



## ***Full Length Review Article***

### **PHOTOVOICE AND CULTURE: INNOVATIONS IN TEACHING NURSES**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

There is an expression that a picture is worth a thousand words, and as a society, we rely heavily on visual aids to understand the context of different concepts and objects. In research, visual elements, such as pictures, are often used to supplement the findings section in a research report, but photography, or photo voice, is not commonly used as a research methodology in and of itself. From a nursing educator's perspective, a visual research methodology can identify themes and concept, especially in an unfamiliar environment. As a pilot study to determine feasibility, photo voice was used while in China as a means of identifying themes present in Chinese society with the aim of the photo voice study to compare Chinese society with the US in terms of health care as part of a study abroad program. The results and lessons learned from this study will guide the assignment development for nursing students on future study abroad travel programs.

**Key words:** Culture, Nursing, Photovoice, Education.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The world is growing and shrinking simultaneously as our global connections increase the impact of our reach, but our human connections make the world a little smaller through globalization. As a nurse educator and health care professional, it is important to understand the importance of culturally competent and culturally sensitive care. Patients that do not receive culturally competent care suffer more health care disparities, experience a higher level of stress, and have a higher rate of non-compliance (Leninger, 2008). Reducing health care disparities is an important aspect of having a healthy community both locally and globally, and health care providers that can meet the needs of culturally diverse patient populations can have a greater impact in shaping a healthy world. Study abroad programs are a manner in which health care professionals can be better prepared to provide culturally competent and culturally sensitive care (Caffrey, Neander, Markle, and Stewart, 2005; Sargent, Sedlak, and Marsolf, 2005). Cultural competence is the dynamic process by which health care professionals interact with diverse patients to meet the needs of the patient within the cultural context of the patient as defined by the individual, family, and the patient's community (Campinha-Bacote, 2002). Cultural competence is a concept supported in the literature as a way to reduce health disparities, and health disparities in the US total over one billion dollars annually.

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This important health care tool relies heavily on experiencing another culture, reflecting on one's own beliefs, and examining ways that the health care provider can incorporate the patients' self-identified cultural needs. Nurse educators and their accrediting agencies have an attitude towards providing culturally competent education for nursing students and other health care professionals. Research studies support the use of cultural immersion experiences to address the issue of cultural competence education. The researcher used the study abroad experience to pilot test an educational assignment to determine the feasibility and practical challenges of using photo voice as an educational assignment to meet course objectives while actively engaging students in the learning process.

The photo voice assignment combined with the opportunity for study abroad programs in a foreign country present a unique perspective, and the researcher is interested in identifying differences between the country in question, China, and the US. Traveling abroad provides students with a better understanding of what life is like in their own country and in the visited country. Travel abroad leads to a deeper understanding of the daily lives that those from a diverse country and culture experience, and it allows students to reflect on their values, beliefs, and customs. Sometimes the experience is challenging and causes students to realize the conflict between their culture and the other cultures (Michael, Della, Jones, and Stoddard, 2011). This realization contributes to the ability to relate to diverse perspectives, and it provides an introductory educational experience for teaching the cultural competence education prescribed by nursing education entities.

There is promising research in the literature to support that photo voice is a visual methodology that can identify the concepts present in another country through the use of photographs taken by the researcher as a means of creating narratives through reflection.

### **The Study**

Perhaps because of the innovative technologies that are available to researchers, or perhaps because visual examples speak so well to people, using visual modalities for research is a growing area of research. Photography, or photo voice, is one visual component of the field known as visual methodology or visual research, and these terms are used synonymously to refer to a concept that have some relationship with the visual appearances of cultures that we experience (Warren, 2005). Nursing is one of several disciplines that use qualitative visual research methods, and other disciplines like sociology, anthropology and ethnography also use this type of research to enrich their findings (Warren, 2005; Banks, 2001; Prosser, 1998; Rose, 2001). Specifically, photo voice is a methodology used by participants to identify, represent, and enhance their experience within the community through photographs.

Photographs of images typically mean different things to different people according to their cultural context and the degree of familiarity with the concept. The differences in perception, although culturally bound, limit the universal nature of what a photo means to the person, or participant, that took it. What one picture means to one person, it will mean something different to another person. Photo voice as a methodology enables participants to achieve some control and autonomy by allowing the participant to express their self more easily (Rosler, 1992). The ability of an image to capture a moment and concept promotes an effective participatory way of distributing knowledge and experience. Through photo voice, researchers gain a viewpoint from a different perspective and cultural experience that contributes to a basis for cultural competency.

Medical photography is nothing new to the profession of nursing. Medical conditions and ailments are captured and shared for research purposes as a way to document what may be assessed on visual inspection. The medical photography is used as a quantitative means to document a condition. It is important to value the wealth that photographs add to qualitative research. In fact, photographs provide a creative and attractive method for participants to communicate their thoughts about the concept at hand (Burke and Evan, 2011).

Despite the promise of photo voice as a qualitative research methodology there is only a small amount of research about the use of visual research for evaluation in education, specifically nursing education. As a means to support the use of photo voice in nursing education and to illustrate the differences in China and the US, this study was conceived. It is essential to understand the strength that this modality can play in cultural competence education in health care professionals. The aim of the photo voice study was to pilot test the photo voice methodology as a means of learning for nursing students as they explore the differences in China and US through the use of photographs.

Information from the study will be used to improve the assignment structure for students and pre-emptively address most challenges that students may encounter. Using the qualitative visual methodology, the photo voice approach was utilized with this study with the researcher capturing visual images across Shanghai, China. The presence of the digital camera in the cell phone is a convenient tool to allow the researcher to take pictures easily while traveling. The digital images provide immediate results for the researcher to check the quality of the work and check for accuracy in the concept captured. Additionally, the digital files can be saved on a password protected flash drive to protect the data.

Photo voice is a manner to allow the researcher to capture desired images and provide meaning through written words to reflect on the subject matter depicted. The brief synopsis of the written words allows for there to be little ambiguity behind the meaning of the image and allow for identification of themes present within the photographs. The photograph may contain potentially thousands of different interpretations of the photo so the written words document what the situation means. Photographs provide a visual capture of the concept experienced, and curating the images for data analysis allows for identification of the specific themes that are present. The researcher collected photographs while studying and traveling in China. The researcher serves as both the data collector and participant. The researcher took photographs representative of experiences related to the health aspects in China. From the perspective of cultural competence, the photographs addressed cognitive learning, practical learning, and perceptions of cultural implications. The researcher also recorded impressions through the photograph modality and the written word using the above stated criteria as a framework.

### **Findings**

When photography is used as a research tool, the camera used, the photographer, and the quality of the photographer are worth considering as part of the analysis process. The elements of the data are interwoven and require careful consideration when analyzing the photographs. As a result of the impact that the photographer plays in the data analysis, it must be noted that the researcher or photographer interprets each photograph and is recorded with the brief, written synopsis.

Physicians and nurses are viewed differently than in the US. Physicians are the leaders of the hospital and easily identified by wearing white. Appearance is important to physicians, and it seems that patients value a clean appearance from their physician. Nurses appear under-represented in the health care profession. Their value is seemingly subservient to the physician. In the US, the hospital administrator is the leader of the hospital, and they wear professional business attire in most settings. Appearance remains important, but it is not as valued as in China.

Preventive care is an important aspect for the Chinese health care system. Tools are used to diagnose health care from a variety of different aspects. One methodology was used to assess the quality and tone of the voice to determine the nutritional status and other ailments to advise of dietary and life style changes that should be implemented.

Another test used a visual image of the face and tongue to determine preventive health measures the patient may incorporate. In the US, preventive care is not a focus. Preventive care is limited to vaccinations and prenatal health care. Reproductive health is an issue in China. The One-Child Policy has dramatically shaped the desirability of pregnancy in China. As such, the prevalence of condoms is wide-spread, and they are strategically placed to allow for convenience of the Chinese people. The condoms were placed at check-out registers with other convenience items and candy. Feminine hygiene products were also placed in high visibility areas with extremely colorful and catchy marketing schemes. It is thought that this supports the encouragement for women to stay not pregnant. This is different than the US where condoms are hidden away on some aisle away from the front of the store. Feminine hygiene products are also tucked away from the front of the store where the topic can be avoided.

Food safety is represented as an interesting concept. The grocery stores have open food in the market. Everything from produce to fish to bulk grains are displayed in open containers. It appears that an effort is made to encourage the Chinese to wash their hands in a stainless steel bowl with water placed in it. Restaurants also had a label for food safety. Each restaurant has a scorecard for hygiene. The US has open displays for produce, but fish and bulk grains are contained and handling is limited. Similarly, the US has food inspections of restaurants, but restaurants with bad report cards are suspended.

### Conclusions

The data gained through the photo voice methodology offers an interpretation and understanding of the perceptions and understanding to becoming more culturally competent and sensitive. Through the researcher's narrations, it emerged there was development of insight into the cultural circumstances of China and potential impact on the health care system. There is room to add to this research through a more rigorous analysis of the data and additional studies with multiple participants. This research study indicates that introducing researchers into a different culture in a study abroad program allows for growth in cultural awareness and an increase in cultural competence and sensitivity. By experiencing the culture and documenting reflections with photo voice, it allows for the researcher to put different culturally bound perspectives into perspective. This stands to enhance the knowledge and skill needed for nursing students to provide culturally competent care and reduce health disparities in the US. Photographs and photo voice provide a rich set of information for the researcher and those reading the research studies. This study provided information on China, cultural competence, and provides a cursory comparison of China and the US.

Distinct lessons were learned by the nurse educator in considering how to strategically structure the assignment to best meet the needs of students and address challenges they may face in the process of completing the assignment. It is important to give voice to observations and items of interests observed in a foreign country, and it is an important learning activity for nursing students to make meaningful connections and comparisons between that which they know and that which they are trying to understand. This assignment and learning process will continue to be refined as students complete the assignment and they focus on lessons learned in a foreign country for nursing students in the US.

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