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Author Biography

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Her Research & Academic Interests are in the areas of: Sleep, Sensory Processing, Global Health, & Intra-professional collaboration

She is a member of the World Federation of Occupational Therapy, the American Association of Occupational Therapy, the Kentucky Occupational Therapy Association (KOTA), the Florida Occupational Therapy Association, and the Wisconsin Occupational Therapy Association.

She has taken on leadership roles as KOTA Eastern District co-chair, serves as a Member of the Occupational Therapy task force of the Kentucky Department of Behavioral Health- School-based Physical & Behavioral Telehealth, and serves as Co-chair for the EKU College of Health Sciences Living and Learning Community. She is also the Education Abroad Liaison for the Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy Department at Eastern Kentucky University

Her clinical practice included experience as an occupational therapist, rehabilitation senior, and Occupational Therapy Director in rehabilitation, burn care, & SNF settings, pediatric out-patient and school settings, & home health care settings.

Dr Spira is the recipient of E. Kossoff Best Teaching Practices Award, Barnard College, was nominated for Instructional Design best use of technology, EKU, received the 2019 American Occupational Therapy Association Emerging Scholar award, and in 2019 was admitted to Columbia University Alumni Loyal Blue Society.

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Use of alternatives to written methodology for pedagogical coursework is worth investigating as students increase use of visual means in their social media communications. When offered a choice, a full 61% of students report preferring visual video feedback over written feedback. Use of a visual imagery method, named PhotoVoice was used to reconstruct a written assignment in an Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy curriculum. The specific methodology included use of auto-photography where students photographed their daily occupations. Photo elicitation was used to extract meanings from the visual images. 54 students photographed their daily occupations and routines over a 2-4 week period and then analyzed the photos by occupational categories and then by unique personal themes. Five themes emerged regarding student learning by visual imagery methods. Students reported ability to view occupations through photos. They stated that they had increased observational skills through viewing images taken over time. They noted increased creativity using visual means. Active learning with student expression was achieved. Learning via visual routes was noted to enhance tacit (unwritten but known) learning when analyzing the photographs. And students reported that viewing occupations also through affective means, deepened their understanding of the assignment content.

Students of the Millennial and Gen-X generations have grown using visual communication methods suited to their Smartphones, such as Instagram and Snapchat. Their written communication is typically truncated and concise. When offered a choice of written or visual feedback, 61% of students preferred video feedback (West & Turner, 2016). When considering individual student preference of teaching methods by learning styles, students were flexible in their preferences and were able to accommodate to a variety of teaching methods (Saeed, Yang, & Sinnappan (2009). However, students reported that use of video feedback provided greater insight, had a more conversational quality and they were able to receive more global feedback than they received in a written feedback format (Silva, 2012).

When this Instructor began to teach a pre-existing course, all ten assignments were assigned in written format. A challenge in developing this course was to restructure a significant number of the assignments into formats with greater variability of modes.

Institutional/ program context

This course was held during the first semester of the junior year, during student admission to the Occupational Science Undergraduate program. The course title of 'Self as Occupational Being' is described in the Course Catalog as: "Analysis of occupation and occupational patterns of self. Recognize the influence of occupation on the well-being of self through active learning experiences"

Overview of approach

The chosen assignment for reconceptualization and reconstruction was titled "Occupational Profile of Self". The assignment purpose was listed as "To apply course material to analyze yourself as an occupational being". The approach considered was the use visual imagery, specifically that of auto-photography and photo elicitation (Glaw, Inder, Kable, & Hazelton, 2017). The intent was to foster alternative methods of expression other than written means and to incorporate additional forms of critical and creative thinking. The principles of the Photo Voice (PV) approach were investigated.

This author first heard of PV as a health care research method while attending a 2017 Occupational Therapy Africa Regional Group (OTARG) National Conference in Ghana, West Africa, where an occupational therapist presented on the use of PhotoVoice by disabled children in an orphanage in Ethiopia (Toporek, M., 2017). Although, not typically disenfranchised in the larger international sense, many students from Kentucky have experienced or witnessed disadvantage in their home communities, in addition to undergoing the personal reflective process elicited in PV.

PhotoVoice as research tool

Photo Voice (PV) was begun as a research study and social justice project for rural women in Yunnan Province, China in 1992 (Wang & Burris). PV is a participatory action type of research which documents and reflects the reality of overlooked or underprivileged people who are typically denied a voice. The photographs may be used for different purposes across the research stages, including to elicit data, to analyze date, and to represent and communicate the findings (Mathison, 2008). Participants are trained in basic techniques and ethical photographing. Participants photograph their daily lives and then select and describe their pictures. Researchers then mediate a group discussion about the ideas found in the pictures and their broader meanings. The photographs are used as a reflective analysis to bring awareness of physical and social barriers, for advocacy, and to empower to their lives (Wang & Burris).

Use of PV in health science research has recently begun to be investigated, with a focus on the experiences of people with disability and illness (Letts, Rigby, & Stewart, 2003). In 2012, Lal, Jarus, & Soto conducted a scoping review of the use of PV in health research, and specifically in Occupational Therapy. The review found that

PV was used to elicit meanings and experiences of health concepts, environmental perspectives, as well as to document the experiences and perspectives of participants' activities and roles. 38% of the studies combined PV with another methodology, both qualitative and quantitative.

The use of PV in health research is appropriate for Occupational Therapy. PV also examines the experiences and perspectives of participants' performance of activities and roles, and parallels the client-centered approach used in Occupational Therapy (Townsend & Politajko, 2007). Concepts of occupational justice may be applied, as PV also considers the effect of one's environment on the ability to participate in a range of meaningful and fulfilling occupations in life (Townsend & Wilcock, 2004). However, out of 191 health related studies using PV which were reviewed, only 4 studies were found in the Occupational Therapy literature (Lal et al, 2012).

Of the four articles describing the inclusion of PV in Occupational Therapy research, Berinstein & Magalhaes (2009) used PV to examine the meanings participants attributed to play, while Zecevic, Magalhaes, Madady, Halligan, & Reeves (2010) examined the meanings and perspectives of aging. Andonian (2010) and Andonian & McRae, 2011 used PV to examine community participation and social inclusion.

Photovoice as a pedagogical tool

Use of visual methods are an acceptable method for qualitative research (Pain, 2012). Visual methods often produce a different and richer kind of data than written or verbal methods, including the expression of emotions and by providing tacit (unspoken or unacknowledged) knowledge. Two specific uses noted are auto-photography in which the participant takes photographs of themselves and their environment, and then uses the photos as actual data (Glaw, Inder, Kable, & Hazelton, 2017). Photo elicitation uses the visual medium to create knowledge with different layers of meaning. PV uses both auto-photography and photo elicitation in its technique (Pain, 2012). Although PV has been used as a pedagogical tool, it is uncommon (Chio & Fandt, 2007).

The participatory aspect of PV in the classroom promoted science students to authentically inquire about their major and empowered students to deepen their connection with their area of study. Additionally, use of PV facilitated student interaction and connection with their communities (Cook & Quigley, 2013). Lichty (2013) considered that use of PV in a classroom assignment prompted students to actively relate to the concepts presented. Just as PV is used to increase participation and empowerment for disadvantaged participants in research studies, so may PV be used to encourage active participation and empowerment of students in a classroom setting. A further study notes that in the classroom, PV is able to sharpen focus on the process of learning and knowing information, which encourages students to develop personal meanings (Warne, Snyder, & Gadin, 2013). To summarize, advantages of using PV as a classroom assignment include increasing student awareness of the topic

and elicitation of an affective response, which is more typical to the visual than the written medium, hence the saying that a picture is worth a thousand words (Massengale, Strack, Orsini, & Herget, 2016). Furthermore, use of PV has the capacity to increase both personal and professional self-awareness, making it a useful pedagogical tool (Bromfield & Capous-Desyllas, 2017).

The use of image-based methods in social science research is an emerging field. Use of visual data to facilitate participant voice and interpretation and analysis while retaining the uniqueness of the visual medium is emerging as reliable as well (Knoblauch, Laurier, Petschke, & Schnettler, 2008; Liebenberg, Didkowsky, & Ungar, 2012).

Upon concluding the literature review, this author chose PhotoVoice as an assignment for classroom participants to examine their activities and roles, express them, and to derive richer meanings of the activities in which they participate. Use of a visual method was anticipated to foster a more expanded view of their occupational profile, as opposed to thinking and considering their activities solely from a cerebral cognitive point of view.

Analysis

54 students photographed their daily occupations and routines over a 2-4 week period. The assignment instructed students to create categories of occupation. Students organized the results into 3 categories- Activities of daily living/ or restoration, productivity, and leisure (Pierce, 2003). Students then constructed 3 unique personal themes gleaned from the photos.

Initially, photos were grouped at 20 images per page, resulting in 3 slides, one per categorization category. Students arrived to class with the groupings completed. In class, an explanation of what constituted unique themes was given, with visual examples. Students then began looking for unique concepts that emerged from the entirety of their photos. This grouping and re-grouping is similar to open and axial coding in qualitative research. The primary outcome was to foster creative and critical thinking, so research coding labels were omitted as a 'soft landing' for the groupings process. For the unique themes, students chose 2-3 themes that were typified by pictures *across* categories, adding the 'theme' slide to the PPT. Students also wrote a summary paper on the experience/ process and the conclusions/ outcomes of the assignment.

Five themes emerged from student feedback in the written summary paper. The first theme was 'Usefulness of a visual medium for the assignment'. Student comments included the following:

"I was able to visually see what my occupations look like".

"Having the four week period of collection gave enough time to see regularly

occurring occupations in their individual context".

"Eventually my photos became redundant about the 50-60 picture mark".

The second theme was 'Learning from the sorting & analysis'. Here students commented as follows:

"Through the sorting process I understood more connections about my occupations. I got to figure that out".

"I learned organization and the process of classification".

"At first it appears that the work is a graphic design version of occupational categories. The organizing process … resulted in more than collage artwork".

"I noticed in the picture taking process that all my photos of me reading had coffee in them. I never found a connection between the two until this assignment".

"I noticed that in many of the pictures my materials are aligned very neatly. This represented instances when I felt focused and efficient. Other times, my materials were scattered… which also represented how I was feeling at that time".

"Some of the photos crossed over from one category to another and couldn't be confined to one specific analysis slide. This showed me that I engage in many combined occupations. I liked getting to know this about me".

A third theme found was 'Creativity in using image-based data'. Selected student comments were:

"Personally I like straight-forward simple answers. This assignment is more open to interpretations and creativity".

"I like that this assignment gave me a chance to explore the creative side that is deep inside".

"From the complex to the mundane I recorded everything. This activity allowed me the creative freedom to photograph my daily life and highlight the important pieces of it".

The fourth theme was the 'Perceived value of using photo elicitation in learning assignments'. Students responded with:

"Taking these photos of my daily life allowed me to notice and appreciate several of my personally constructed patterns and enabled me to further understand the dynamics between my habits, my mindset, and my environment".

"I have developed observational skills needed for future therapy practice".

"I have extended my ability to observe occupation in and out of contexts".

"In my youth, I had a wish to take myself out to lunch and see who I was from outside myself. This project came close to gaining that view".

The final theme was "Understanding occupation". Students commented that:

"I can better understand how our everyday occupations affect how we function and thrive in everyday life".

"This project was influential by allowing me to make connections between occupations that once seemed separate".

"I learned that occupations can be simple or complex. No matter what, there is meaning behind them and it[']s up to us to figure it out".

"While working on documenting a snapshot into my daily occupations, I did not realize certain things about myself. This assignment brought many things into perspective and was very personal".

"Taking pictures of my daily occupations over time gave me the chance to step back and see my life in a new light that enabled me to value my occupations and the people I share them with".

Discussion and considerations

Use of PhotoVoice as a type of auto-photography and photo elicitation was chosen to develop a course assignment in alternate ways than by written assignment. PV is well documented as a research tool for action participation research. There is less available literature about the application of PV for pedagogical use. Use of PV in the classroom bifurcates into three primary uses, one for connection to the community, one for active expression and participation of students in learning, and one for learning through the visual system in deeper and tacit types of learning, as opposed to structured cognitive written types of learning. The assignment for the course "Self as occupational being" focused on the use of PV for expression and participation and for accessing alternative sensory systems of learning other than cognitive-written forms.

Student feedback concurred with achieving these goals. Five themes emerged: 'Usefulness of a visual medium for the assignment', 'Learning from the sorting & analysis', 'Creativity in using image-based data', 'Perceived value of using photo elicitation in learning assignments', and "Understanding occupation".

Students reported that use of image driven elicitation allowed them to take a step back from the moment that they performed or thought about their daily occupations.

This was truly a snapshot in time that allowed them to return and make new observations about those occupations. Students noted that documenting over time gave a deeper perspective of their actions. The process of photographing their occupations and constructing unique and personal themes brought out their creative side. This was both difficult for some and freeing for others. The more scholarly task of analyzing the photos promoted rich understandings for the students. When faced with graphic evidence of their occupations, students utilized observational skills and skills used in qualitative analysis. They noted connections and patterns that they did not organically notice when performing the occupations. They organized their approach to analysis, interpreted meanings, and gained perspectives which aided them in the final analyses. Students reported positive outcomes from using PhotoVoice as the learning method in the assignment, stating that they were able to observe and note facets both in themselves and in their daily occupations that they had not previously been aware of. Since PV was the method and not the outcome learning measure, student comments were also used to note if course content outcome goals for learning were met. In this aspect too, students noted connections, meanings, and perspectives about how they construct occupation into their daily lives, that were a result of performing the course assignment using PhotoVoice methodology.

It is suggested to develop further criteria for success when analyzing assignment outcomes. During the assignment, the required photographs were reduced from 100 to 60, as students were reporting saturation at that level. Further research into the effectiveness of visual imagery in pedagogical coursework is now suggested. However, as an initial trial, classroom use of PV as an auto-photography method of photo elicitation as an assessment tool appears to have met goals of finding a possible alternative to a course that had solely written assignments.

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