Photo Voice

What is Photo Voice?

Photo Voice is a tool often used in forms of action research[3]. In that context, it asks participants in a research process to use photographs, images or other visual material[4] to represent their experiences of the research. In an evaluation context, it allows those groups and individuals who have been part of a project to have a voice in the evaluation of that project. This is done by their presenting images which they feel represent:

- the process itself that a group undertook in that project; or
- their own part in that project; or
- their reactions to that project; or even
- their own evaluations of the project.

Why use Photo Voice?

Photo Voice would normally be used in a classroom evaluation when seeking the views of students about the processes in which they had been engaged during a project. Like any form of participatory evaluation, *Photo Voice* can build capacity and empower those who otherwise simply remain the 'subjects' of the evaluation. In other words, student participation in evaluation through a process like *Photo Voice* would itself be a learning exercise.

Strengths and limitations of *Photo Voice*

Photo Voice provides a window into how students perceive the work of the classroom/school. It also provides them with a voice, which some may find less intimidating or more meaningful than other forms of contributing to an evaluation. It can also provide a voice for students who are just becoming literate or struggling with literacy. It is an exercise in learning of itself, and is usually highly engaging for the students taking the photographs.

Its limitations can be that if few students are actually taking the photographs, then a student view on the overall project may only be partial or otherwise not representative. As a

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[3] A straightforward definition of action research is that of John Elliott (1991): 'the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it' (p.69). Action research is a cyclical process in which a problem (such as a way of teaching a particular topic) is addressed, a possible solution is tried out, data are gathered about the success of this practice, the practice is adjusted in response to these data and again data are gathered from this adjusted practice, practice is again re-thought etc. etc. Researchers are usually 'insiders' in the practice being researched. Thus, action research is often about trying to change some practice collaboratively and emphasising group reflection. In educational contexts particularly, the phrase 'action learning' is often used for action research.

[4] For 'photograph' here and throughout, read 'photograph/images/other visual material'.

consequence, it may need to be supplemented as a resource for evaluation. Usually, *Photo Voice* does not provide data that are readily quantifiable.

How do I use *Photo Voice*?

For an evaluation of, say, a new pedagogy for student engagement, one scenario might be to have students take photographs of processes going on in the classroom under that new pedagogical practice over a week. In this case, signs of engagement among students in the photographs might be presented as typical of that time.

Students could then be instructed to sort and select from these, e.g. 'Choose three photos that best represent engagement in the tasks we have been undergoing this week'. They would then need to explain what there is about the chosen photographs that best shows engagement related to the new pedagogical practice.

A sequence of steps using an example of evaluating the impact of a problem-based learning program

A teacher is introducing problem-based learning in a particular class for the first time. Students are working in groups over an extended period (say, one week) to solve the problem presented by the teacher. The teacher wants to evaluate the success of the project and decides on *Photo Voice* as one instrument.

1. Choose one or a number of students. Supply each with a camera (phone, other device).
2. Their instruction is to take photographs during this lesson (over this week) that show the class working on the problem. Teachers might ask them to photograph or film 'When good learning is happening'. Students may be rotated on this duty each day for over a week or so.
3. At the end of the period (one week, in this example), students who took photographs (or even students who didn't) are asked to choose a small number of photographs that they think best represent what the class has been engaged in over the period of time.
4. These students are asked to explain why these were the images they chose, and why they best represented the class's engagement over that time. This could be done in writing or as talk. If done as talk, teachers would consider whether to record or transcribe the students' answers. Questions may be framed as 'Why did you choose this photo as representing this task?' 'How does it represent what we have done here?' 'How does it show engagement in solving the problem you were set?'

This could lead to a presentation to the class from the photographer(s).
Photo Voice could also be used by students as a form of self-evaluation, or as a form of evaluating the group in which they were working.

When do I use *Photo Voice*?

Photographs would usually be taken *during* the project and the discussion/justification for choices of photographs to represent the project would usually be *during* or *after* the project

	Throughout the project/study	At the end of the project/study
Purposes	To record the project and sometimes to evaluate its impact so far	To contribute to the evaluation of the impact of a program
Examples	Selected students take photographs of students engaged in the relevant project, say problem-based learning	Students discuss their choices and the reasons for them
What might be used in tandem	Student Self-assessment Peer Assessment Teacher Observation	Student self-assessment or peer assessment Teacher Observation Student Interviews, Focus Groups or Surveys Student Products Most Significant Change
How long does it take?	⏰⏰	⏰⏰⏰
With whom?	🧒👧🧑	

(See end of section for icon key)

What the research says

For good coverage of photo-oriented techniques for researching and evaluating with students in schools, see:

> Susan Groundwater-Smith, Sue Dockett and Dorothy Bottrell (2015) *Participatory research with children and young people*. London: Sage (see also *Photo Elicitation*)

Dana Harley of Northern Kentucky University discusses using *Photo Voice* with children and adolescents, including the issue of 'photovoice safety'. She also has links to other important *Photo Voice* sites.

Though not school-education based, there is a useful literature review on *Photo Voice* and its role in participatory research at:

Kuratani, D.L.G. & Lai, E. (2011) Team Lab: Photovoice Literature Review.

A pioneering reference in the field is:

Wang, C. and Burris, M.A. (1994) 'Empowerment Through Photo Novella: Portraits of Participation', Health Education and Behavior, 21:2, 171-186. doi: 10.1177/109019819402100204

Resources

Photo Voice: Reframing the world is a charity and a key site for an overview of techniques and projects using *Photo Voice* and an introduction to its potential for participatory research:

('Working in partnerships with other charities, NGOs and community organisations, Photo Voice designs and delivers tailor-made participatory photography, digital storytelling and self-advocacy projects for socially excluded groups'- Photo Voice website, About us)

See also STEPS Centre

Though not focused on evaluation, there is a very useful *YouTube* clip on how to go about *Photo Voice* that is easily adapted to the classroom.

There is a Photo Voice app (*Photo Voice*) available through iTunes that combines photos and voices.

References

John Elliott (1991) *Action research for educational change*. Milton Keynes and Philadelphia

Icon key

How long does it take?	🕐 1 day-1week	🕐🕐 about 2 weeks	🕐🕐🕐 About 3 weeks	🕐🕐🕐🕐 1 month or more
With who?	Students	Community	Teachers	