

**The Photovoice Process as a Teaching Method to Facilitate Communication and
Reflection in an Initial Early Field Experience Course**

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Need for Innovation

AgEdS 116 is an initial early field experience (EFE) course in agricultural teacher education in which students participate in four face-to-face class meetings and log 12 hours of field experience within a school-based agricultural education (SBAE) program. Two face-to-face meetings were held at the beginning of the semester and were focused on developing the student's individual goals and expectations of the course. These two initial meetings were followed by the 12 hours of field experience. At the end of the course, students met twice to share their experiences with one another and to reflect on their experience prior to completing a portfolio documenting their EFE. The documenting of their experiences through a portfolio has been a standard practice for this course which includes observations and reflections.

The purpose of this EFE is to provide students with experiences that resemble or model the experiences the students will have as agriculture teachers (Smalley & Retallick, 2012). Reflection plays an essential role in making meaning of the experience. AgEdS 116 is taught from a social-constructivist theoretical premise in which social interaction and language are used in the construction of knowledge (Doolittle & Camp, 1999). A teaching method was needed to enhance the social interaction within the course and the discussion of the student's varied individual experiences. The photovoice process was selected to offer students an opportunity to take photographs that they thought were meaningful from their experience and to facilitate reflection as an end of course debriefing.

How it Works

Photovoice is a process that allows participants to tell a story from their individual perspective (Wang & Burris, 1997). The original development of the photovoice process was as a participatory needs assessment (Wang & Burris, 1997). Later, the photovoice process was adapted as a qualitative research method to provide a rich description of the lived experience of participants (Catalani & Minkler, 2010). Wang and Burris (1997) list the goals of the photovoice method as "(1) to enable people to record and reflect on their community's strengths and concerns (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussions of photographs, and (3) to reach policy makers" (p.369).

As part of the first class meeting, students were given a description of the photovoice process and instructions for the photovoice assignment. As a course assignment, students were asked to take three photographs during their EFE, one photograph to represent each of the three components of the school-based agricultural education model – classroom/laboratory instruction, FFA, and SAE. The students were asked to upload their photographs and a 250 word description/reflection in a threaded discussion on BlackBoard Learn to facilitate sharing their photographs and descriptions with their classmates. Students were instructed to obtain consent to take photographs from their cooperating agriculture teacher prior to taking any photographs. Additionally, the students were instructed to not take pictures that identified any high school students.

As part the final two class meetings, students presented their photographs to the class, described the content of their photograph, and their reason for choosing to photograph the content they selected. A class discussion focused on comparing and contrasting the EFE student's experience was facilitated by the course instructor to serve as a debriefing from the experience and a reflective process.

Results

To date, the photovoice process has been used as a teaching method in one initial EFE course for one semester. The students participated in the process and provided positive feedback to the instructor. The ability to show photographs to the class augmented the class discussion as students compared and contrasted their own experience with others in the course. Additionally, the photovoice teaching method provided insight to the course instructor regarding the student's perceptions of the components of the SBAE model and how the students made meaning of their experience.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Future plans are to continue using the photovoice process as a teaching method in EFE and to expand the use of photovoice to other experiences within agricultural teacher education. One example of an experience that could benefit from using the photovoice process is during student teaching. Student teachers could take photographs detailing the content and context of their experience relating to the SBAE model or other aspects of their experience to share with other student teachers in their block on the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) communities of practice and/or to share in a final debriefing with university agricultural teacher education faculty at the end of the semester. An additional way photovoice could be used would be with early career teachers who might be involved in a state mentoring or beginning teacher program to share ideas and resources among other beginning teachers.

Advice to others wishing to incorporate the photovoice process into an EFE course is to concentrate on the process of making meaning of the experience. The purpose of the photovoice method is participatory in nature and it empowers the participants to photograph content that is meaningful to them. Photography skill is not the primary focus of the photovoice process (Wang & Burris, 1997). Rather, the photograph is only a tool that is used to help students engage in conversation with others in the course and to serve as a starting point for reflective thought. The debriefing conversation with the group after the photographs are taken is essential to the photovoice process (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Costs/Resources Needed

Minimal to no cost is associated with the photovoice teaching method. Students in the course used the cameras that were included as a standard function within their cell phones. Students were expected to pay their own travel expenses to and from their EFE site. However, the student's travel expense was considered to be a part of the course regardless of the use of the photovoice teaching method.

References

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