

Big Ideas

Photovoice as a teaching and learning strategy for undergraduate nursing students



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Posting digital pictures on the Internet has become a creative form of expression in modern society. The use of digital photography on social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or personal blogs is increasingly prevalent, particularly among the millennial generation. Nursing faculty are careful to warn students of the pitfalls of taking any types of pictures associated with nursing or patients. However, photography, when used appropriately can be an effective tool for student engagement. I have adapted concepts from photovoice to incorporate the use of digital photography into an interactive classroom assignment. This innovative teaching and learning strategy can promote awareness and stimulate critical thinking about a variety of cultures and populations among undergraduate nursing students.

Photovoice is a community based participatory action research methodology that has been used predominantly in the public health domain. Originated by Wang and Burris (1997), photovoice methodology includes the use of pictures, individual reflections and critical group dialogue to bring to light the lived experiences of a sample population. The acronym VOICE in photovoice stands for “Voicing our Individual and Collective Experiences” (University of Massachusetts, 2014). Participants involved in this type of study become immersed in the research process and are considered co-researchers (Catalani and Minkler, 2010). Photovoice studies often include groups of participants that are perceived as marginalized or oppressed. As co-researchers, participants become empowered as they seek to illuminate their experiences and during the process, they often create change (Catalani and Minkler, 2010). Results from a photovoice study are often disseminated to community stakeholders in the form of an art exhibit, which becomes a platform for increasing awareness about the group's issues as an impetus for social action (Palibroda et al., 2009).

Photovoice is grounded in Paulo Freire's theory of education for critical consciousness. Freire (1974) was a twentieth century Brazilian educator, social activist and theorist. Freire coined the term “critical consciousness” to describe an individual's critical understanding of the world and how individual, social and political circumstances influence the understanding of one's reality. Freire theorized that individuals could adapt to their reality or integrate into it. Adaptation was explained to be man's adjustment of self as a response to reality; the path of least resistance in which Freire postulated was the weaker conduit. Integration was described as the ability to adapt plus transform one's reality by responding to the challenges. According to Freire (1974), through integration, individuals develop a critical consciousness about their surroundings and circumstances. According to Wang and Burris (1997), Freire often used pictures or illustrations depicting social issues to stimulate conversation among community members. The use of

photographs by participants involved in a photovoice study has been effective in initiating critical group dialogue to explore a variety of health related issues across international boundaries (Catalani and Minkler, 2010).

Photovoice as an Innovative Teaching and Learning Strategy

Concepts from photovoice can be used to promote social, health and cultural awareness about an assigned population among students, instilling in them a type of critical consciousness about the clients to whom they will provide nursing care. This teaching and learning strategy incorporates the theoretical underpinnings of photovoice methodology by incorporating photographs as an impetus for reflection, evaluation and critical group dialogue. Each student in a medical–surgical didactic course in a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program is asked to submit a word document containing a picture, taken by the student, that illustrates the student's perception of a challenge experienced by or a support utilized by a patient with a chronic illness or problem studied in the course. For student and patient protection, students are prohibited from taking a photograph of any person, clinical facility or inside a clinical facility. Excluding photographs of individuals also promotes abstract thinking and encourages the student to explore creative links between their photographs and the challenge or support. Specific guidelines and grading criteria for the assignment are outlined in Table 1. The assignment also includes a written description of the challenge or support and a reflective narrative with evidence-based details on how the insight or knowledge of this issue will affect the student's nursing practice. The reflective writing component epitomizes the voice of the “individual experience” referred to in photovoice methodology (Wang and Burris, 1997). Ash and Clayton (2009) encouraged reflective writing among applied science students to derive meaning from experiential learning. For example, reflective writing can connect concepts students learn in didactic courses to experiences they have in clinical rotations and vice versa. In addition, reflective writing promotes problem-solving skills and opens the students' minds to new ideas, perspectives and critical thinking (Ash and Clayton, 2009).

This assignment yielded a variety of both concrete and abstract photos, descriptions and reflections about chronic illness. For example, one student submitted a concrete photograph depicting meals and snacks for a patient with type II diabetes mellitus (Fig. 1). The activity of preparing the food for the photograph contributed to the student's learning on the difficulty of meal planning for a patient with diabetes. The student reflected:

Before this assignment, I never thought about how a type II diabetic may feel every day when he or she eats meals. He or she needs to prepare meals ahead of time in order to control glucose levels. I enjoy snacking throughout the day, so if I were to become a diabetic it would be difficult for me to adjust to the meal planning. I did not realize the amount of work it may take to prepare food for individuals with this disease. This assignment has helped me become more empathetic to the type II diabetic individual. I believe I have become

Table 1
Photovoice guidelines and grading rubric.

Guidelines	Grading points assigned
Formatting:	10 points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The submitted photo should be inserted into a word document with one-inch margins and should take up about 1/4th of the page. Please single-space the text. The assignment should not exceed two pages, excluding references. Use 1 in text reference and cite it at the bottom of the paper using APA format. The reference must be from a peer reviewed professional journal within the last 5 years. 	
Creativity:	10 points
Photograph is clear and creative. The photograph can be linked to a challenge or support through the narrative description. Think outside the box. Sometimes the best photos are abstract.	
Narrative description of the photograph:	30 points
Student will provide a narrative description including supporting details of the photograph and its relationship to the challenge or support depicted.	
Critical reflection:	50 points
Student includes written reflective narrative on how this perception will affect his or her nursing practice.	
Total possible points	100

Other essential information:

- Pictures of people are not permitted in this assignment.
- Do not take any type inside or of a clinical facility. This could result in a Health Insurance and Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA] violation.
- Make sure the photo is original and taken by the student submitting the work. Do not copy a photograph from the Internet or another source.
- Students who do not have access a device that takes a digital picture may check one out from the professor.
- Use the template posted in the electronic course management (Supplemental online digital content) system to guide the reflective writing.
- Photographs and reflections will be compiled into a PowerPoint presentation and viewed by the entire class. Students should notify the professor if they do not wish for their work to be shared for any reason.

more aware of helping these persons create an easy, but healthy, meal plan to follow in order to decrease some of the stress they experience with having to manage their glucose levels every day. One question that I have regarding this topic is: Does an individual with type II diabetes get annoyed with constantly planning meals?

Another student took a more abstract photograph to depict challenges faced by patients with chronic heart failure (Fig. 2). The narrative description of the photo included evidence-based details:

The flower in this photo is called the “broken heart,” which is the most obvious reason it brings heart-related problems to mind. At the bottom of each flower, the pale grey extension makes me think of the greyish, clammy skin of the patient with chronic heart failure; its bulbous shape is to me reminiscent of ventricular hypertrophy. The pink top of the flower could represent the frothy pink sputum with which the patient could present, indicating a medical emergency. The fact that there are several flowers along the stem reminds me that heart failure is an ongoing, chronic disease that patients may live with for many years. The stem sags downward with the weight of the flowers; similarly, the wellbeing of the patient with heart failure declines as he or she experiences fatigue and depression and becomes increasingly dependent on others for activities of daily living.

[Waterworth and Gott, 2010; Hagglund, Boman, Lundman, & Bruman, 2008, as cited in Falk et al., 2013, p. 252]

Together the student submissions formed a “collective experience” of student perceptions, further epitomizing the theoretical underpinnings of photovoice. I compiled the photographs for this assignment into a PowerPoint presentation for the class to promote “critical group dialogue”, another concept derived from photovoice methodology. Sixty students participated in this assignment and interestingly; the majority (85%) submitted photographs related to challenges of chronic illnesses or problems instead of support systems that could be utilized by the patients. During class discussion, it was apparent that the students had a gap in knowledge related to effective support systems for patients with chronic problems. This gave me the opportunity to modify the learning objectives for the day to emphasize the importance of the nurse's role in helping patients identify evidence-based support systems for the problems they experience. As I contemplate Freire (1974) writings about adaptation versus integration, I connect the nurse's role in facilitating integration among patients or groups of patients who are experiencing challenges. Freire emphasized that a response to life's challenges is needed in order for integration to occur. Through the implementation of supportive evidence-based nursing interventions the nurse can facilitate integration.

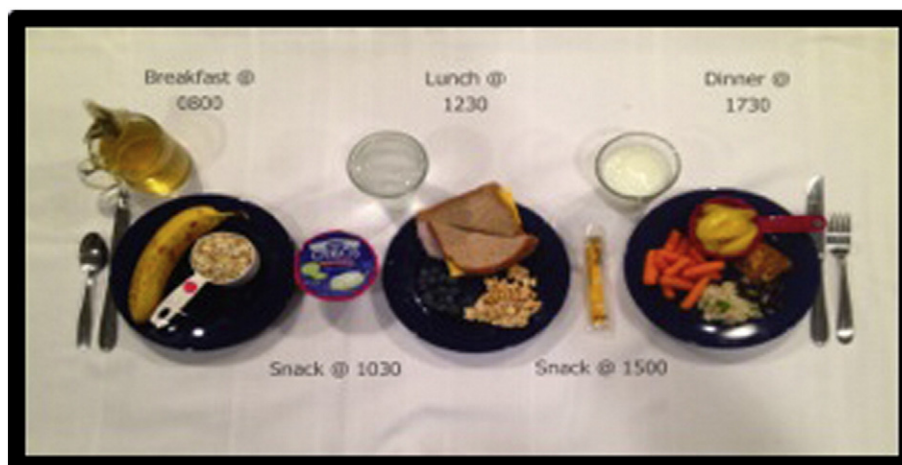


Fig. 1.

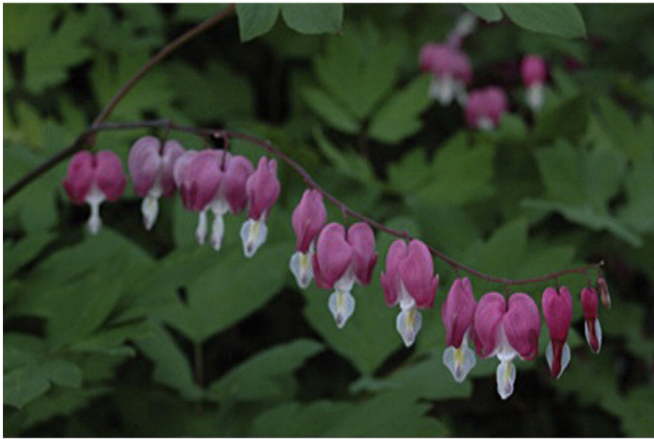


Fig. 2.

I often hear colleagues voice frustrations about students who become distracted during class, particularly when students engage in social media on their computers when the professor is utilizing a traditional lecture style of instruction. Pop culture media has recently labeled the upcoming generation of students as generation “like” because of their interest and fascination with social media (Public Broadcasting System, 2014). It is sometimes difficult for nursing faculty to balance the interests of new generations of students while still maintaining the core theoretical concepts. Yet, we understand that the synthesis of knowledge is amplified when students are interested and actively engaged in the learning process (Ash and Clayton, 2009). As educators, we should continually seek pedagogies of learning that are grounded in theory and evidence. However, strategies may need to be adapted to include tools that capture the attention of the target audience. A strategy such as photovoice is especially effective for visual learners. The use of digital photography as an impetus for individual and group reflection and to promote awareness about populations cared for by nurses is a unique and innovative way to carry theoretical concepts from generations past into the present.

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