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SAY CHEESE! CAN PHOTOGRAPHY INFLUENCE STUDENTS' WELL-BEING, LEARNING SKILLS AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP?

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Abstract

Photography has been a tool for visual expression for almost two centuries. If owning a camera was a privilege in the past, technological development in the 21st century has made the camera a standard tool used as a means of everyday life interpersonal communication. While the verbal communication (spoken language) can vary among individuals, groups and cultures, the visual language functions as a common denominator among most cultures, allowing the expression of personal world emotionally and cognitively. This form of visual language can be used to bridge students from different cultures that yet did not understand or even tried to get to know each other, and even improve learning skills and well-being. This theoretical article presents and discusses photography as a tool used by education systems concerning the Photovoice model, an immersive learning method that promotes active-real-world problem solving, shows unique virtues in the interdisciplinary aspect, and advances student-driven teams and high-impact learning experiences. Also, we argue that by using the Photovoice model, one can influence personal development and change, the experience of success, long-term memory, relationship skills, academic skills, problem-solving, and well-being. All these variables facilitate psycho-emotional changes allowing the participants to speak out, share knowledge and ideas and learn from each other by using pictures. The article aims to emphasize an educational model that uses the photographic tool to take advantage of educational aspects that are currently available to almost everyone and can contribute to meaningful learning and better communication between students, contributing to a positive learning environment.

Keywords: Educational program, photography, photovoice, pedagogy, skills

1. Introduction

Visualization is a common ability that most people have and use each day, and even more in the last few decades, when digital photography has been developed significantly, and more and more people are communicating with each other, using photographs they created themselves. There is no need for knowledge of an additional language or learning photography in order to create understandable visuals for the use of a conversation. Today, everyone can push the camera button and express him/herself without words. In today's world, photographs have become an essential communication tool to define our multiple identities, stories, existence, culture, and the sociopolitical world (de los Ríos, 2020). The photographs can function as a language in today's visual language, expresses the personal world (cognitive and emotion), and help to gain self-awareness and self-identity on the way (Paone et al., 2018). There is an increased interest toward the research of visual tools for reaching the youth, especially for those who feel that no one sees them (Burke et al., 2016; Zenkov & Harmon, 2009). As Paone et al. (2018) claim, photography can reduce anxiety when complex issues are discussed since communication is indirect and replaces verbal. The photos can be used as a reflection of an inside struggle that otherwise might not have been exposed and reflect a feeling captured in an instant by the camera and can emerge once again just by looking at the photo once more.

1.1. Visual tools in education

Šrot (2019) evaluates that in order to express students' level of abstract thinking to a level of literary-aesthetic experience, they need more vocabulary than the one that is generally used in common verbal communication. Visual communication, in his view, is a tool for creative dialogue and for the development of logical thinking ability. To apply the tool, knowledge of a number of different disciplines is needed among teachers, in addition to the fact that photography, among other art education processes, includes a social-emotional aspects and skills (Farrington et al., 2019) that teachers should acquire as a method. According to Whitmore et al. (2019), the use of images offers work on the social skills and authentic social abilities of children for extended periods as well as visual research, in the context of the curriculum. They argue that the images taken in the process of visual learning analysis (VLA) offered much more information than common tools used to evaluate the languages of emotional social learning. The VLA has achieved its goal as a means of deepening the educational staff's understanding of learning as a social emotional. Educators' understanding of visual language learning is critical to advancing the understanding of 21st century learning. In addition, the VLA supports attention to detail that might otherwise be missed by a flurry of busy classrooms and active children. A beneficial feature of the process is the way it makes pedagogical values visible.

1.2. Photovoice

The use of photographs in an educational process can build trust and cohesiveness among people, connect them as a strong community and give them a different "voice" they can express (Bessell et al., 2007). The "voice" expression is the basis for Wang and Burris's Photovoice theory (1997). The initial goal of the photovoice theory was (1) to express their voice and speak out their concerns and strength in

relevance to the community they live in, (2) so they can raise a critical dialogue with the help of photography, about important community issues, in large and small groups discussion, (3) in order to enlighten them for policymakers could be aware of them. They based their theory on Freire's methods (1970) of problem-posing education that starts with raising dialogues of essential issues that revolve around the lives of the people (especially women and mainly related to the healthcare field) who initiate them by presenting photographs they took themselves. Freire based his ideas on empowering education, feminist theory, and documentary photography by making individuals initiate dialogues and critical thinking of their community and being more independent with their education. Taking photos can make people more active by doing something to solve their problem, rather than being passive and waiting for others to make a move. This way, the participants who take the pictures gain more knowledge from their community and spread it forward in the process of social learning, analysis, and empowerment. The process brings them to critical thinking and assessment of their lives and shares it with policymakers, leading to real change (Morgan et al., 2010). Through the focus group discussion, cooperative learning is created by giving the participants to opportunity to speak out, share knowledge and ideas and learn from each other as a collective (Julien et al., 2013). As part of the method, there are six questions (SHOWeD) to be answered by the participants (Wang, 2003): S – What do you SEE here?; H – What is really HAPPENING here?; O – How does this relates to OUR lives? (or your life personally); W – Why does the situation, concern, or strength exist?; e – How could this image EDUCATE the community? (or class); D – What can we DO about it? These questions are the primary tool for assessing the participants (Husnun et al., 2018).

2. Problem Statement

The Photovoice method is considered a meaningful reflection tool for all kinds of activities, an engagement tool for youth at risk, and a support tool for a group's desired change process (Hall & Bowen, 2015). Researchers are using that by getting more authentic perspectives of the participants (Julien et al., 2013). The method is considered a qualitative one, in which the researcher can collect data related to experiences, which is assessed mainly by photos analysis, dialogues, and discussions that occur in several meetings in the process.

3. Research Question

In this theoretical paper, the main research question is what is the support offered by various authors to the Photovoice model as an educational tool. Hence, the proposed way to answer this question is to critically analyze the literature in the direction of documenting each of the steps of the Photovoice process in the context of education.

4. Purpose of the Study

The article aims to emphasize an educational model that uses the photographic tool to take advantage of educational aspects that are currently available to almost everyone. It is assumed in this

study that the model, i.e., the Photovoice model, can contribute to meaningful learning and better communication between students, thus fostering a positive learning environment.

5. Research Methods

This is a theoretical paper based on an integrative review of the up-to-date studies addressing the topic of Photovoice model in educational context. A common definition of the integrative review refers to it as being a review method that "summarizes past empirical or theoretical literature to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon or healthcare problem" (Broome, 1993, as cited in Whittemore & Knafl, 2005, p. 546).

6. Findings

6.1. The procedural steps of the Photovoice method

According to the reviewed studies, since the Photovoice method involves group discussion, focus group, and interviews, it is recommended, especially with youth, that there will be a mediator that is well-versed in interview and discussion management techniques and even take the role of a mentor that is more involved in the discussion (Julien et al., 2013); in this study, the education team is the appropriate expert for the role. The method involves several sessions with the participants, that can change according to the research goals, number of participants, facilities and researcher (Christensen et al., 2022; Latz et al., 2016; Rogers et al., 2019), which an eclectic example of such sessions is as follows:

6.1.1. Preparation session

Today, almost everyone has a camera, whether a DSLR or digital, as a part of their phone, but not everyone controls the picturing skills the same. For that reason, the first meeting is dedicated to a photographic essential learning skill so that all participants can start from nearly the same skill level (Julien et al., 2013). In addition, a discussion must be made about ethics and power, how to read photographs, and how to give back to the community, after getting their help in taking photos, how to give them the photos back (Wang & Burris, 1997).

6.1.2. Selecting a topic and taking pictures

A group discussion is being conducted about issues that they wish to solve or emphasize. The participants are the ones to choose the issue they wish to solve (with the help of photography), though Julien et al. (2013) recommend that if youth are involved, the researcher should be a part as a guide to suggest themes. At first, they are being sent to take pictures of their community in small groups (3-6 participants), and have a discussion about the photos being taken. In the next step, all groups meet as one group to discuss the issues they had raised, and are being sent to take more pictures as homework, relevant to the issues raised in the group, each one individually, and come back with up to 15 photos they took concerning a problem they identify in their community, from which, they select their most meaningful photograph(s) and add a short description to each photo (Williams, 2016). It is crucial for the

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study that the participants are the ones to select the photographs that reflect the community's needs, contextualize them by telling their stories, and codify by identifying the issues and themes that emerge (Wang & Burris, 1997).

6.1.3. Ingroup discussion

Each participant brings their selected photos (three photos, printed or digitally) in order to start a productive discussion, in their original small groups, about the specific issue she/he intended to raise. The photographs are the trigger to encourage the participants to start a conversation (Williams, 2016). This is the point in time in which the SHOWeD questions are used as a trigger, and as an encouragement tool for assessing the photographs (Wang, 2003). Other triggers can be used as long as the participants contextualize each photo. At the end of the meeting, the participants should tell what they have learned from their peers before they are dismissed for doing their homework and bring back selected photos that emphasize strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. A print version of the photographs is recommended since everyone can present and watch it at once.

6.1.4. Outgroup collaboration

After the participants hang their printed photographs in the given space, they can present their ideas visually and verbally to the other participants in the wider group. A title should be added to each photo by the photographer. In the research of Williams (2016), a different aspect was added, in which the rest of the participants could categorize all the photographs in the group by "strength," "weakness," or "opportunity," and then have a discussion about it. Another option that Williams (2016) and Wilson et al. (2007) suggest is to ask the participants to write next to each printed photo, their impression, thought, and feeling of it.

6.1.5. Photovoice Exhibition

The photographs exhibition is an important stage in the Photovoice method since this is the part that the participants give their voices. There can be several purposes for a voice to be heard: if the purpose is to expose the issues discussed in the process to as many people as possible to make an extensive change, then there should be a comprehensive and central place to present the photographs for the public and the policymakers. If the goal is to make a domestic change within the class or school, a small, local exhibition is enough (Sutton-Brown, 2014). An exhibition is an empowerment tool that completes the Photovoice process by combining the four accesses in the project that Wang and Burris (1994) mention: access to knowledge, to decisions, to networks, and resource, and it is planned and held by the participant (Christensen et al., 2022). The audience can be government, city hall management, community leaders, school principal, teachers, peers, and more. Before producing the exhibition, some questions are needed to be answered (Liebenberg, 2018): Who are the policymakers that can make the change?; How can they be engaged and active in the change process?; What information do they need to get in order to act?; What are the best ways of sharing the information with the relevant audiences? Since Wand and Burris's theory was published, it became pretty popular as a methodology tool and is being

used until these days (Cantarero-Arévalo & Werremeyer, 2021; Csesznek, 2021; Rogers et al., 2019; Saal et al., 2020) in various disciplines like education, sociology, health, public health, and mental health (Paone et al., 2018), and with quite a lot adolescence studies (Strack et al., 2004; Wilson et al., 2007). Over the years, there were a few adaptations assimilated into the method, such as giving the camera to a less disadvantaged participant to accompany the disadvantaged participants (Hall & Bowen, 2015), using cellular phones' cameras instead of a standalone camera (Williams, 2016), mix two different education institutions in one research (Latz et al., 2016), learning a history course relevant to the multicultural study topic, and taking photos every week in order to follow the progress of the process later, along with writing reflection (Paone et al., 2018). Julien et al. (2013) introduce five photovoice principles:

i. Teaching with photographs: photos help understand concepts that words cannot, in terms that individuals that can express their self-perception with visuals, giving their subjective and broad worldviews interpretation.

ii. The policy can be influenced by photography: apart from the participants and the researchers' worldview, other people can be influenced by watching photographs and even making them want to change or reform.

iii. Community empowerment toward changes: the policymakers do not always come from within the community. Therefore, they are not always aware of the problems and need to make a change. Involving them increases that chance of making a meaningful influence and promoting a change.

iv. Positive change can be made when the policymakers can see through the community's eyes by being exposed to the photos as an audience: open minds are essential to the process, which can be made by good communication between the community and the policymakers.

v. Individuals and the community are given the platform to speak out and take action: they do not need to be passive and can act by using their literal point of view. They can start communicating in more media channels and be empowered by them.

Julien et al. (2013) emphasize that when integrated into dialogue, visuals have the power to act like a code that the participant can interpret in their own way. Since these photos are a part of their own world, it is more comfortable to try and understand.

6.2. The influence of the Photovoice pedagogy (community, class, group, individuals, and teachers)

Literature indicates the following aspects that can be positively impacted and fostered by the Photovoice pedagogy:

6.2.1. Personal development and change:

Advocacy of the method and its results can be excellent in educating the community and the policymakers about issues that need to be changed, but it can also influence the personal development of the participants (Julien et al., 2013). According to Fournier et al. (2007) and Wilson et al. (2007), the participant in Photovoice studies contributes to the involvement and creating a social connection with peers, learning new skills, influencing and making a change in their class or community. One of the

essential individual benefits is that they matter. Their opinions and ideas are being heard by their classmates, teachers, or community (Julien et al., 2013).

6.2.2. Experience of success:

Another product of the Photovoice as pedagogy is the success of accomplish a goal (Catalani & Minkler, 2010). Harper (2002) argues that when looking at pictures, people can access a deeper part of their brains, opening a new understanding for subjective interpretations. Since the participants are responsible for the data creation, they participate more than usual by making their own decision regarding which photographs to choose for the discussion (Julien et al., 2013) .

6.2.3. Long term memory:

Wang and Burris (1997) add that the long-term memory andimplementation are also a by-product of the Photovoice when the participants transfer the knowledge and skills they had acquired into their routine in the community, which later will emerge by initiating new ideas to implement in their surroundings.

6.2.4. Relationships:

One of the significant benefits of the Photovoice method is the new relationships that can create and that can strengthen the community (or class) by the continual meetings, personal sharing of reflection, stories, and successes in solving problems that bring them closer together and encourage each other to continue and initiate new things (de los Ríos, 2020; Julien et al., 2013). Latz et al. (2016) emphasize the relationship created between the staff and students. The teacher and the students are involved in the project while the teacher is a guide and not a tutor. The situation creates collaboration and builds trust.

6.2.5. Knowledge:

In the community aspect, the fact that the participants have to make preparations (take pictures) in order to present their photographs concerning the issue they had chosen, go to different locations, meet new people, connect with them, and maybe learn from their ideas (and vis versa), enriches their knowledge and connecting them to the community (Julien et al., 2013). According to Wang and Burris (1997), it is essential to use the studies' results to promote community development and influence the policymakers.

6.2.6. Academic skills:

According to Julien et al. (2013), the participants remembered the process more than other studies that do not use photographs. They argue that this is due to the effective method of pulling more details from experience than from memory alone, among other things due to the fact that people feel more comfortable when photographs are involved in an interview or focus groups, and the main focus is on the product than themselves.

6.2.7. Problem-solving:

Photovoice promotes active-real-world problem solving with interdisciplinary aspects and advances student-driven teams and high-impact learning experiences (Latz et al., 2016).

6.2.8. Critical thinking:

The Photovoice pedagogy is based on the critical pedagogy by Freire (1970), which can lead students to more independent thinking (Morgan et al., 2010). In a society where a person learns and assimilates the other side of the conflict is the enemy, it is crucial to be exposed to the other side in an equal setting, be more involved and create social connection (Fournier et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2007) and feel that you can make a change when being heard by those who can practically influence the situation (Julien et al., 2013).

6.2.9. Teaching skills:

Teachers are sometimes locked in their teaching methods and can influence instructional practices by concerning the "disabled student type." As a result of the teachers' involvement and the opportunity to know their students much more profoundly through the Photovoice pedagogy, the teaching skills are being enriched with a classification system that helps them articulate their understanding of the students (Ciotoli, 2019). Ciotoli (2019) also explains that the teachers showed a breaking boundary thinking that increased opportunities for meaning-making. Teachers found alternative ways of making contact without the written or speaking word. This aspect is essential to the Prejudice Photography-based study since it aims to bridge cultures that do not always speak the same language—the same for the teachers, who need to communicate with the students from the other culture.

6.2.10. Common language:

Photographs reflect what the eyes see, how the photographer feels, his point of view, opinions, and ideas (cognitive and emotionally). If students with disabilities or from a different culture are involved, or students that speak a different language, it is easier to connect with them through the pictures they take (Paone et al., 2018).

6.2.11. Well-being:

Photography contributes to gaining self-awareness and self-identity and can reduce anxiety (Paone et al., 2018). Palibroda et al. (2009) lists the principles underlying the Photovoice methodology: acquiring photography skills; telling stories and sharing ideas through photography; creating a research database; proposing critical projection; group work; social activity; influence on public policy and increased awareness of personal and community matters.

6.2.12. Learning and assimilating diversity and different cultures:

By visualizing social differences, the students are being socially aware of their group members, that yet before might have thought different things about them and maybe even categorized them (Rose, 2016). The cooperation and gathering from different cultures proved to build trust between the groups (McKenna et al., 2017). If the Photovoice method can build trust between the two culture groups in the Prejudice Photography-based study, that will be a great accomplishment. One of the Photovoice aims is to make a change, especially a social change (Morgan et al., 2010; Wang & Burris, 1997). In the Prejudice Photography-based study, the policymakers can be the students themselves, if they could only spread the co-existence to their friends and community, the teachers, that can activate a similar program in their schools for more students, and maybe even policymakers from higher levels of decision-makers, that can hear their voices and react.

6.3. Photovoice as an assessment method

Wang and Burris (1997), who are the inventors of the Photovoice method, see it above all as a tool that assesses the participants' lives. The ability to see through someone else's eyes is unique and can contribute much to the research (Wang & Burris, 1997). The use of what the eye sees sometimes has a more significant impact than well-considered words and does not reveal the subtext that might be presented in the photo. Wang and Burris add to the benefit of the Photovoice as an assessment tool that people who have trouble with writing and reading can express themselves visually. In addition, sometimes the researchers need to know about the participant surrounding in which they live, and if they do not come to see it themselves, they cannot get a clear picture of it. Photovoice solves this problem by documenting the setting and adding another assessment tool to the study. Another aspect is integrating the assessment equation by adding the community ideas and points of view while the participants take their pictures. This way, more data is collected and assessed (Wang & Burris, 1997). Julien et al. (2013) add that the primary assessment of the method comes from the discussion group(s), which is one of the benefits of this method since the participants are empowered just by knowing they are part of the data analysis. They have control over the situation. The photographic sharing allows the participant to engage with each other, even on matters they have not raised sooner. During the discussion, common themes emerge, emphasizing the critical issues to be solved. According to Julien et al. (2013), this brings equality to the researcher-participants relationship and helps promote the validity of the study one step forward.

6.4. Photovoice ethics

There are two aspects of ethics in photovoice research, one of those who take the pictures and one of those whose picture is being taken. Besides the regular ethics that every research deals with, this method involves pictures, which are the product of the participators themselves, taking (in most studies) with their cameras. It, therefore, stays with them, even after being sent/given to the researcher. It should be evident to the participants that no use, besides the use of the study, is being done with the picture they take (unless explicitly requested, and then the decision of giving the rights is theirs). On the other hand, they cannot use the picture they take of someone else (unless this someone gives them his/her approval).

Before conducting the research, the participant should sign an appropriate agreement that settles the ethics suitable for both the researchers and the participants (Julien et al., 2013; de los Ríos, 2020).

7. Conclusion

Photovoice is an immersive learning method that promotes active-real-world problem solving, shows unique virtues in the interdisciplinary aspect, and advances student-driven teams and high-impact learning experiences. One of Photovoice's benefits within the education institutions is the connectedness created between the staff and students, creating a collaborative, mutually-beneficial partnership that expands educational opportunities and fosters parity and equity in the developed 21st Century world (Latz et al., 2016). Equally important, photographic images can help emerge narratives that can be used as critical examination, revealing and dealing with beliefs and cultural assumptions and contributing to multicultural education dealing with anxiety-provoking issues, sexism, classism and racism (Paone et al., 2018). In most pedagogical systems, the students are defined more as participants than project facilitators. The Photovoice puts them in the position of the narrators and interpreters of their own and their peers' photographs (Latz et al., 2016). The method promotes learning about diversity, understanding, and empathy that they draw from their peers and teachers. Another essential point, according to Chio and Fandt (2007), is that Photovoice as a pedagogy effectively blurs the gaps between the experts (education team) and non-experts (students), objective differences in a diversity learning, provides a tool for independence and creation, and a compelling experience criticism reflection on the engagement of one with himself and others (from which the empathy is being developed). All the above requires a unique supportive curriculum that suites the 21st Century and that creates the right conditions for group efficacy, empowerment, and enough time for group connection and teambuilding activities, interpersonal problem solving, and some free time (Wilson et al., 2007).

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