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How to “see” in research: Using your five senses in social (and scientific) inquiry

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HOW TO “SEE” IN RESEARCH:

As a researcher starts in the brain, the sight of imagination - not the eyes

HOW TO “SEE” IN RESEARCH:

Why is it that two people look at the same thing but ask completely different questions?

“What a crab sees before it gets eaten by a cuttlefish”

NYT, 3 March 2025



HOW TO “SEE” IN RESEARCH:

- I work in a struggling school
- For weeks, my data came from using all FIVE senses

1. EYES (sight)

- For example, transition times
- Losing up to 15 minutes of instructional time

2. NOSE (smell)

- Stinky toilets
- Humid, hot classrooms with closed windows in winter
- Health and learning consequences

3. EARS (hearing)

- Unbelievable noise levels around and inside the classrooms

4. TONGUE (taste)

- For example, the routine availability of unhealthy food
- The insensitivity (unless for special events) to Muslim sensibilities

5. SKIN (feeling)

- For example, skinniness, carrying pain (dental as an example)
- Goosebump moments (many)

KEY TAKE-AWAY

- It is the combination of data from the senses that gives a ‘picture’ of the school for 2 purposes:

1. Analysis

What’s wrong

2. Reform

How to fix it

RESOURCES FOR BEGINNER RESEARCHERS

Jansen and Vithal (2019, 2nd edition)
Designing your first research proposal (Juta's)

Thank you

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