

Picture Perfect: The potential of photographs in the tertiary classroom

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The research

This research aims to explore the practices and experiences of Tutors in an Institute of Technology (ITP) with regards to their use of photographs in their classrooms as a teaching and assessment tool. The research will have an exploratory purpose of enquiry, which seeks to discover new understanding and insights, generate ideas and hypotheses for the future.

The research project currently being undertaken is a qualitative case study taking place over a two-year period. The study looks at ways in which a small group of Tutors within an Institute of Technology (ITP) in New Zealand are currently using photos within their classrooms, in order to gain an understanding of ways in which they are being currently used to promote teaching, learning and assessment further. As a result the outcome of the study aims to formulate some guidelines and suggestions surrounding future use to promote effective use of photos within the tertiary classroom, in order to stimulate greater understanding and learning

Why the topic is important

The everyday world in which we live is becoming increasingly visual. The advent of digital cameras and the popularity of social media sharing sites have seen a rapid increase in the taking and sharing of photographs. There is mounting demand for individuals to be able to use, understand, and create photos within their everyday life. There is little doubt that photos, have the potential to evoke emotions and memories, stimulate discussion, and aid concrete understanding of complex matters. Photos are such an established and conventional part of our everyday life however their potential within education is often overlooked. As educators within tertiary contexts it is imperative that the necessary skills for our students to become visually literate are being developed and encouraged.

Photo elicitation is a term commonly used to describe the insertion of a photograph into a research interview in order to elicit information and as an aide to help stimulate discussion. While it is acknowledged that there is much literature surrounding the use of photo-elicitation in research, there appears to be limited literature surrounding the use of photos within the tertiary classroom context, and in particular within the New Zealand setting.

Through an investigation of the literature it is apparent that there are many benefits for the use of photos within the classroom ranging from encouraging an increase in student participation, to an increase in critical thinking. Additional benefits noted were an increase in creativity, increase in understanding of concepts, the encouragement of collaborative learning, and benefits to student reflection and recall. Additionally the benefits of using photographs as an assessment tool have also been reported. Not without its issues, discussion within the literature also highlights the need for increased visual literacy within students, and the need for considerable planning, ethical considerations and monitoring.

It is important that we gain an understanding of ways in which photos are currently being used successfully in the tertiary classroom as a teaching, learning and assessment tool in order to formulate some guidelines and suggestions surrounding future use to promote effective use of photos within the tertiary classroom.

How the session will be run

The intended outcomes of this workshop will be that attendees gain background information into the current literature surrounding the use of photographs as a teaching, learning and assessment tool. They will have the opportunity to discuss different ideas surrounding current and potential use of photos in order to enhance learning.

The first section of this workshop will be spent outlining some background information about photos with some brief, relevant literature.

Following will be a discussion activity with attendees being split into mixed groups of 4 or 5 of current users and non-users. Those who currently use photos can begin by explaining how they have used them in one of their teaching units, and what they perceive as the advantages of using them. Those who have not used photos in their teaching can discuss a situation where they could include photos. The group works together to come up with an appropriate way of using photos and discusses the value of doing so. Each group reports back to the whole workshop on one of those, either a current or potential use.

This will be followed with some examples of units where photo-elicitation is being used and comparing these to similar units where they are not used. As a group the advantages will be identified and barriers discussed.

The session will end with the sharing of some of the initial data and analysis from the research being undertaken along with some focussed discussion.