to let them practise facilitating an activity. The class teacher did engage with his pupils, and the facilitators were able to offer advice about how to allow the children more independence in creating their drawings or thinking through the elicitation activities, but this needs much more attention.

# 7. Nyanji Basic School

Nyanji was another school we had visited in September 2004. We had carried out mapping and photography activities (see previous report). The school has very limited resources, and during the previous visit we had needed to introduce some careful discussions with the class to overcome possible despondency at the many infrastructure problems that the mapping and photography highlighted.

## Photo elicitation

We had not used photo elicitation in Nyanji during the activities in September. The Ethiopian study tour team had, however, brought with them a large collection of photographs of schools in Ethiopia and we therefore used these images to facilitate a 'spot the difference' activity in the class in Nyanji. Children were asked to discuss the Ethiopian pictures in their groups and to decide on things that were the same or different to their own school. This activity gave children (and the class teacher) a chance to see what life was like in poor rural schools in Ethiopia. The photographs stimulated some discussions within the groups, particularly about pictures depicting Ethiopian children learning in the open air, or writing in Amharic script. The class was still reticent though.



*Example of photograph from Ethiopia used in this activity*

The facilitators discussed with the groups what they thought was happening in each picture, but the children on the whole found it hard to do this. A lack of experience among participants of using images to stimulate imagination can make photo elicitation harder to facilitate: more input and encouragement is required from facilitators. Therefore, an adaptation made by one of the UK facilitators, in an attempt to encourage analytical thinking about the pictures,

was to suggest that the children role play what was happening in the picture. For example, one photograph depicted five Ethiopian pupils sitting in a semi-circle on the ground outside, looking at a book. A group of Nyanji pupils were encouraged to each pretend to be one of the children in the picture, and to make up a conversation between these characters about the situation they were in. This took a great deal of explaining to the group.

The groups chosen to do this activity did then have a discussion about what was *possibly* happening in their pictures. However, they were unfamiliar with the concept of dialogue, and so they reported the story of the photograph in the third person (eg, "he is saying that he likes the book"), rather than assuming the character of one of the people in the picture (eg, "I like this book, though I don't like sitting on the floor very much, do you?").

This is a further reflection of the limited emphasis placed on imagination and creativity within current teaching and learning methods. In theory, the dialogue that the photograph 'characters' speak, could tell us a great deal about what the 'actors' think and feel about their own lives or schooling. Unfortunately, the children's concerns about presenting only correct answers meant that photo elicitation activities (using whatever technique) did not easily elicit the children's true feelings and opinions. Spontaneity and personal reflection can be stifled by the children's previous experience of 'how things work' in class.

## Photography

Throughout the session, groups were taken one at a time to learn how to use the camera and take photographs. They were given the same instructions as in previous schools. In order to reduce the likelihood of only depicting negative aspects of the school, the emphasis was not placed purely on taking pictures of 'places and spaces', as happened in September.

Most groups took far too many pictures. Many were posed shots of friends, looking 'cool' or 'tough' outside the classroom (often outside the toilets). There was not time to print all the pictures during the session. For example, one group (of about six pupils) took 43 photographs, when they should have taken 12 maximum! The children therefore had to select the images that they wanted printed. This situation is far from ideal, because it means that there were many pictures which were not used in the subsequent photo posters, and which did not get discussed by the groups and the facilitators. For example, we were not able to hear the children talking about why they had taken pictures of boys hanging around outside the toilets, because on the whole they did not select these images for printing.

*An example of a photograph that the pupils did not select for printing.*

Children created photo posters using their new photographs. However, in an attempt to encourage critical thinking, and an analysis of progress made by the school, we supplied the groups with copies of pictures taken by the facilitator in September. The pictures quite clearly illustrated changes in certain aspects of the school (eg, walls are now painted). The children were asked to incorporate the 'old' pictures into their posters as a way of showing what has or has not changed, why it has or has not changed, and what they suggest should happen to make it change.

No groups achieved this level of analysis. Most inserted the 'old' pictures and annotated them as 'we like/don't like this', but did not comment on whether the situation is the same now or not.

## Drawing

Drawing was used as a filler activity: the photo elicitation tasks did not generate very lengthy discussions and the children therefore needed other things to do while waiting for their turn to use a camera. They were given the same instructions as the children at Chibansa – to draw something that makes them happy and unhappy about coming to school. They were later encouraged to add the drawings to their photo posters if they wishes, although no group seemed to do this.

# Lessons learned and recommendations/suggestions

### Choosing the right elicitation technique

'Spot the difference' seems to offer perhaps the most 'safe' photo elicitation technique for many of the children we worked with (in Nyanji and in other schools). Compared with other activities, it is not so far removed for existing teaching/learning practice (children feel they are looking for right and wrong answers to the questions of 'what is the same or different'), and it does not ask for large leaps of imagination. Yet at the same time it is promoting increased critical assessment of the picture, and encouraging children to look more closely at the details of an image and to debate what they see.

### Timescale

The experience in Nyanji further highlights the needs to allocate plenty of time to image-based activities. The ideal, given the one-week timeframe available, would have been to select one school in the district and work with them for a couple of hours each day, allowing time for printing of all photographs, and for building up confidence and creativity among the children. However, we were under a certain amount of pressure to visit as many schools as possible; teachers and head teachers did not want their schools to be overlooked. Image-based action research (or active learning) activities ideally need to be adopted by the schools and used on an ongoing basis, if the children and teachers are to become comfortable with using them and start to see the benefits of the activities. It is not an approach that is suited to one-off school visits. This is one reason why having a local facilitator, who can continue to support the participating schools, is such a bonus in the development of this work in Mpika.



*A photo poster from Nyanji Basic School*

# 8. Community exhibition

We wanted to ensure that the activities carried out in the schools did not stay as one-off activities confined to the schools. It is important to use the children's outputs and opinions within wider debates on improving the inclusion of children in education. We therefore decided to hold a small exhibition of the drawing and photographs, and invited parents, pupils and teachers from the schools (though we knew travelling distance would prevent many from attending at short notice).

Staff at the venue chosen for the exhibition, (believing they were doing us a favour) set up many wooden desks and chairs as if for a seminar or meeting. This formal arrangement was not what we had in mind as we had wanted the room to be free of furniture so people could walk around and view the displays on the walls. We were able to reorganise the chairs and desks to allow some space around the edge of the room, but we did not have time to remove all the furniture.

The event was a difficult, but fascinating experience. Most of the pupils from Grades 5 and 6 from Peads School attended, along with many of their parents and some of their teachers. Some of the Nyanji pupils attended, as did a teacher from Chibansa and a few teachers from other schools. The Peads pupils very rapidly began engaging with the displays and were clearly excited seeing their own work and the work of students from other schools. It was relatively easy to get them engaged in conversation, thinking, debating and discussing the work. Most of the parents, however, glanced quickly at the displays before sitting down. We had not anticipated this response. We offered a brief explanation of what the displays were and encouraged the participants to have a good look and chat to each other about the displays. They made another lap around the room and sat back down.


*Pupils from Peads school at the exhibition*

A parent then asked us to introduce ourselves properly in a formal way and to give a full explanation of what the work was about and why the students had done the projects. We had anticipated discussing this informally as parents viewed the exhibition, but this was not appropriate. After a formal presentation of the project, we showed a short clip of the video taken at Musakanya Basic School, showing the children creating their photo posters. We then tried again to engage the participants in discussions about the displays and about what these could tell us about making schools more inclusive for all children. It was a slow process, but a debate slowly evolved.

At first participants talked about how bad the government schools seemed. Most of the parents had children in Peads. Fortunately, a teacher from another school skilfully steered the debate away from a limited discussion of government versus independent schools and towards reflecting on the meaning of the images they had seen in the exhibition. Slowly participants (two men in particular) started asking questions about certain photographs and offering their own speculations on meaning of the images and how this related to inclusion or exclusion of children from education. Although the gender balance of participants was almost equal, only two women spoke. The enforced formality of the event did not allow us enough space to talk with female participants in an informal way as they viewed the displays, although we managed some of this.

Eventually we found ourselves facilitating a community meeting in which parents shared insights and asked questions. Not everyone engaged with this, but participants who did expressed their interest in this approach. It is hoped that future displays can be arranged for parents and community members

## Lessons learned and recommendations/suggestions

### *The medium is the message*

Looking back it seems obvious that running the event as an informal exhibition – with chatting and mingling, and participants speculating on the images and sharing their comments in an informal manner – just would not work! However, EENET is committed to the concept of "the medium is the message". In this instance, through displayed the children's work and having informal discussions (the medium) we would be demonstrating participatory inclusive practices (the message). Using the medium of a formal presentation would not reinforce the message about inclusion and active participation in education. However, there is a fine line between wanting people to experience something different, and not making it so different that it becomes uncomfortable, shocking or insulting, and results in people shutting down.

### *Parents of children in inclusive school need help to understand inclusive concepts*

The level of engagement of the children compared to that of their parents was striking. The parents seemed much less used to being asked to express their opinions and exercise their imagination in such a forum. Most parents were unable to match the freedom of expression and imaginative thinking of their children, even though most of them had children in an inclusive child-focused school. The parents had presumably been educated in a traditional didactic system that tends to discourage critical thinking and questioning. This was reflected in their questions and overall response to the event. The exhibition clearly illustrated that one cannot assume transference of understanding of inclusion or inclusive practice from children to parents (or children to children). **Working with parents and families to help them understand, experience and support inclusive participatory practices is essential for the successful development of inclusive schools.**





*Exhibition of pupils' drawing, writing and photography*

# 9. Conclusions

The activities in May 2005 provided us with a deeper insight into the use of image-based activities, both as action research tools and as teaching/learning techniques in the classroom.

We were able to try adaptations the activities tried initially in 2004. For example, the presence of an additional facilitator enabled us to give pupils more comprehensive instruction in photography and camera use. By not attempting to conduct all activities in all classes we were also able to investigate how to manage a photography project with a whole class, rather than just with three small groups, even though we were still restricted to three cameras. We also found better ways to introduce drama activities, and creative ways to combine various activities (photo elicitation with role play, for example).

### *We encountered a number of challenges:*

It was the first week of term and many pupils in all schools had not yet returned to town from their rural homes, or had not yet obtained the required uniforms or materials needed to attend class. All classes were therefore much smaller than they should have been (eg, 20-30 pupils instead of 40-60). While in some ways this made our task easier, it prevented us from gaining a true picture of how our activities would work with large classes. It also meant the Ethiopian study team did not see the whole picture of the challenges facing schools struggling to be inclusive in Zambia. The situation, however, provided us with a clear reminder of how the inclusion of children in education is affected by factors in the community as much as in the school.

Printing photographs in schools without electricity is a problem. We improved on the approach used in September by powering the photo printer through the car cigarette lighter socket. This did mean that the person in charge of printing faced several hours sitting in an extremely hot car!

Translation was provided by two teachers employed specifically to assist us. However, with the Ethiopian team also present, there was not sufficient translation support to enable us to always talk spontaneously with the children as soon as we noticed something that we wanted to discuss.

## Summary of key lessons learned

- When asking children to work together in groups, do not assume that they understand or respect the concepts of negotiation, co-operation and team work. Do some preparatory activities in advance, to foster group work skills.

- Photographs (or other images) can offer a great stimulus to help children begin writing about their experiences, even when previous writing activities have not worked well. Any action research writing activity for children should be preceded or accompanied in some way with an image activity.

- Providing examples or demonstrations is essential when introducing a new concept or activity (such as using environmental materials in art). But it is important to prevent demonstrations becoming blueprints which stifle participants creativity. Facilitators should spend plenty of time working out in advance what demonstration or example they will use and how they will introduce it, so as to minimise the risk of participants following their lead.

- Storytelling is not necessarily something all children are comfortable with, even in communities which have an oral culture. This may be particularly the case where the education system is separate from the community and from 'traditional'/local culture and communication approaches. There is a need to find ways of breaking down the barriers between school and community, and of using the skills and knowledge that children acquire in the community within the school. Image/arts based action research (or active learning) activities offer a way of bridging the divide.

- Often, even the poorest classrooms have some decoration or visual imagery on the walls (eg, a home-made alphabet poster). Opportunities therefore could be made for children to create the visual teaching and learning materials displayed in class, rather than the teacher making them, or the school buying them.

- Using images and art in action research (or in active learning in the classroom) is about much more than assessing a finished product. The process that the participants go through can offer greater insights than the end product in some situations (for example, the dramas in Mpika Basic School, which were less adventurous than the rehearsals and discussions preceding them). Facilitators need to devote ample time to observing and joining in the process, not just recording the outputs. Children also need opportunities to participate in as much of the process as possible – for example, taking an active role in printing the photographs.

- Working with participants who are nervous or reticent requires patience and persistence. It's important for facilitators not to give up if children do not respond or speak out. Finding new and creative ways to help participants engage with the image-based activities, in a way that makes them comfortable, is essential. But this can be time consuming, and therefore realistic timescales need to be set for introducing image-based activities into action research (or classroom practice).

- Such activities need to become an integral part of the school's practice, and a part of any action research happening within the community, to help bridge the often wide divide between what happens at school and the lives children lead at home.