

Preservice Teachers' Perspective of Photovoice and Visual Literacy Experiences

Abigail Winard, Lory E. Haas, & Slimane Aboukacem
Sam Houston State University, USA

Abstract. The image and visual experience has become an accessible and embedded part of our society. The digital generation lives in an age of new media and photograph. They constantly engage in capturing moments with portable devices, and then sharing and receiving pictures. In this qualitative study, the researchers examined the perceptions of twenty-two undergraduate preservice teachers on visual literacy using Photovoice at a public university in southeast Texas. The participatory action research was carried out by allowing preservice teachers to participate in the Photovoice process and ultimately create their own Photovoice product. Through the process, participants analyzed a variety of photographs which served as catalysts for meaningful discussion to develop visual literacy skills and promote critical pedagogy. The study was implemented in five phases over the course of an academic semester. Participants presented their Photovoice projects to the class at the end of the semester. The preservice teachers' projects contained sentimental photos and reflections. Also, the material shared in the class increased the depth of discussion as well as the evaluation and interpretation of photographs. The preservice teachers' final projects revealed themes focusing on passion for teaching, strength in overcoming life challenges, social advocacy, importance of visual literacy, and desire to replicate a similar Photovoice study with future students.

Keywords: Photographic literacy, Photovoice, preservice teachers, visual literacy

Photovoice is a participatory action research method originally employed by Wang and Burris (1997) in their seminal study in rural China. Photovoice, as a research method, places individuals as visual anthropologists of their own environment and culture; it promotes critical dialogue about common issues and problems arising in the community. Photovoice provides, in other words, citizens the power to be active contributors and leaders of research, to negotiate the findings, and to develop workable action plans. Photovoice involves an interpretive or a negotiating process of telling the story behind the photographs and the context in which they occurred (Chio & Fandt, 2007; Wang, 2004; Wang & Burris, 1997).

Wang and Burris (1997) had a goal to challenge the power dynamics by giving voice

to a marginalized group of farm working women in China. Wang and Burris provided cameras to enable these women to act as investigators and assume the potential role of catalysts for social action and change in rural China. Photovoice is a subfield of visual literacy, and, as a method, it uses the immediacy of the visual image and people's accompanying stories to supply evidence and to promote participatory means of sharing experience and viewpoints to enact change (Wang 1998). Through Photovoice, communities and individuals have the means to impact policy (Ghosh, Sen, & Bose, 2019; Papa, 2019), influence powerful decision makers (Jarldorn, 2019), and make a lasting impact through critical public awareness (Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell, & Pestronk, 2004).

As a socially empowering practice, Photovoice aligns with Freire's (1970) idea of advocating for those in powerless positions. The opportunity for participants to express their unique perspectives through photography is an empowering --- community inclusive act (Lögberg, Nilsson, & Kostenius, 2019; Mayfield-Johnson & Butler, 2017). Photovoice research has been used to advocate for health concerns (Esau et al., 2017; Padilla, Matiz-Reyes, Colón-Burgos, Varas-Díaz, & Vertovec, 2019), immigration reform (Mozaffarian, 2019; Sahay, Thatcher, Núñez, & Lightfoot 2016), empowering women and girls (Coemans, Raymakers, Vandenaabeele, & Hannes, 2019; Shah, 2014), and impoverished marginalized communities (Sarti, Schalkers, Bunders, & Dedding 2018).

In an ever-increasing world of images, pictures and the visual are omnipresent (Kember & Zylinska, 2012; Schrag, 2015). The ability to analyze and interpret images in an overwhelmingly visual society is an important media and visual literacy skill (Hobbs, 2010; Potter, 2018). In addition to the empowering method of Photovoice, multi-literacies, such as visual and media, are crucial skill sets to understand messages conveyed through multiple forms of text (The New London Group, 1996). Hobbs (2010) defines text as "... any form of expression or communication in fixed and tangible form that uses symbol systems, including language, still and moving images, graphic design, sound, music and interactivity" (pp.16-17). According to the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL, 2011) Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, visual literacy is "a set of abilities that enable an individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and visual media" (n.p.). In addition, visual literacy competencies should include awareness of digitally altered images and understanding that not every image online is authentic or real (Aboukacem, 2020; Aboukacem & Haas, 2018; Kember & Zylinska, 2012).

Images can be used to persuade or influence opinion, and one aspect of visual lite-

racy is to analyze those messages (Rabadán, 2015). It is critical for preservice teachers to learn about and promote visual literacy as an important part of their curriculum and teaching practices (Aboukacem, Haas, & Winard, 2018).

Metros (2008) stated, we are inspired by a culture of visuals "with easy access to the visually rich Web, photo dependent social networks, video saturated media, and graphic-ally sophisticated entertainment and gaming" (p.102). Visual literacy is necessary to provide the foundation for analysis, reflection, and discussion around what is seen with the eye in our society on a daily basis (ACRL, 2011).

Photovoice is a visual literacy research method that is different from traditional qualitative research methods. Harper (2002) posited research with photos is collaborative, unlike the traditional researcher-led and one-way flow of information. Harper (2002) contended that photo elicitation, i.e., discussing photos and findings, is another variation of interviewing participants. Traditionally, an interview builds on the assumption that the researcher will ask a set of questions. In the Photovoice process, the interviewee or the participant is the one who eventually leads the investigations process as well as interpret and communicate the findings to a select audience (Harper, 2002).

In line with the concept of empowerment and participant as a researcher, Photovoice promotes critical information literacy and critical pedagogy. It enables the individual to analyze and provide thoughtful reflections about both their personal and societal practices (Yoon, Yol, Haag, & Simpson, 2018). The American Library Association (ALA, 1989) emphasized that public participation in making and sharing content as well as becoming an information literate person was of utmost importance to all members of society.

Visuals and photographs are an important source of information nowadays, and the citizen should be "able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (ALA, 1989, n.p.).

Visual literacy is a significant form of information literacy. It challenges our perceptions of the world through the image, and increases our understanding of various perspectives through cultural, social, and historical environments (Hobbs, 2016; Rawlinson, Wood, Osterman, & Sullivan, 2007). New media have evolved, and many forms of participatory media such as photography repositories (e.g., Instagram, Pinterest) appealed to citizens for convenience and ease of access (Aboulkacem, 2020; Aboulkacem & Haas, 2018; Aboulkacem, Haas, & Winard, 2018; Kember & Zylinska, 2012; Fleming, 2014; Hobbs, 2016; Potter, 2018). Exposure to photography, especially in today's society, requires citizens to possess visual literacy skills to effectively analyze social issues, expose historic inequalities, and promote critical thinking. Participating in the process of analyzing photographs, discussing issues, and communicating the findings can empower individuals and marginalized groups (Freire, 1970).

Visual literacy involves decision making based on an awareness of one's feelings and culture, making and owning the meaning behind what is viewed (Messaris, 1994). We live in an era of visual culture and increasing diversity, which leads to the importance of communication and interpretation of what is observed. Thus, it is important to understand that images can be used to create or distort reality (Potter, 2018; Burmark, 2002). With an abundance of social media platforms and the constant use of technology displaying strong images in the faces of young people, minds are being shaped through the way they interpret, judge, and discuss images with others (Aboulkacem & Haas, 2018; Errázuriz, 2019; Newfield, 2011). The more visually literate individuals become, the more successful they are in determining their own realities, which is a vital skill.

PURPOSE

Teaching visual literacy in the classroom is a challenge due to the plethora of images continually available to students who are accustomed to judge what they see at face value (Todorov, 2017). Educators have a rather daunting task to transform 'lazy and com-placent' viewing of images into visual proficiency (Burmark, 2002; Silverman & Piedmont, 2016). Students often passively consume or tend to be dismissive of what they see due to the sheer volume of images shared and published on a continual basis. With so many images available, it is not surprising that students may deem the infinite number of pictures as worthless commodities with which they do not need to take time to actively engage (Gonchar, 2015). Students must be taught how to critically evaluate images to develop creative thought, just as they are taught to critically question and evaluate printed texts (Burmark, 2002; Hobbs, 2016; Messaris 1994; Potter, 2018).

Today's students are often exposed to more visual texts than printed texts (Ilan, 2018; Adaval, Saluja, & Jiang, 2019). Therefore, instruction must evolve to support comprehension of visual media (Hobbs, 2016; Shen, Kasra, Pan, Bassett, Malloch, & O'Brien, 2019). Images are ubiquitous (see also The New London Group, 1996), and many students are racing far ahead of their teachers in putting new media tools to work for learning and understanding.

Visual literacy is a complex process of making meaning from images and media. Students must be taught the skills necessary to analyze visual information and put it in context, which requires them to apply cultural, aesthetic, and technological knowledge (Kress, 2003; Lacković, 2020; Rothman, Daley, & Alder, 2020). However, teachers must have the knowledge and competency in using visuals in the classroom as tools other than simply displaying information. Teachers must be able to guide students in examining and exploring images to gain deeper understanding of the world around them (Kress, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Educators need to ask critical questions regarding teaching methodologies, and whether or not they promote or encourage understanding of

visual literacy.

The need for teachers to develop knowledge and competencies in visual literacy skills prompted this study with a group of preservice teachers who will soon enter their classrooms. Preservice teachers, enrolled in a block of courses focused on literacy methods, were informally surveyed at the beginning of the semester to determine their level of confidence in using social media including practices in posting and sharing images. The group was very familiar with social media, and considered themselves proficient in posting and sharing images.

When participants in this study were asked about visual literacy, and more specifically, what it was and how they might define the term, their responses lacked a working definition as to what the term or the new literacy meant. In general, the preservice teachers determined visual literacy meant the understanding of what one sees when they look at a picture. After showing the preservice teachers some photos of social justice issues, they soon realized that simply looking at a photo did not always mean knowing what the image was about. In this study, the researchers investigated the perceptions and reflections of pre-service teachers after participating in a variety of visual literacy experiences and completing a final Photovoice project. In addition, participants were asked about implementation of Photovoice in their future classrooms.

METHODS

This qualitative study used Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006; Kemmis, 2006) to engage participants both in analyzing social issues and promoting societal changes. In PAR, the participants become self-reflective researchers as they collaborate and explore problems through inquiry and evaluation. In line with constructivism (Steffe & Gale, 1995) and critical theory (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1981), PAR aims to equalize the role of the

participants and researchers in analyzing, disseminating, engaging, and questioning societal problems. The PAR process involves self-reflection to promote change, enact social justice, and impact others through awareness of social issues (Caraballo, Lozenski, Lyiscott, & Morrell, 2017; Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2015). In the current study, the Photovoice method was applied for preservice teachers to examine both personal and community issues, through various lenses and make deeper meaning. Supporting Freire's (1970) idea for educational empowerment, Photovoice provided the means for in-depth analysis and discussion surrounding images and social justice advocacy.

Research Questions. The following research questions were examined in this study:

1. How did the preservice teachers perceive the messages portrayed in the media prior to the Photovoice project participation?
2. What impact does participation in a Photovoice project have on the perceptions of preservice teachers using visual literacy instruction in the classroom?

Participants. The twenty-two preservice teachers involved in this study included preservice teachers enrolled in a southeast Texan public university. Convenience sampling was applied as these preservice teachers were enrolled in a literacy methods courses which is a requirement for the teacher preparation program. The participants were working towards obtaining their teaching certification in one of these areas: early childhood through sixth-grade, bilingual education, or English language arts/social studies for Grades 4 through 8. Table 1 provides the participants' demographic data.

Role of Researchers. This research study was developed and implemented by three researchers. One researcher served as the faculty member teaching the courses and implemented all phases of the study as part

of the instructional design of the courses. The other two researchers served as research assistants in the doctoral literacy program at the same university. One doctoral researcher has extensive knowledge and experience with photovoice and the second has expertise in the area of social and new media literacy. The research assistants analyzed and coded the reflections and projects of the preservice teachers. Then all three researchers met to verify themes. The faculty member provided examples of classroom activities and discussions to support the identified themes and shared details of the action research of the participants as the phases of the Photovoice process unfolded.

Data Collection. Prior to the implementation of the Photovoice project, the researchers wanted the preservice teachers to experience visual literacy and explore visual media. The aim was for preservice teachers to recognize and understand the impact visual media has on society, and the importance of including visual literacy skills and strategies in the classroom. The preservice teachers expressed their thoughts and feelings through rich discussions involving images and photographs using the

Socratic method (Overholser, 1992; 1993). The study was divided into five phases over a 15-week semester, and each phase was implemented every three weeks. The five phases allowed for the slow incorporation and development of ideas about visual literacy and the engagement of preservice teachers in critical dialogue and analysis of visual messages. Table 2 provides an overview of the five phases of implementation of the various experiences.

Table 1. Demographic Data for Preservice Teachers

Gender	Count
Female	22
Male	0
Age Range	
20-24	20
25-29	2
Ethnicity	
White	15
Black	3
Hispanic	4

Table 2. Phases of Visual Literacy Project Application through the Semester

Phase	Time	Practice-based Experience	Data Sources Applied
1	Week 3	Introduction to visual literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preservice teachers selected personal photos Selected photos by researchers
2	Week 6	Learning to analyze photos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher selected photos and images
3	Week 9	Individual and group discussions of visual analysis of specific themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher presented photo collections of several themes
4	Week 12	Learning how to select photos to convey deeper meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preservice teachers shared photos they selected in group discussions of photo analysis
5	Week 15	Preparing and sharing Photovoice presentations Written reflection of experiences and discussion as a class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preservice teachers created Photovoice projects Preservice teachers selected method of presentation and theme

PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION OF VISUAL LITERACY EXPERIENCES

Phase 1. During this first phase, in the third week of the semester, the preservice teachers were given instructions to find a photo on their phones that has a special meaning to them. Once they located their special photo, they were asked to exchange phones with the classmate nearest to them. No further instructions were given, however; the preservice teachers instinctively engaged in a class discussion about their personal photo selection and the meaning behind their photograph. The preservice teachers felt the need to share their photo's background for others to gain a clearer understanding of their choice.

Following class discussion, historic photos of segregation from decades ago were shown to the class (<https://allthatsinteresting.com/segregation-in-america-photos>). As each photograph was displayed, the preservice teachers slowly examined the photo for several minutes. They were encouraged to pause and consider the messages of these images without further comments. After looking through all the photographs, from the display for group discussion. The participants were asked to engage in a discussion with the person next to them about their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations about the image on the screen. Images were selected from various public domain websites. Some of the images shared and discussed in depth in phases one and two are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Phase 2. In the sixth week, the second phase of visual literacy experiences included analysis of photos brought to class by the faculty member teaching the courses. The faculty member's choice of photos centered on social justice issues to elicit discussion. The second group of selected photos from public domain websites were placed on the walls around the classroom, and the preservice teachers were asked to conduct a gallery walk by visiting each photo and writing down their responses to the images. They wrote about their thoughts, feelings, analysis, and interpretations of the photos. After the gallery walk,

the preservice teachers then engaged in small group discussions with classmates from other tables and groups.

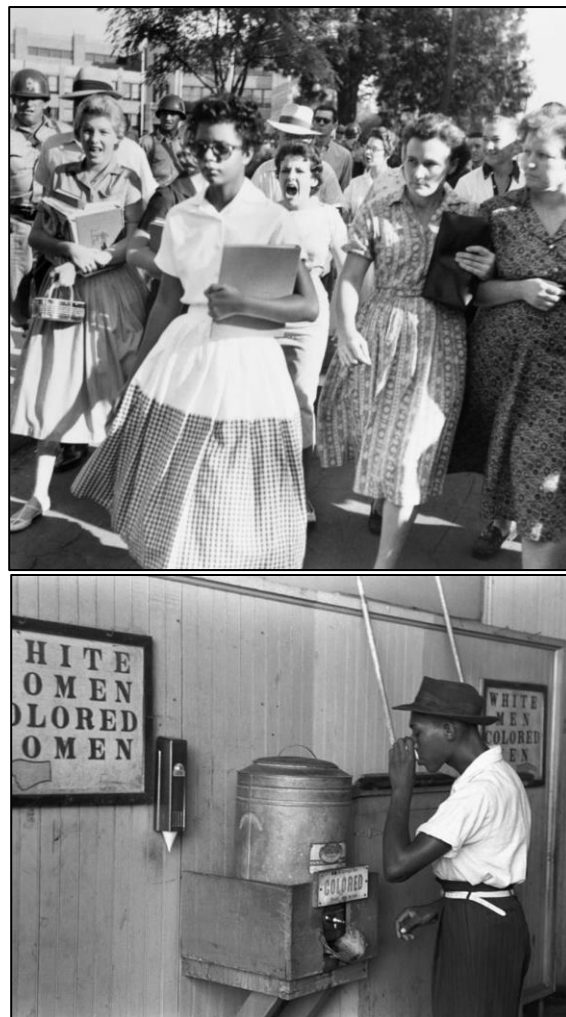


Figure 1. *Segregation pictures.* Picture credits to Brettmann/Getty Images & Russell Lee/Library of Congress.



Figure 2. Pictures highlighting social justice issues.

Phase 3. During the ninth week of the semester, the faculty member teaching the courses chose images of hands, eyes, and other features of various individuals. The preservice teachers analyzed the style, color,

and composition of the photos. Then they participated in group discussions to collectively select a theme for the message of the photos. These photos were displayed and shared with the preservice teachers from public domain websites. Some images selected included those in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Picture displaying human individual features

Phase 4. During the twelfth week of the semester, the preservice teachers brought in the photos to class, which they felt had a powerful and meaningful message to them. The preservice teachers were asked to number their photos and place them on their tables. The preservice teachers would then walk around the tables displaying the images and write personal notes about each photo. After writing their notes, the preservice teachers formed small groups at their tables to discuss and come up with themes found from the displayed images. Once the small groups were finished adding themes to the photos, the class engaged in a discussion about their thoughts on the photos, summary of the themes found, and the purpose for why they selected their photo to share with the class.

Phase 5. In the fifteenth week and final phase of the visual literacy study, the preservice

teachers were asked to use their own phones and capture their own photos and creatively show-case them to the class. The instructions were open for the preservice teachers to decide how many images to display and how to present their projects. In addition to their Photovoice project, the preservice teachers completed written responses and reflections about their photo experience, perspectives of visual literacy, using Photovoice in their future classrooms, and explained their selected photos for the Photovoice project.

THE POWER OF VISUAL LITERACY

The initial phase of the visual literacy experience encouraged preservice teachers to show photos on their phones with each other during class, and briefly discuss the context of their photo. The conversations revolved around superficial things that are only significant to them, such as their friends, families, or pets. As the class progressed through the phases, and the preservice teachers began analyzing photographs from segregation, they were engaged in more in-depth conversations about how the visual image displayed powerful messages through composition, style, and details. The preservice teachers were able to analyze the purpose of the photograph with detail and discuss topics such as, issues of power, racism, and segregation during that time-period. The participants compared the photographs from their phones to the ones displayed from segregation and commented on how superficial their photos were and how they lacked a powerful message. The visual literacy discussions on these historic photographs made one preservice teacher comment about how powerful the visual image can be used to teach others about controversial topics.

The second phase enabled the preservice teachers to actively engage in richer dialogues and discussions about sensitive issues. Child labor, immigration, and homeless photographs posted around the room, elicited comments such as, *These images are heartbreaking! How can children be expected to carry heavy containers and*

not be allowed to go to school. This phase led the participants to deeper level conversations about social, economic, and political problems.

In the third phase, preservice teachers began to lead the photograph discussions regarding images of hands, body features, and the detailed composition of the photos without the instructor's help. They elaborated on the messages portrayed through visuals, and one claimed, *Hands can be so powerful in a good way and a bad way. They can help someone or hurt someone; it depends on the individual's intent.*

In the fourth phase, the preservice teachers began to take ownership and lead the photo discussions. The preservice teachers brought to class photographs, which showed controversial topics of human trafficking, violence/abuse, orphanages, homelessness, poverty, and environmental issues. After writing notes about the photos, the preservice teachers gathered themselves to place the photos in thematic categories. They discussed social justice issues, the messages portrayed, and how powerful the visual image can be used to elicit strong emotions and feelings. During this phase, the preservice teachers went from shallow conversations to leading discussions about serious and impactful topics.

During the fifth phase, the preservice teachers presented their Photovoice projects to the class and there was a noticeable difference in regard to how the preservice teachers discussed visual literacy. They highlighted the importance of the image, the social justice impact, the messages it conveyed, and how it could influence one's emotions. The presentations brought some to tears, as they discussed their personal life stories of over-coming cancer, poverty, and mental health. The preservice teachers felt personal and emotional growth after the photo-voice project and visual literacy experience. All participants agreed that they would implement similar Photovoice projects with their future students. The preservice teachers learned about the importance of visual literacy and how it was a powerful tool to teach strategies relating to social justice issues and personal perspectives.

ANALYZING THE REFLECTIONS AND PROJECTS

Once the preservice teachers completed their written reflective responses and Photovoice projects, thematic analysis was used to code and discover prevalent themes from the data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The faculty member teaching the course implemented the Photovoice project, created the written reflection questions, and conducted the visual literacy experiences in the class, whereas the other two researchers worked together in analyzing the reflections and projects' artifacts. Once themes emerged from the data, the researchers met to discuss the findings and reached an agreement upon the finalized themes.

The first phase of data analysis included becoming familiar with the written responses and projects by reading and rereading the preservice teachers' work. The second phase involved reading the data and coding the written examples. The third phase began the process of categorizing the codes into possible themes by collapsing multiple codes into a single theme. The fourth phase involved creating a thematic map of the data, as well as checking to ensure the themes match the categories of codes. The fifth phase finalized the defined themes and included the selection of themes from the coding process and thematic map. The sixth phase included the selection of quotations and pictures from the data collection to support the defined themes. Table 3 summarizes the six phases.

Table 3. *The Six Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun, Clarke, & Hayfield, 2015)*

Phases	Coding Action
Phase 1	Reading and rereading the writing prompts to become familiar with their responses.
Phase 2	Coding the data with examples from the written responses.
Phase 3	Categorizing codes into formulating potential themes.
Phase 4	Checking and reviewing the themes to match the categories of codes and creating a thematic map of the data.
Phase 5	Defining and selecting the themes using information from the categories of codes and the thematic map.
Phase 6	Selection of specific examples of quotes and pictures to illustrate the defined themes from the data collection.

THEMES AND PERCEPTIONS

Passion for teaching. A majority of the preservice teachers discussed the importance of education, their passion for teaching, and shared their reasoning for becoming a teacher. One preservice teacher said, *Making a difference and a 'thumbprint' in these children's lives is a huge part about being a teacher and what to keep in mind when working with your students.* One comment in particular was about visiting different classrooms on a trip to Honduras,

Something you can't see in these pictures are the teachers. The teachers

of these students were all very kind people. They almost all spoke English, which wasn't common, and were so proud of their classrooms. Just by talking to these teachers, I knew in my heart they were educated and could have other jobs making more money instead..... All of the teachers we met loved these students so much that they made a sacrifice to educate them, and I came to admire them so much during my time in Honduras.

There was also a discussion about the Photovoice project and a passion for teaching, and one participant said, *The theme addresses*

important children in my life that molded me into being a teacher. I chose this theme because I am so passionate about my future profession and each one of those interactions with these kids has helped me on my way to becoming a teacher.

Struggles and adversity. Many of the participants shared personal stories of how they, or someone else, endured pain, struggles, or adverse tragedies in their life. The participants wrote about the fortitude and determination developed during hard times. One participant wrote, *My theme is 'Difficult Roads Often Lead to Beautiful Destinations,' and I chose this because throughout my whole college life I struggled each day. I felt like I couldn't do it till I realize each year I get closer and closer to my goal and what the other side of this struggle will look like after I am done.* This preservice teacher openly shared a personal story of her brother's special needs situation, and explained,

My little brother was diagnosed with autism at 18-months old and diagnosed with an unknown form of muscular dystrophy when he was 16-years old. His spine was curved over 60% in a matter of months and all while this was happening he was being loved and giving love with no words (he is non-verbal). His strength his whole life showed even more throughout his surgery.

In addition, a participant wrote about her brother's tragic football game accident, in which she wrote, *The sound of a pop after the opposing player twisted his kneecap around sealed his fate...A torn ACL and meniscus in two places is what the MRI showed. The months that followed proved to be a true testament to my brother's strength... I watched him go from being the most athletic and determined person I know to not being able to walk without help.* Figure 4 depicts the preservice teacher's brother before surgery to demonstrate what has been shared by the participants.



Figure 4. Preservice teacher shares family moments with the class.

The same participant also shared images and the story of a child she was working with in her field placement. She was helping a second-grade child complete a photo essay of his life. She had gotten very close to the family due to the child's challenges and what she had experienced with her brother. The child had a rare lung disease and received treatments at a children's hospital each month. The preservice teacher and child were completing a project of creating a book about the child's life. He carefully selected photos he wanted to put in his book that (see Figure 5) showed him as a baby on many machines for three years and then when he was able to swing by himself for the first time. The child shared, *I felt free on the swing, swinging all by myself, and I like the picture of me with my arms up in the air when I was sick. This showed I was strong even when I was sick and couldn't walk or talk.* The child shared his interpretations and feelings of the photos, so the preservice teacher felt it would be a powerful piece to include in her project to show how students view personal photos and she felt both her brother and her student showed struggles and strength through their experiences.



Figure 5. Teacher-child relationship discussion.

Mental health. Some of the preservice teachers composed their photovoice projects around mental health issues and described the impact it has on individuals. This preservice teacher wrote, *I chose this because it is really important to me and everyone suffers from it in a different way but most times silently...My goal is for people to really see this as a medical issue and that people don't make it up.* Additionally, this preservice teacher shared, *The message I want the readers to take away is that emotions and thoughts in people's minds can take a huge toll on their health. Mental illness is at an all-time high, so we need to take this into consideration as we teach...It is important to talk about mental issues and get to know your students on a personal level.*

The preservice teachers touched upon the concept of words and how they can affect us personally. One participant shared, *I hoped readers would reflect on themselves and how they not only speak to others, but even the things they say about themselves. My goal was to show how negative words and positive words can either hinder us or help us grow.* Similarly, this preservice teacher elaborated, *The theme of my project is that words hurt We can choose to use positivity or help motivate and inspire others in everyday life...This project hit kind of close to me because people sometimes do not realize how big of an effect words have on people.* Figure 6 was created by a participant to depict mental health issues. See earlier comment about summarizing this finding and explaining its significance.



Figure 6. Mental health issues as depicted by a participant.

Social advocacy --- Animal rights. Quite a few preservice teachers chose a topic related to something they are passionate about, which was animal welfare and advocacy. Many discussed animal cruelty, such as this participant who argued, *Killer whales should not be in captivity. My purpose was to show the difference between what killer whales look like when they are in the wild and how they look in captivity.* . In addition, this preservice teacher shared thoughts on the topic of animal cruelty and illustrated *“I chose this topic because it is close to my heart especially when it comes to the American pit bull terrier breed. Pit bulls are their own worst enemy; their loyalty and devotion make them the perfect victim...People need to also be aware that puppy mills are not good; we need to stop breeding and start adopting. It’s time to take a stand and end animal cruelty to ALL animals everywhere.* Finally, someone wrote about an organization called Save the Pups and shared, *I chose this because it is really personal to me because I have 2 rescue dogs that are the sweetest and best dogs ever. I just don’t understand how or why someone could just abandon a dog when all they crave is your love and affection...You have the power to help stop this. By adopting a rescue animal you are playing a major role in helping these animals.*

Environmentalism. In this study, a few advocated for the environment. In sharing about climate change, this participant said, *I chose this theme because not a lot of people truly understand how much the Earth (sic) has changed and will continue to change throughout the upcoming years if climate change does not cease.... My goal/purpose of my Photovoice project was to make viewers aware that the Earth is slowly dying and becoming worse if no one is deciding to help repair and give back to the Earth.* Adding to this narrative, there were images of serene nature along-side images of piled up garbage polluting nature with a written poem that stated,

*We are transforming materials
Materials born of life
Into things that cannot*

*Sustain life, create life
We are transforming
The earth into death
It is obvious,*

*At this point
That man,
Hates life.*

Lastly, there was a discussion about plastic consumption and its consequences, *I chose this theme because plastic products are destroying the environment as we know it, killing the planet’s creatures and causing the ecosystems around us to crumble....There are consequences to our overuse of plastic in our daily lives, and these photos show only a small portion of what is happening. I hope that the reader takes away the thought to use fewer plastic products in their lives.*

THE IMPACT OF VISUAL LITERACY

When the participants wrote responses to various questions that elicited writing reflections, many of them wrote about the value and necessity of visual literacy. This person shared, *I feel like it is important because we use it a lot in advertising. It helps express feeling and connect them to product to help sell them.* Furthermore another added, *I think visual literacy is very important in the world today because most of what we consume on the internet and social media is conveyed or advertised through pictures. Being able to understand what a picture is trying to say and how it has been portrayed to get that message across allows the consumer to be able to make informed decisions.*

Additionally this participant expressed, *I feel this is important to visual literacy in today’s word by allowing individual learners to interpret art and visual media as they are exposed to them. Visual literacy offers a deeper connection with all kinds of texts and encourages different interpretations of what is represented and their hidden meanings. More importantly, there was an emphasis that, Visual literacy is tremendously important in today’s world. Due to technology, the new generation is more drawn to pictures rather than reading. Although both reading and pictures go together in order to help the reader/viewer understand more, most people rather see the proof and/or evidence in pictures, since pictures are*

harder to manipulate/change compared to words.

Applying Photovoice in the classroom. All the participants in this study agreed they would do this Photovoice project again, or something similar in future classrooms. They found it to be an important way to incorporate visual literacy into the classroom. Of significance, as shown prior, the preservice teacher working with a child to develop a photo essay was able to experience the process first-hand in the classroom. She made connections to the importance of photos in the lives of children and how a child can determine important messages they want to share with others.

Exploration of reflections included one preservice teacher's statement, which reads, *If I were to do a similar project with my students in the future, I would allow them to choose any form of presenting the project, including various forms of media. I would want the students to learn how to use technology to their advantage, as well as how to get a message to others without having to explain their presentation.* There was also a mention of cultural implications about this project, which stated, *I would have [my students] bring in photos that show off their culture to write about why their culture is important to them. I could also have them pick a place or thing that they are passionate about and have them present to the class just like we are doing. I would want them to learn more about each other and their values.*

Lastly, the idea to incorporate the community into a Photovoice project was suggested, *I would have the class come up with a topic that impacts them or their loved ones (poverty, homelessness, violence, bullying) and take pictures in their community that portrays that to them. I will have them come up with a way to help their community with their chosen topic.... this will become a service project for us to do throughout the year, taking pictures of our progress as we go.*

CONCLUSIONS

Visual literacy continues to play a vital part in educating and informing us about the images we see in our society. In our study, the visual literacy experience and Photovoice project enabled the participants to see beyond the photo

and experience a deeper level of connection and analysis. The choice to use Photovoice, as a participatory action research method, empowered the participants to voice their perceptions about their reality. It is necessary for preservice teachers to have this exposure to Photovoice in order to empower their future students and classrooms.

Teachers are often the best advocates for their students and this project can further their students' growth and gain an insight into the strengths and problems in their community. The preservice teachers in our research went from superficial discussions and picture taking to in-depth analysis and awareness about controversial topics. Photovoice has the potential to transform ideals and perspectives, while providing the platform to speak out and give our voice to important issues. Freire (1973) pointed out the idea of critical consciousness, which enables individuals to create the link between themselves, and the social/political factors in their lives. Once the participants understood Photovoice and visual literacy, their application and projects revealed a connection between themselves and society. Some of the preservice teachers discussed the impact of plastic on the environment, and how one person can make a difference to stop waste and pollution. The social advocacy component of Photovoice is something preservice teachers can pass down to their students and help embolden them to become active citizens involved in their community using their voice and their cameras.

When preservice teachers implement Photovoice in their future classrooms, it has the capability to build a strong rapport with their students. Students want to have a positive relationship with their teachers in order to have a pleasant school experience (Pollack, 2019). The participants in this study all agreed that Photovoice would be something they would include in their curriculum. Once they experienced this project for themselves, they could see the benefits of building not only the individual and teacher-student relationship, but also enriching the community through advocacy. Many of the preservice teachers wanted their students to conduct a Photovoice project about social justice issues and topics they are passionate about in their lives or community.

In this study, preservice teachers revealed many positive aspects such as critical thinking, real-life application, and personal transformation. The advantages of conducting a Photovoice study with preservice teachers indicated how impactful it is for their future classrooms. Many classrooms often follow a banking education model (Freire 1970), where all knowledge is held by the teacher and administered to the student. Photovoice research by Cook, Brown, and Ballard (2016) highlighted the significance of creating an equal sharing of power and collaboration through participatory action research. When students feel a balance of power in the classroom, it creates a positive atmosphere and nurtures an encouraging relationship with their teacher. Photovoice and visual literacy experiences are useful for preservice teachers to prepare them to lead the next generation.

REFERENCES

- Aboulkacem, S. (2020). *Media and information literacy in Algeria: Perspectives from students, media practitioners, and government officials*. Deutsche Welle and PLAYARA.
- Aboulkacem, S., & Haas, L. E. (2018). Perceptions, practices, and guiding principles of pre-service teachers in the quest for news and information across informal media. *The Online Journal of New Horizons in Education*, 8(3), 129-139.
- Aboulkacem, S., Haas L. E., & Winard, A. R. (2018). Perspectives from Algeria and the United States: Media and news literacy perceptions and practices of pre-service teachers. *International Journal of Media and Information Literacy*, 3(2), 40-52. <https://doi.org/10.13187/ijmil.2018.2.40>
- Adaval, R., Saluja, G., & Jiang, Y. (2019). Seeing and thinking in pictures: A review of visual information processing. *Consumer Psychology Review*, 2(1), 50-69. <https://doi.org/10.1002/arcp.1049>
- American Library Association. (1989, January 10). Presidential committee on information literacy. *Final report*. Chicago [Website]. <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/whitepapers/presidential.htm>
- Association of College and Research Libraries. (2011). *Visual Literacy Competency Standards*. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/visualliteracy>.
- Baum, F., MacDougall, C., & Smith, D. (2006). Participatory action research. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 60(10), 854. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2004.028662>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Hayfield, N. (2015). Thematic analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (3rd ed.) (pp. 222-248). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Burmark, L. (2002). *Visual literacy: Learn to see, see to learn*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Caraballo, L., Lozenski, B. D., Lyiscott, J. J., & Morrell, E. (2017). YPAR and critical epistemologies: Rethinking education research. *Review of Research in Education*, 41(1), 311-336. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X16686948>
- Chio, V., Fandt, P. (2007). Photovoice in the diversity classroom: Engagement, voice, and the "eye/I" of the camera. *Journal of Management Education*, 31(4), 484- 504. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562906288124>
- Coemans, S., Raymakers, A. L., Vandenabeele, J., & Hannes, K. (2019). Evaluating the extent to which social researchers apply feminist and empowerment frameworks in Photovoice studies with female participants: A literature review. *Qualitative Social Work*, 18(1), 37-59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325017699263>
- Cook, K., Brown, A., & Ballard, G. (2016). Using Photovoice to explore environmental sustainability across languages and cultures. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, 7(1), 49-67. <https://doi.org/10.1515/dcse-2016-0004>
- Deeb-Sossa, N., & Flores, Y. G. (2017). Using Photovoice with farmworker children and youth: A methodology for understanding sociopolitical mental health issues. *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 42(2), 49-80.
- Errázuriz, L. (2019). Metamorphosis of visual literacy: From 'reading images' to a critical visual education. *International Journal of*

- Education Through Art*, 15(1), 15-26.
https://doi.org/10.1386/eta.15.1.15_1
- Esau, D., Ho, P. T., Blair, G. K., Duffy, D., O'Hara, N. N., Kapoor, V., & Ajiko, M. (2017). Engaging youth in rural Uganda in articulating health priorities through Photovoice. *Global Health Promotion*, 24(3), 59-67.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1757975915614167>
- Fleming, J. (2014). Media literacy, news literacy, or news appreciation? A case study of the news literacy program at Stony Brook University. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 69(2), 146-165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757975915614167>
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. Seabury Press.
- Ghosh, U., Sen, B., & Bose, S. (2019). Photovoice as a participatory approach to influence climate related health policy in the Sundarbans. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 3, (22). [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(19\)30165-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(19)30165-2)
- Gonchar, M. (2015, February). 10 intriguing photographs to teach close reading and visual thinking skills. *Teaching and Learning With The New York Times*.
<https://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/02/27/10-intriguing-photographs-to-teach-close-reading-and-visual-thinking-skills/>
- Harper, D. (2002) Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation, *Visual Studies*, 17(1), 13-26, DOI: 10.1080/14725860220137345
- Hobbs, R. (2010). *Digital and media literacy: A plan of action*. A white paper on the digital and media literacy recommendations of the Knight Commission on the information needs of communities in a democracy. The Aspen Institute. <http://www.knightcomm.org/digital-and-media-literacy/>
- Hobbs, R. (2016). *Exploring the roots of digital and media literacy through personal narrative*. Temple University Press.
- Ilan, J. (2018). *The international photojournalism industry: Cultural production and the making and selling of news pictures*. Routledge.
- Jarldorn, M. (2019). Photovoice theories and the potential to advocate for social change. In *Photovoice handbook for social workers* (pp. 25-45). Palgrave Pivot, Cham.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>
- Kember, S., & Zylinska, J. (2012). *Life after new media: Mediation as a vital process*. MIT Press
- Kemmis, S. (2006). Participatory action research and the public sphere. *Educational Action Research*, 14(4), 459-476. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650790600975593>
- Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. Routledge.
- Kress, G. (2004). Reading images: Multimodality, representation and new media. *Information Design Journal*, 12(2), 110-119.
<https://doi.org/10.1075/idjdd.12.2.03kre>
- Lacković, N. (2020). Thinking with digital images in the post-truth era: A method in critical media literacy. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-019-00099-y>
- Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2003). *New literacies: Changing knowledge and classroom learning*. Open University Press.
- Lögberg, U., Nilsson, B., & Kostenius, C. (2019). *Using Photovoice to promote young migrants health: Benefits and challenges with the method*. Paper presented at the 9th Nordic Health Promotion Research Conference (NHPRC) 12-14 June 2019, Roskilde, Denmark. <https://www.divaportal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1325911&dswid=-159>.
- Mayfield-Johnson, S., & Butler, J., III. (2017). Moving from pictures to social action: An introduction to Photovoice as a participatory action tool. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, (154), 49-59.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20230>
- Messaris, P. (1994). *Visual "literacy": Image, mind, and reality*. Westview Press.
- Metros, S. E. (2008). The educator's role in preparing visually literate learners. *Theory into Practice*, 47(2), 102-109.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840801992264>
- Mezirow, J. (1981). A critical theory of adult learning and education. *Adult education*, 32(1), 3- 24.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/074171368103200101>
- Mirra, N., Garcia, A., & Morrell, E. (2015). *Doing youth participatory action research: Transforming inquiry with researchers, educators, and students*. Routledge.
- Mozaffarian, D. R. (2019). Refugees, sport and belonging: A Photovoice inquiry (Master's thesis). <https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/>.
- Newfield, D. (2011). From visual literacy to critical visual literacy: An analysis of educational materials. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 10(1), 81-94.
- Overholser, J. C. (1992). Socrates in the classroom.

- College Teaching*, 40(1), 14-19. Overholser, J. C. (1993). Elements of the Socratic method: I. Systematic questioning. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 30(1), 67. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-3204.30.1.67>
- Padilla, M., Matiz-Reyes, A., Colón-Burgos, J. F., Varas-Díaz, N., & Vertovec, J. (2019). Adaptation of Photovoice methodology to promote policy dialog among street-based drug users in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. *Arts & health*, 11(2), 147-162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2018.1444647>
- Papa, E. L. (2019). Revealing the resistant capital of Cambodian youth: Using Photovoice as a tool for advocacy and policy change. *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement*, 14(1), 13. <https://doi.org/10.7771/2153-8999.1182>
- Pollock, S. (2019). Literacy difficulties: What are learners' experiences? *Educational & Child Psychology*, 36(1), 101-114.
- Potter, J. (2018). *Media literacy* (8th ed.). Sage.
- Rabadán, Á. V. (2015). Media literacy through photography and participation. A conceptual approach. *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research*, 4(1), 32-39. <https://doi.org/10.7821/naer.2015.1.96>
- Rawlinson, K., Wood, S. N., Osterman, M., & Sullivan, C. C. (2007). Thinking critically about social issues through visual material. *Journal of Museum Education*, 32(2), 155-174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2007.11510566>
- Rothman, E. F., Daley, N., & Alder, J. (2020). A pornography literacy program for adolescents. *American Journal of Public Health*, 110(2), 154-156. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305468>
- Sahay, K. M., Thatcher, K., Núñez, C., & Lightfoot, A. (2016). "It's like we are legally, illegal": Latino/a youth emphasize barriers to higher education using Photovoice. *The High School Journal*, 100(1), 45-65. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hsj.2016.0020>
- Sarti, A., Schalkers, I., Bunders, J. F., & Dedding, C. (2018). Around the table with policymakers: Giving voice to children in contexts of poverty and deprivation. *Action Research*, 16(4), 396-413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750317695412>
- Schrag, A. (2015). "Pics or it didn't happen": On visual evidence in the age of ubiquitous photography. <http://hdl.handle.net/11418/560>
- Shah, P. (2014). Spaces to speak: Photovoice and the reimagination of girls' education in India. *Comparative Education Review*, 59(1), 50-74. <https://doi.org/10.1086/678699>
- Shen, C., Kasra, M., Pan, W., Bassett, G. A., Malloch, Y., & O'Brien, J. F. (2019). Fake images: The effects of source, intermediary, and digital media literacy on contextual assessment of image credibility online. *New Media & Society*, 21(2), 438-463. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818799526>
- Silverman, K. N., & Piedmont, J. (2016). Reading the big picture: A visual literacy curriculum for today. *Knowledge Quest*, 44(5), 32-37.
- Steffe, L., & Gale, J. (Eds.). (1995). *Constructivism in education*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- The New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60-93. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.66.1.17370n67v22j160u>
- Todorov, A. (2017). *Face value: The irresistible influence of first impressions*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400885725>
- Wang, C. C., Morrel-Samuels, S., Hutchison, P. M., Bell, L., & Pestronk, R. M. (2004). Flint Photovoice: Community building among youths, adults, and policymakers. *American Journal of Public Health*, 94(6), 911-913. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.94.6.911>
- Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, 24(3), 369-387. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819702400309>
- Yoon, B., Yol, Ö., Haag, C., & Simpson, A. (2018). Critical global literacies: A new instructional framework in the global era. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 62(2), 205-214. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.763>



APA citation format (7th edition) for this publication: Winard, A., Haas, L. E., & Aboukacem, S. (2020). Preservice teachers' perspective of Photovoice and visual literacy experiences. In D. M. Baylen (Ed.), *Crossing boundaries and disciplines: The book of selected readings 2019* (pp. 44-60). International Visual Literacy Association. ISBN: 978-0-945829-13-3