

Case Study Title: *Making Epistemology Engaging: Use of Photovoice in Teaching Research Methods*

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Subject area: *Social Psychology and Qualitative Research Methods*

Programme/Course: *MSc Qualitative Approaches to Psychology – all psychology MSc courses take this module*

Module/Unit:

SCQF Level: 11

Assessment Name: Photovoice Epistemological Perspective

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1. How would you summarise your practice case study?

Students take 5 photographs to depict their own epistemological perspective. They caption each photograph and write one short, 200 word summary which contextualises their photographs with their perspective. This helps to reduce language barriers, facilitates inclusion and allows diverse and creative ways to communicate really wordy philosophical constructs. It is also an authentic engagement with the student's own lived experience and making that salient within the assessment. Visual storytelling can be a very empowering and equitable assessment, allowing students to show how they understand and not just how they might explain it in written English.

2. Why did you develop or enhance your assessment and what was your rationale?

How do we teach complex epistemology to a diverse cohort without privileging fluent academic English? My classes comprise students from round the world, often up to 75% of the class. I have students studying to be professional health psychologists alongside students taking a psychology conversion course with no methodological or scientific training. I was aware that the previous assignment was potentially disadvantaging to some students and I really wanted to address that. I also wanted to allow creativity and freedom of expression in my class.

3. What enhancements or changes did you implement in assessment in making this more innovative, diverse or inclusive of diverse learner cohorts?

I wanted to make learning epistemology more fun. We practice photovoice in class with a padlet exercise and I ensure they understand the method, the ethical premise, and how to approach consent during the class. It is a method we have used in research with autistic adults and I highlight it's role in depicting chronic pain and disability experience. By also emphasising the role of creative methods in tackling epistemic injustice, I hoped to encourage a range of students that their preferences and experiences were being catered for, and that our focus on 'ways of knowing' in class, and who is often excluded from published literature, might help students find their own voices, and be inspired to 'speak up' if they felt able.

4. What informed your approach to the changes you made, e.g. student feedback, observations of student difficulty, insights from literature or research findings, assessment pass rates etc.?

Mostly it was driven by a rise in academic misconduct cases and over-reliance upon AI. I was tired of receiving generic assessments focusing on very old texts like Dewey. I knew these were AI generated, and I wanted to make the assignment personal to inspire students not to take the 'easy' option but to really engage with who they were and how they saw the world, and that their perspective is unique, valid, and important.

5. What key changes have you seen as a result of this change to your assessment practice?

A significant reduction in academic misconduct cases, increases in students recommending the module and reporting feeling included. Students also began articulating that they liked epistemology, they found it challenging but rewarding to engage with.

6. How are you evaluating the effectiveness of these enhancements or changes implemented?

Several students wrote to me to express their gratitude for the opportunity, one example: "The thing that has been the biggest help has been that the first term had this photovoice project. I find your approach to teaching very accessible and stimulating. I am someone who learns through doing as much as listening and reading, kinaesthetic learner I think they call it." Also increased satisfaction in evaluations and specifically increases in perception of support and inclusion.

a. Tips for practitioners:

My social psychology module will incorporate photovoice as a group assignment, students are tasked with depicting either stigma, prejudice, or discrimination of themselves, or others. Their images will be shared in an exhibition in our campus central. Publicly addressing societal issues and harms in an educational context can really help students to feel we are motivated to support them. And that we recognise their struggles.

Allowing creativity and expression does not need to reduce academic scholarship. Rather, the opposite. Having tiny word counts and complex ideas really is taxing for students to portray cohesively and well. Students really must know what their epistemological perspective is, before they can capture it in a photograph.

Having comprehensive rubrics which emphasise that whilst creativity is encouraged, it is not directly evaluated in terms of aesthetics. It is the meaning making which is graded. And the comprehension of the topics (whatever they are). For example:

My Photographs (meaning, not aesthetics)

My photographs should show how I understand or experience the world.

Together, the five images should be connected by a clear idea or viewpoint, expressing my epistemological perspective.

They should encourage thought or questioning rather than simply showing something obvious.

Someone else looking at them should be able to sense that they reflect a particular way of seeing or knowing.

I should be focusing on meaning rather than how visually impressive the images are.