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ARTICLE

Using Photovoice as a Critical Pedagogical Tool in Online Discussions

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Abstract

*Anthropology classrooms challenge instructors to critically engage students in theories of the field and how these are visible in everyday life. At the same time, the rise of online education has made new technologies and tools available that allow for the design of innovative pedagogical strategies. This article considers the use of photovoice, a feminist ethnographic research method, as a classroom strategy in an online discussion in an introductory linguistic anthropology course that was taught in a variety of modalities. We explore the students' products, photographs representing the course concept of performativity, as well as accompanying discussion posts, in order to gauge the effectiveness of the activity. Specifically, we analyze students' photos and related discussion posts to answer the following question: In what ways did photovoice as a pedagogical strategy illuminate students' knowledge about the concept of performativity? We discuss how photovoice provides a window into student learning and consider the teaching strategy's potential for facilitating concept mastery and relating course concepts to lived experience. Finally, we present some recommendations to fellow anthropology educators interested in implementing this activity. **Content warning:** This article contains an image of a combat zone and blood that some may find disturbing or distressing.*

Keywords: *photovoice; performativity; linguistic anthropology; critical pedagogy; online discussions; online education; feminist pedagogy*

Introduction

A persistent challenge in anthropology classrooms is the design of pedagogical strategies that encourage college students to critically engage with key concepts and theories in the field. At the same time, online education has risen to prominence in recent years, hailed as a way of making higher education accessible to populations which have not typically had access. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic made online teaching ubiquitous. This seemingly unstoppable growth of online education, accelerated further by the COVID-19 crisis, has created a spillover effect, as more and more instructors rely

on online technologies for instruction across modalities. Anthropology departments have not been an exception in this trend. At the University of Central Florida (UCF), students enrolled in the anthropology major are likely to take courses across a variety of modalities, including face-to-face (F2F), blended (M, or Mixed-mode), and fully online (W, or Web). When teaching a particular course, creating effective assignments that translate across modalities presents a unique challenge. How does one facilitate experiences that elicit the kind of learning we want to see in our students, regardless of the class setting in which they learn? This article explores the use of the photovoice method to frame an online discussion assignment in an undergraduate linguistic anthropology course, *Language and Culture*. Specifically, we analyze students' photos and related discussion posts across different teaching modalities to answer the following question: In what ways did photovoice as a pedagogical strategy illuminate anthropology students' knowledge about the concept of performativity?

Introductory courses in anthropology typically convey that there are multiple perspectives and ways of understanding social phenomena. Anthropology instructors encourage students to be critical, inquisitive, and open-minded. In cultural and linguistic anthropology, students are often exposed to alternative ways of thinking and being-in-the-world that challenge their own assumptions. We seek to guide students towards associating course concepts and ideas with their own lives, as well as to widening their perspectives through interactions with other students.

In the 21st century, various technologies have come to occupy a central place in the everyday lives of most US college students. One such technology is the ubiquitous smartphone and its built-in camera. It is not surprising that today's college students have been called "The Selfie Generation" (Elers 2017). A large-scale survey of students at the UCF revealed that over 99.8% of survey respondents reported owning a smartphone (Seilhamer 2018). The widespread presence of cameras in everyday life presents new challenges along with opportunities for new ways of teaching and learning (and doing) anthropology.

Photovoice

The photovoice method was originally a social justice strategy in which a community of people take photos that relate to a certain topic. The meanings given to the photos by the community are the central part of the photovoice experience, usually generated through text captions as well as discussion. Put simply, it allows people to photograph and give collective meaning to their realities (Wang 1999). As a social justice strategy, influencing policy is one of the underlying goals. The photovoice method has also been used as a participatory action research strategy, as it inherently invites people to take the lead in their own inquiry, in relation to their lived experiences (Cornell and Kessi 2017; Sitter 2017). Because of its foundations in social justice and participatory action research,

it can be considered a feminist ethnographic method (Davis and Craven 2016; Wang and Burris 1997).

Although not explicitly a social justice endeavor, a pedagogical approach shares some of the same goals, namely the promotion of critical dialogue about community and individual issues through discussion of community-created photos (Wang 1999). Ultimately, photovoice allows learners' experiences and identities to be recognized, and learning takes place through these experiences and identities. Extending this method to higher education settings has become more easily realized with the rise of mobile devices, photo-sharing applications, and social media.

Online Discussions

The online discussion forum is one of the most utilized tools in higher education across all teaching modalities. However, without careful design thinking, online discussions can easily be seen by students as "busy work." Typically, the instructor creates a discussion prompt as well as the parameters for students to discuss and make their work visible. Most critical to the success of an online discussion is not the tool itself, but what the students are actually doing within the discussion, why they are doing it, and who they are doing it with (Milanes and deNoyelles 2014). Photovoice is one way to empower students to direct the flow of the discussion because their content is the discussion. They are able to interpret and apply their understanding of course concepts within the class community in a creative, personal way.

Photovoice has been found to be effective in supporting students to actively demonstrate their understanding of anthropology concepts (Pfister and Wilson 2016). In an earlier publication, we shared that students found the photovoice method effective within the online discussion environment in several ways (Reyes-Foster and deNoyelles 2018). First, most students agreed that taking and sharing photos as well as generating interpretations prompted them to relate their experience of the world to the course content (the concept of performativity, specifically). Looking at others' photos prompted them to consider alternative ways to conceive of course concepts, essentially understanding others' realities. Students agreed that interpreting the photos their peers had posted made them feel more engaged in the activity, and it promoted interactions with each other. Sharing photos facilitated a dynamic connection among students often not often realized in an online discussion, which continues to be largely text-dominated.

In this article, we seek to understand photovoice's potential for facilitating concept mastery and relating course concepts to lived experience, as facilitated by the online discussion tool. To this end, we present a typology of photos submitted by students enrolled over three semesters and two teaching modalities. Rather than analyzing the content of the photos themselves, we analyze the types of photos submitted, how these photos are interpreted by students, and how they reflect concept mastery and facilitate

communication among students. Finally, we present some recommendations to other anthropology educators interested in implementing a similar activity.

Methods

Context and Participants

The University of Central Florida (UCF) is a large metropolitan state university in Orlando, Florida. Recently designated a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) by the U.S. Department of Education,¹ UCF is one of the largest institutions of higher education in the country, with a total student population of over 68,000. The student body is socioeconomically and ethnically diverse. Over 50% of enrolled students are community college transfers. A great number of students are first-generation college students and the institution also serves a sizable number of students with veteran status or who are currently serving in the military. The institution is on track to become a “majority-minority” institution² in the next five years with a minority student population of 47%. Many students are considered “non-traditional” – they are older than typical college students (18-22 years), they tend to work part- or full-time, and many are supporting families. The recent growth in student enrollment can be largely attributed to the university’s robust online offerings; 29% of all Spring 2020 courses (which began before restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic were implemented) were offered in an online-mediated modality. The Department of Anthropology offers an online-only major alongside its on-campus major³ and most of the growth in enrollment for the department has been taking place in its online courses. Anthropology faculty at UCF work with a student population that is highly diverse in age, socioeconomic status, and race and ethnicity, and instructors are often challenged with creating rich learning experiences in classes across teaching modalities that encourage students to meaningfully interact with the content as well as each other.

Beatriz Reyes-Foster joined the UCF Department of Anthropology in Fall 2011 and taught *Language and Culture* every semester (Fall, Spring, and Summer) from Fall 2011 through Fall 2017. Although she is not a linguistic anthropologist, she had a background in linguistic anthropology through undergraduate and graduate coursework. Aimee deNoyelles also joined UCF in Fall 2011 as an Instructional Designer. Instructional Designers serve as consultants to faculty, assisting them in developing pedagogically sound online-mediated learning experiences. UCF faculty charged with designing and

¹ An HSI is a not-for-profit institution of higher learning with a full-time equivalent undergraduate student enrollment that is at least 25% Hispanic.

² A majority-minority institution is one where the majority of the student body belongs to a traditionally under-represented group in higher education.

³ The online course offerings for the online major and the on-campus major are identical. On-campus students typically enroll in a mix of F2F, M-mode, and W courses. From an instructor’s perspective, it is impossible to know which students are enrolled in the online major and which are not.

facilitating online courses complete a semester-long training course and are paired with an Instructional Designer. Reyes-Foster and deNoyelles were paired in this manner and quickly developed a productive research relationship (see deNoyelles and Reyes-Foster 2015; Reyes-Foster and deNoyelles 2016; Reyes-Foster and deNoyelles 2018). Aimee deNoyelles has a background in feminist research methods in online environments. The authors co-created the class activity profiled in this article as part of their collaborative working relationship.

Description of Photovoice Activity

The assignment described here was used in *Language and Culture*, an upper-division linguistic anthropology course required of anthropology majors at the University of Central Florida, taught by Beatriz Reyes-Foster. This course also satisfies requirements in an array of other majors, minors, and certificates. It is offered every semester (Fall, Spring, and Summer) in either a blended or fully online modality. Students in the blended modality meet twice a week in addition to engaging in online coursework. Enrollment fluctuates from 70-150 students, depending on semester and modality.

This course uses Laura Ahearn's *Living Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology* (2017). Ahearn's book takes an accessible, sociolinguistic approach to linguistic anthropology grounded in four key concepts: multifunctionality, practice, language ideologies, and indexicality. The text introduces various aspects of the subfield (research methodologies, deictics, language acquisition, multilingualism, literacy, gendered and racialized aspects of language, and language death, among others) using the four key concepts as a common thread throughout.

For the assignment explored in this article, the concepts covered were performance and performativity in linguistic anthropology. Ahearn's approach (2017, 177-190) introduces three distinct definitions of performance: 1) performance defined in opposition to competence (Chomsky 1965); 2) performativity as the ability of utterances to do something merely by virtue of being said (Austin 1975; Searle 1976), an approach further developed into concepts such as gender performativity (Butler 1999); and 3) performance as verbal artistry, events in which performers display special skills for an audience that evaluates them (in other words, "traditional" performances such as theater, storytelling, songfests, etc.) (Bauman and Briggs 1990). Students were expected to learn Ahearn's approach in order to demonstrate concept mastery in the assignment presented in this article.

Students in both online and blended versions of this course completed alternating biweekly quizzes and online graded discussions, as well as one written assignment and two exams (a midterm and a final). The online discussions were worth 40% of the students' final grades. Discussion prompts were designed to encourage critical thinking and engagement among students. To create the feel of a smaller classroom, students were evenly divided into groups of 7-10. These groups remained consistent throughout

the semester to encourage students to get to know each other. The photovoice discussion took place after the halfway point of the semester.

The purpose of this particular discussion was for students to demonstrate concept mastery by connecting the material being presented, specifically performance and performativity, to their own lived experiences as well as those of other students in the class. These topics had been challenging in prior semesters, as students often expressed confusion over the different theories of performance and performativity. Student work in prior versions of the discussion for this unit, which mimicked “conventional” discussion prompts in which students were asked a question about the course material, had been disappointing. Student work either did not demonstrate concept mastery or responses were superficial and did not reflect engagement with the text or concepts. Student responses resembled monologues, with minimal communication between students in their groups.

The problems with the original discussion assignment were likely a function of the discussion prompt itself, which tasked students with combining a different unit on literacy with performance. The original prompt read: “In your original post, due FRIDAY, give an example of a literacy practice or a literacy event from your own life experience. Using one of the theories of performance from Ahearn’s chapter 8, explain how your example could be considered a performance. Be sure to explain which theory of performance you are choosing and why your application of this theory is appropriate.” Although modifying the original discussion prompt to ask another question about the course concepts may have resulted in an improvement, when deNoyelles suggested implementing photovoice as a teaching strategy, Reyes-Foster agreed that this option was the best fit. The goal of the discussion assignment was to help students better understand the concepts taught by applying them to something tangible in their everyday lives. Secondary goals were to challenge the students to think about the subject matter in a new way, for the students to be creative and enjoy the assignment, and to subtly encourage student interaction and engagement with one another. Photovoice could achieve all these goals.

The authors drafted the photovoice discussion assignment prompt together (see Table 1) and it was implemented for the first time in a summer course in 2015. During this initial run, which was not intended to be included in SoTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) research, the assignment was quite successful. We assessed this success based on both the quality of the work submitted as well as through extemporaneous student feedback, with several students mentioning how much they had enjoyed the assignment in their student perception of instruction responses at the end of the semester. Based on this experience, Reyes-Foster decided to make the strategy a permanent feature of the course, and the authors decided to initiate research to track the strategy’s effectiveness over time and across modalities.

Table 1. Assignment Instructions

Introduction

“Photovoice” is a research method in which people express their points of view or communities by photographing scenes that highlight certain themes – then the photographs are interpreted in the community. At the end, we have this nice collection of photos that represent certain themes.

This week, we have spent a lot of time talking about performance and performativity. For this discussion, I want you to think outside the box.

Take a Photo

Using your cell phone or camera, take a photo of a performance – remember, our definition of “performance” is very broad, so this can be a display of identity, a speech, or a particular event. **YOU MUST TAKE THE PHOTO YOURSELF**; photos from the internet will not be accepted.

Discussion Parts

There are THREE parts to this discussion. Please note the due dates for these below.

- PART 1 (For WEDNESDAY):
 - a. Post the photo to the discussion board using the options described below. Do NOT include an interpretation of the photo; simply post it.
 - b. There are three different ways to upload the photo to the discussion board. [Detailed instructions for uploading a photo were included.]
- PART 2 (For FRIDAY)
 - a. Choose one of your fellow group member’s photos and write a 100-200-word response, interpreting the photo (note: select someone who has not gotten a response yet). What is the photo of? How do you consider it to be a performance? How do the concepts of performance, performativity (including the performativity of gender), and performance as display of verbal artistry help us interpret this photo?
- PART 3 (For TUESDAY)
 - a. Respond to the reaction your peer(s) posted about your photo in less than 100 words. First, reveal the concept you were originally trying to illustrate. Then, reflect on whether the peer(s) was right on target or what you saw that was different.
 - b. Respond to the feedback survey.

Students were evaluated using a grading rubric created by Reyes-Foster. First, photos were evaluated simply on whether or not they appeared to be the original product of the student. This was done by assessing whether or not the photo could be found through a Google image search. Second, the assignment graders (usually Reyes-Foster and a graduate teaching assistant) evaluated whether all three required components of the assignment – a photo, an interpretation of a peer’s photo, and a response to peer interpretations of the student’s own photo – were present. Third, concept mastery was evaluated. Because “performance” as it is taught in the course is a broad conceptual category, students were graded based on their interpretation of others’ photos (Part 2, as mentioned in Table 1). In other words, students were evaluated on whether they clearly connected the photo to one of the three definitions of performance/performativity as outlined above and explained, with clear references to course materials, how the photo exemplified that particular definition of performance/performativity. The grading criteria evaluated whether concepts were properly applied in the interpretation, as well as whether individual posts clearly referenced course concepts and materials.

This study was approved by the UCF Institutional Review Board (protocol #SBE-16-11917) and data collection began in Spring 2016. In order to participate in the study, students had to opt-in by contacting Aimee deNoyelles. Students who enrolled in the study consented to having their photos and discussion posts used for the purposes of this research. All students in the course completed the assignment, but we only include the work of students who enrolled in the study in our analysis. Students received extra credit (a 3% boost to their final grade) as compensation for participating in the study. Students who did not wish to participate but who wished to take advantage of the extra credit opportunity were offered a short assignment they could complete in lieu of participating in the study. No student took advantage of this opportunity. Table 2 presents the semester and year, modality, total student enrollment, and participation rate in the study.

Table 2. Context and Study Participants

Semester/Year	Modality	Total Enrollment	Participation in Study
Spring 2016	Fully online	135	65 (48%)
Fall 2016	Blended	68	20 (29%)
Spring 2017	Fully online	141	55 (39%)

After the photovoice discussion concluded, students who participated in the study were surveyed about their experience and perceptions of their own learning.⁴ Students

⁴ Results from the survey and an in-depth analysis are presented in Reyes-Foster and deNoyelles 2018. A discussion of the survey and its results is outside of the scope of this article.

rated items about authentic learning, student interaction, and satisfaction highly. Photos were downloaded and assigned identifying numbers. A total of 111 photos were collected over three semesters. Selected discussion posts associated with the photos were screened to ensure they had been written by study participants. These posts were given identifying numbers to associate them with particular photos and then were pasted into a Word document.

Analytical Strategy

We used a dialogical, collaborative analytical strategy informed by grounded theory and feminist ethnography to develop a typology of the photos (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Davis and Craven 2016). Once the photos had been analyzed, we then analyzed peer interpretations of the photos. Finally, we considered the student-to-student interactions that took place in response to the photos submitted. This approach allowed us to consider how the photovoice strategy illuminated student understandings of the course concepts of performance and performativity, as well as student interaction with the material and each other.

We developed an iterative analytical approach based on previous research (Reyes-Foster and deNoyelles 2016). First, we came together to look through all of the photos. To facilitate analysis, we created a private Flickr group. During the initial session, we looked through the photos together and identified a list of preliminary codes based on our initial impressions of the photos (for example, "person," "interaction," and "signs and objects"). We coded one semester's photos (photos 1-22) together and agreed to each code the photos from one other semester separately. We created a shared Google spreadsheet with the preliminary codes and agreed to enter new codes as they arose, if necessary. After this initial round of coding, we came together to compare our codes and added some new ones ("relationship/connectedness") that emerged through the coding process. Once we agreed on a final list of codes, we went back and re-coded the photos with the new codes in mind. At our subsequent meeting, we compared our codes to ensure inter-rater reliability (i.e., that we both generally agreed on the codes assigned to particular photos). We differentiated between "descriptive" codes (codes which referenced a particular characteristic of the photo) and "meaning" codes (codes which elicited an interpretation of the meaning of the photo by the authors) (Table 3).

Once we agreed on codes, each author coded independently, and we came back together to compare results and reach agreement. We identified themes that emerged through the types and frequencies of codes as they pertained to our question: In what ways did the photovoice discussion as a pedagogical strategy illuminate students' knowledge about the concept of performativity?

Table 3. Descriptive and Meaning Codes

Descriptive Codes	Meaning Codes
Person	Cultural references
Person/group	Relationships
Animal	Emplacement
Signs and Objects	Performances
Posing	Family
Hand gestures	
Theme parks	
Edited	

Results

We developed a typology, identifying four overarching types of images emerging from the sample of photos: (1) performances, (2) cultural references, (3) relationships, and (4) emplacement. In this section, after describing the basic characteristics of the sample, we showcase examples of student work illustrating each type (Part 1 of the activity as noted in Table 1), including peer interpretations (Part 2 of the activity), and student responses to peers (Part 3 of the activity). We then present an analysis of the students' work for each type. At the time when we obtained IRB approval, we were not required or advised to have students who participated in the study sign releases giving us permission to use their images and posts in future publications. As we discuss below, at the time of publication, we had to retroactively obtain signed releases to publish images and posts. Where we were unable to obtain said release, we have replaced some images with descriptive texts and paraphrased some discussion posts.

Basic Characteristics

Before attempting to identify complex themes, we found it helpful to first note the basic characteristics of the photos (Table 4). We found that people were featured in most photos. 84% featured at least one person; of these, more than one person was featured 76% of the time. 73% of photos that contained two or more people also exemplified some semblance of personal interaction. We found it interesting that 23% of the photos prominently featured an inanimate object, such as a sign. This certainly showcases the complex meaning of performativity as found in students' everyday lives.

Table 4. Basic Descriptors

Code	Description	Percentage
Individual Person	One person is featured.	24%
Person in Group	Two or more people are featured.	76%
Interacting	At least two people are interacting with each other.	58%
Posing	At least one person is making a movement with their body because of their awareness of the photo being taken.	25%
Signage & Objects	A sign or object is a focal point in the photo.	23%

Performances

Given that the topic of study in this unit was performance, it is not surprising that 48 out of 111 students (43%) took photographs of events easily recognizable as performances in what Ahearn describes as “performance as a display of verbal artistry” (2017, 187-188). These performances are defined as containing the following elements: 1) presence of an audience, 2) involves heightened attention, and 3) framing (the performance has a clear beginning, middle, and end). Such performances usually involve an individual or group of individuals carrying out a preplanned action in front of an audience who are there to see them. Students’ photos included musical, dance, and theatrical performances as well as political speeches, sporting events, and academic events. Out of 48 of the photos we coded as “performance,” 23 (47%) were of musical performances in a variety of different venues. Because one of the semesters in the study covered the 2016 presidential election and because UCF is a large university located in a key battleground state, it was not surprising to see photos of political speeches by President Barack Obama and candidate Donald Trump at election rallies on campus.

Example: “Rock Concert” (original photo not available)

Text Description: The photo features an outdoor rock concert at nighttime. The person taking the photo is in the middle of a crowd of people, so we see the backs of people, arms up in the air. The singer, a white-appearing man, is visible, although far away, and his arm is extended in the air. There are three other white-appearing men on stage – two with guitars, one behind drums. There are circular bright lights around the stage and a banner on top of the stage that says “NOW.”

Part 2 (Peer Interpretation): I would describe this photo as performance because it's showing a band performing a concert for an audience. This photo is depicting a performance as a display of verbal artistry because it showcases the performers (band members), the audience, and involves the heightened attention to how something is said. In this case, the people are attending to listen to how the lyrics are being sung in the band's songs. Performances are interwoven with social relations of power and often enables the performers to have substantial influence of the audience members (Ahearn 2017, 174). This influence can be seen in the photo due to how the audience are all raising their arms in the air in response to how the performers provoke interaction and emotions such as excitement and happiness in the crowd.

Part 3 (Student Response to Peer) [paraphrased]: The student who took the photo responds to the peer, agreeing that it's a performance since members of a band are performing on stage, and notes the inclusion of an audience to witness it. They cite Ahearn, recognizing the social relations in the photo, with the band having influence over the audience with their actions.

Example: "Presidential Campaign Rally" (Figure 1)



Figure 1. Presidential Campaign Rally

In this photo, Barack Obama stands at a podium behind posters for Clinton/Kaine. He is surrounded by a crowd of people, many of whom are holding signs or have cell phones and cameras raised.

Part 2 (Peer Interpretation) [paraphrased]: The student who chose to interpret this photo expressed delight (using the word “excellent” and exclamation points) that the student who took the photo was able to attend a Clinton/Kaine campaign rally and see then-President Obama. The student applied Austin’s concept of performativity to argue that Obama’s speech “does” something and is thus perlocutive. They then interpreted Obama’s speech as a display of visual artistry because of the emotional effects the speech would have on his audience.

Part 3 (Student Response to Peer): Thanks for your comment [student name]! I originally posted this photo to show the interaction between the crowd and speaker as part of the performance, and I think you hit it right on the money! He was using persuasive speech and I think your description of it as a visual artistry is perfect. You can feel the energy in the room through the photo and I think that is always a good sign of the performance that is taking place.

Analysis of “Performances”

In the initial photo described, which portrays a musical concert, the student responding to the original post connects the photo to the notion of performance as a display of verbal artistry. Notably, the student contextualizes their analysis by referencing the course text. While the original poster in Part 3 does reference the definition of performance as a display of verbal artistry, the response is procedural and does not add anything to the conversation. In the second example of the presidential campaign rally (Figure 1), the responding student interacts with the post, using positive affirmation language such as “excellent” and through their use of exclamation points to convey enthusiasm for the post author’s choice of attending a political rally and using this photo for their assignment. Moreover, the student’s analysis engages with the topics covered in the module, most notably Austin’s model of language performativity and, separately, the notion of performance as verbal artistry. The post author’s response is, again, somewhat muted, merely offering positive affirmation to the response without further engaging. While the original poster comments on the response’s analysis of verbal artistry, the student does not engage with the response’s analysis using Austin’s performativity theory.

Cultural References

Over half (54%) of the photos were assigned the complex code of “cultural reference.” Sub-codes emerged such as wedding, sports, celebration, non-western or “ethnic” dress, holiday, and church. 25% of the “cultural reference” photos also carried

the sub-code “political.” While most of the political references featured people as focal points, there were a couple that featured photos of messages instead.



Figure 2. Vote Peace Not Hate

Example: “Vote Peace Not Hate” (Figure 2)

This photo features a smiling young woman at some sort of rally as she holds a sign which says, “Vote peace, not hate.” Another student who is attempting to interpret the photo, writes:

Part 2 (Peer Interpretation): This photo looks like it is of a protest against negativity and hatefulness. It is a performance because the people are using language on their signs in order to convey the message of spreading love instead of spreading hate. I also infer that the people at the rally are probably using verbal language in addition to the language on the signs. The statement on the sign “vote peace not hate” is performative in itself because it is a statement of action instead of a simple statement of fact. The function of this statement is to get people to vote for someone who stands for peace; other functions can be implied by looking at the photo as well.

Part 3 (Student Response to Peer): The photo for me was trying to display how performance is used to express ideas and to take a stand against ideas that one may not agree with. The performance in this photo was intended to be positive and to influence the ideas of others. I agree with the response and that the sign itself is performative.



Figure 3. Capitalism is Killing the Planet

Example: "Capitalism is Killing the Planet" (Figure 3)

This was one of the few photos that did not feature a person or any other living thing (some of the photos featured animals). It is a photo of a wall of some kind with the crudely etched message, "Capitalism is killing the planet."

Part 2 (Peer Interpretation): I love this photo! The photo speaks for itself since the words explicitly say what the overall message is trying to convey. The person who etched this on the sidewalk was attempting, in an artistic way, to share their personal political insight to passersby. I think the purpose of the creator's idea was for people to see this artistic vandalism at a time they were not expecting, walking down the street, or wherever this may be, and reflect on our own opinions of our capitalistic country and world. Hopefully many reflected upon

their own personal imprints and place in this particular economic or political system. This is most closely related to performance as a display of verbal artistry, though it is written instead of spoken, because it is meant to make you feel something or to think and reflect.

Part 3 (Student Response to Peer): I think you were right on target in your response! This photo, taken on the steps to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, is an example of a performance. As you stated, the etched words are a form [of] non-verbal performance; however, one can still consider it a form of verbal artistry, seeing that it invokes a subjective reaction from its audience. While the individual letters themselves mean almost nothing, when placed together, in the setting that they were, this collection of five words then take on an identity of their own, with the meaning contingent upon the onlooker.

Analysis of "Cultural References"

These two examples showcase students' nuanced perceptions of performativity. In the example with the sign (Figure 3), the student's intention focuses more on the content of the message rather than taking a step back and relating performativity to the message. It appears that the responding student's comments encouraged her to think about how the sign itself is performative, going a bit beyond thinking about her personal involvement as the performance. This interaction showcases a growth opportunity for students to deepen their understanding of the concepts. The "capitalism" photo (Figure 4) stretches the concept of performance, showing that it can be both non-verbal and lacking a direct human presence. The importance of audience, which students learn is a key element of performance as verbal artistry, is referenced here, clearly establishing a connection between the photo and course concepts.

Relationships

Of the 111 photos, 15 were coded with the term "relationship." "Relationship" photographs generally conveyed some element of interaction between two or more people. The particular context determined whether they were coded as "relationship" or not. A photo of a large party was not coded as relationship, even though it's presumed the people have relationships within the group. Rather, photos that specifically conveyed a sense of relationship were coded as such. Of the 15 photos coded in this way, 13 were further sub-coded as exhibiting "connectedness." These photos displayed at least two people who were interacting on a level which suggests mutual involvement. Of these photos, 5 were from weddings.



Figure 4. School Project

Example: “School Project” (Figure 4)

One of the photos coded for “relationship” is of two young men standing near each other, seemingly engaged in a project which involves a video camera.

Part 2 (Peer Interpretation) [paraphrased]: A peer interpreting this photo first describes what they see – two “boys” shooting some kind of video footage near a pond in perhaps a gated residential area. They guess that the boys are working on some kind of focused project, since they are holding papers in their hand. They think it’s a performance because they are literally video recording something that is intended for an audience, and the boys are giving significant attention to how it unfolds.

Part 3 (Student Response to Peer): I love how spot-on you were about the location and the interpretation of the photo. I am happy that you were able to figure out that the performance was focused on verbal artistry. Your interpretation is exactly why I used the photo for the discussion. Both guys have to pay close attention to how the actors act and have to speak to them a certain way in order for the actors to understand what they mean and so they can listen to their directions.

Example: “Older Ladies in a Photo Booth” (original photo not available)

Text Description: This photo contains five white-appearing women, all of whom appear to be in their 50s or 60s, in a temporary photo booth. One of the women, located in the front left corner, is moving and her image is blurred, though the viewer can make out what appears to be a red cat ear headband. Center front is

a woman wearing a black t-shirt, over-sized prop glasses, and a small purple prop hat. Behind her and to the right stands a woman wearing a tiny hat and sunglasses, holding a sign pointing at her which says, "I'm with stupid." The woman directly behind her is wearing a messy black wig and red-tinted glasses; she is also holding a sign pointing to the woman in the center front, which is hidden and illegible but ends in "ngle" ("single," perhaps?). Finally, behind and to the left, another woman wearing a hat with beads falling along her face holds two signs: one reads, "Someone alert the paparazzi!" and the other points at the woman in the center front and says "hoe." The five women appear to be looking in one direction away from the camera and stand in front of a wood panel wall. The image was coded as "relationship" since the viewer could surmise that the women made the conscious decision to get together and commemorate the moment. The signs ("I'm with Stupid") were also quite playful, indicating a level of comfort with each other.

Part 2 (Peer Interpretation): Your photo really stood out to me, [student name]. It was definitely a performance, and it encompassed specific symbolic statements using language. The first thing that struck me is its qualities as a performance: everyone was dressed up, posing, holding certain signs in the frame of the shot, and using their faces to communicate, intentionally, their feelings. The other thing that struck me right away was the fact that they were all older ladies (at least as far as I could tell). I felt this photo was a good representation of "performance as display of verbal artistry" that Ahearn refers to (2017, 172). The theatrical nature of the act, combined with the language play in the signs shows a very intentional invocation of audience to construct that performance along with the actors in it "as co-performers" (Duranti and Brenneis 1986, quoted in Ahearn 2017, 171). Also the statements on the signs are culturally situated and presuppose that the audience will interpret them in a certain frame. The statement "I'm with stupid" for example, might not be understood the same by someone outside the cultural context of the United States, who might take it as something of an insult. This also demonstrates the socially constructed nature of language and even interpretation of performance. Look forward to reading your explanation!

Part 3 (Student Response) [paraphrased]: The student who took the photo responded to the peer interpretation, explaining that she and her sisters did not have a real plan going into the photo booth; they were just having a good time at her nephew's wedding. The sisters don't often socialize together much, so they thought it was a good opportunity to take a picture of it. She confirms the ages of the people in the photo ("late 40s to 60s").

Analysis of “Relationships”

These photos demonstrated that students’ concept of performance involved not just a level of interaction between people, but a relationship bond as well. In the “School Project” photo (Figure 4), the image showcases a relationship that appears to be built around a particular goal. The student responding to this photo notes a socioeconomic cue when they describe the image as being taken “in a gated community perhaps, or just a suburb.” The analysis itself occurs at a surface-level, as the student’s engagement with the photo satisfies a minimum of the prompt and does not explore other dimensions of performance or performativity in depth. The photographer’s response, while offering praise, merely echoes the analysis without adding anything new or even offering an explanation of the image. The photo booth picture showcases a familial relationship with certain expressions of intimacy, such as the person with sunglasses holding an “I’m with stupid” arrow. The student responding to the image in Part 2 notes that the women in the image are engaged as “co-performers,” using their faces to communicate feeling. This particular analysis thoroughly engages with course materials to describe performance in a multidimensional way. The student’s choice to submit this image speaks to an understanding of relationality as performance, though unfortunately the student’s explanation of her choice of the photo falls flat in Part 3. These photos showcase the importance of relationships for students’ lived experiences. They illustrate unique bonds and touch on an important aspect of performance and performativity that unfortunately often goes under-discussed in class: the way these concepts can be used to understand how social bonds are made, strengthened, and maintained.

Emplacement

Although we only coded 11 photos with “emplacement,” this was one of the most compelling themes that emerged from students’ photos. “Emplacement” photographs were photographs of places that invited the viewer to experience the space in an intentional way. For example, Figure 5 shows the university reflection pond carpeted with a layer of plastic bottles. The photo is compelling because of the angle at which it is taken and the content of the photo. The plastic bottles are cut off, making it appear as though they continue beyond the photo’s frame. To those of us familiar with the reflection pond, the photo of plastic bottles littering what is usually a carefully curated university location is jarring. Without knowing anything about it, we surmised that the photo was taken at an event seeking to bring awareness of the environmental challenges of plastics.



Figure 5. Plastic at the Reflection Pond

Example: "Plastic at the Reflection Pond" (Figure 5)

Part 2 (Peer Interpretation) [Paraphrased]: The student who responded to this image first expressed wonder at the photo ("your photo is incredibly interesting!") and then guessed that it conveyed a message against plastic pollution in oceans. They then argue that the photo is not actually a performance because it does not contain language, but they then note that the act of staging the photo is a performance itself. The student then concludes that the performativity is "low" and "illocution more than anything."

Part 3 (Student Response to Peer): Thank you for sharing! Our book does discuss that verbal artistry of performances does not have to include words, but rather a message. Ahearn also goes on to talk about how an audience is a key factor and a huge number of UCF students walked by this artistic display which was supporting recycling.



Figure 6. Combat Zone

Example: "Combat Zone" (Figure 6)

This photo, which appears to be taken in a combat war zone, was the most striking to us, and it certainly captured the attention of students.

Part 2 (Peer Interpretation): I am captivated by this photo! The performance in the photo is of the soldier (Navy?) who is patrolling the street with his weapon (M16?), and his reaction to the scene is guarded with no distraction, or is intimidated by the scene that he just passed by. The scene has a recent occupation to it with evidence of the "stains." This is probably why we do not see anyone else in the photo. Looking closer at the photo, there are so many different layers that add to the verbal artistry. My eyes go to the two vehicles, I could be wrong but a story surrounds them. This photo definitely tells a story, I can't wait for you to explain!

Part 3 (Student Response to Peer): The individual patrolling is actually an Iraqi Federal Police Officer. I was in a sniper's nest for a few days observing the pilgrimage route to Karbala for the Arba'een. Our team had trained this particular unit and this individual trained under my shooter/spotter team. Two hours prior to this photo, the white car parked and pretended to be broken down. When a group of pilgrims came to aid, the blue car pulled up to the other side and six individuals climbed out and started unloading weapons and the individuals in the white car began to open fire on the pilgrims. Fortunately, this individual, my team, and another squad of Federal Police Officers stopped a mass casualty event. Two pilgrims received minor gunshot wounds which were treated at the scene then released, seven militants were killed at the scene, and the street was quickly secured so that the remaining pilgrims could continue their journey. The

message I was trying to portray was the ability for two military units, completely foreign to each other, could rise above their differences and make a major cultural event for the host country a safer place for everyone by working as one.

Analysis of “Emplacement”

While Figure 6 is compelling because of its subject matter, it appears to present a missed opportunity, as neither post fully connects it to the course concepts. By the same token, the two students appear to connect with each other, particularly as the student who writes Part 2 appears engaged in interpreting the photo and is eager to hear the story behind it. In contrast, the response in Part 3 to the photo of the reflection pond (Figure 5) references concepts learned in the textbook, noting the importance of an audience and a message over the need for words. Again, both posts appear to demonstrate student engagement with the photo and each other, but the students actually disagree with each other – the student who is responding in Part 2 argues that the photo is not a performance because “there is no use of language in it.” In Part 3, the student who posted the photo correctly argues that performances can exist outside of speech. By noting that performances “do not have to include words, but rather a message,” the student is demonstrating deeper understanding of the role of speech – and its absence – in social communication. The photovoice method enabled this exchange to occur between students, in a setting where other students could witness and benefit.

Discussion

This research has allowed us to better understand how students apply a concept that is at once abstract and pervasive in daily life through the photovoice method. If we look at the photos students submitted as windows into their lives, what we found was that performance, as they understood it, is perceived in experiences that are immersive, relational, human, interactive, and diverse. Students chose an array of experiences and events to share with others, from political rallies and protests to weddings and embraces. Occasionally, the notions of performance were not what we expected, such as in the photos of crudely written messages or in the photograph of plastic bottles covering the surface of the university’s reflection pond. As the results above demonstrate, photovoice illuminated students’ knowledge about the concept of performativity in several different ways. Whether in a fully online or blended setting, the photos and posts make visible the ways in which students understand the course concepts and achieve concept mastery. In the next pages, we describe how photovoice demonstrates concept mastery. We also discuss how the method builds community inside the classroom and consider the role of the teacher in this activity.

Demonstrating Concept Mastery

The use of photovoice as a pedagogical strategy allowed our students to show, rather than tell, what performance meant for them after learning the concept in class. We found that one of the strengths of this assignment was that it relied on students to create and maintain the discussion, hopefully empowering those who participate. The first part of the assignment gives students control in the creation and selection of the photo. In the second part, the invitation to interpret the photo without any corresponding details invites creativity and frees respondents from the responsibility of being correct or incorrect about the intentions of the photo: they are merely giving a guess. Instead of focusing on the interpretation of the photo, the learner is focused on the concept of performativity and demonstrating their understanding of it.

Using the photovoice method to identify lived instances of the concepts taught in class, students demonstrate varying degrees of understanding the concept of performance and performativity. Although we still observed some of the superficial “great job”-type responses that often appear in online discussions, overall we observed that students engaged with the photos and each other in meaningful ways. The presence of a photo and the invitation to interpret it gives the students who respond an opportunity to engage with course concepts in an open-ended, subjective process. The submitted photos are evidence of the importance of relationships, sociopolitical context, and global concerns such as climate change and warfare. While the photos allow students to share their own sensibilities and how they see course concepts appear “in real life,” the pedagogical approach allows for the creation of a space of engagement between peers.

On a deeper level, it appears that the deep thinking/connection to the course material is mostly happening in Parts 1 and 2 of the discussion, but not as much in Part 3. In Part 1, students have to think about the photo they are submitting. In Part 2, students have to interpret the photo in an active way to draw connections to course content. But Part 3 is really more about affirmation and confirmation rather than any kind of meaningful discussion of course concepts. This shortcoming in Part 3 may be addressed with some modifications to the original prompt; for instance, the students could be asked to describe why they chose the photo and how they think it relates to the concept. Nevertheless, affirmation plays an important role in creating and sustaining online community, which is a critical element for photovoice to be successful.

Building Community

Our initial analysis was intended to create a typology of images submitted by the students as a way of better understanding the usefulness of photovoice as a pedagogical tool for facilitating concept mastery. However, the discussion posts also revealed that photovoice is useful in nurturing a community of learners. We were pleasantly surprised by the words of affirmation that were generated among students in the assignment.

Students often responded enthusiastically to particular photos, leading to what at times could be read as animated conversations in the online setting. The use of positive affirmations such as “your photo really stood out to me,” “I am captivated by this photo!,” “I love how spot on you were,” and “Look forward to reading your explanation!” supports the creation of a supportive learning community. Even when students miss the mark on concept mastery (such as with the “Combat Zone” photo analysis), photovoice appears to strengthen the social connections of the exchange, building trust in the community.

The Role of the Teacher

This assignment illustrated the important role of the teacher as an architect of a learning community. In other words, although Reyes-Foster did not actively participate in the discussion, she created a space and circumstance to facilitate meaningful interaction among the students in her class. In fact, one might argue there is value in staying mostly out of the way when it comes to this particular activity. This method gives the teacher a chance to see how students relate course concepts to their own lives, and it also allows her to identify and address incorrect understandings that might interfere with concept mastery.

In our experience, the teacher’s role became more active once the photos and interpretations had been shared. Reyes-Foster created collages of the photos, which she then shared with the class as a way of debriefing. In the face-to-face setting, Reyes-Foster projected the collage onto the board during the first 20 minutes of class after the assignment had been graded, but before grades were released. Students had an opportunity to react to the images and offer their experience of the assignment. At the end of the conversation, Reyes-Foster asked the students what the different images reflected about the course concepts (performance and performativity). This debriefing was very successful when the class met face-to-face, when students had an opportunity to react simultaneously and discuss their experiences of the assignment. In the online setting, Reyes-Foster shared the collage in a course announcement and enabled the comment feature. Students were encouraged to respond in any way they wanted to the image. Students were not as responsive to this approach as their face-to-face counterparts; however, their online survey responses indicated they enjoyed the assignment (Reyes-Foster and deNoyelles 2016).

Conclusion

This research found that photovoice is a useful pedagogical strategy for assessing student concept mastery as well as building community across teaching modalities. Our findings demonstrate the usefulness of this method to assess concept mastery within an online discussion, and student interactions suggest the assignment encouraged collaborative learning.

Since we initially implemented this strategy, some lessons have been learned. First, it is important to clarify to students that the photo they provide should be taken by them and not be pulled from the internet. It is also useful to encourage students to take “not-so-obvious” photos; perhaps the instructor could start off with a photo of their own or an example from a previous semester. Second, technical guidance should be provided so that the students do not experience difficulties uploading their photos to the online discussion board.

A frequent challenge we encountered was that not all photos elicited Part 2 responses. Sometimes, a student would be unable to complete Part 3 of the assignment because no one had responded to their photo. In order to minimize this occurrence, Reyes-Foster frequently reminded students that everyone in their group needed a response, and she would message individual groups if the submission deadline for Part 2 passed and there were students without responses. Part 3 provides a unique opportunity for students to respond to others’ interpretation of the photo they posted. By including it as a required component of the assignment, it guarantees that every student will have someone directly engage with their contribution to the discussion. This is an important aspect of the activity, as it allows for every student to be visible. The Part 3 response then allows the student to not only have their photo responded to, but also to engage in a dialogic process and speak back. It is important to have a contingency plan for cases like this to ensure every student receives feedback on their photo and has an opportunity to respond.

There are four additional concerns to consider before implementing this strategy and which we have had to address since this data was collected. The first is the need to acknowledge the potential that some photos may be triggering for some students (for instance, photos of combat zones could trigger students who are veterans and other survivors of war). This may be addressed by asking students to consider including trigger warnings with their photos, though it is unclear whether this step is sufficient. Another pertains to the privacy of others. Although photos taken by students technically belong to the student, it is not always feasible for a student to obtain permission from everyone they are photographing prior to sharing their photo with the class. Nevertheless, we should continue to encourage students to seek permission prior to taking the photo and explaining the photo will be used for a class project. This is also an opportunity to discuss research ethics with students.

Next, as we indicated above, we experienced an unexpected hiccup in our publication process related to copyright. When we initially submitted our protocol to our university’s IRB, our research received an “exempt” determination because it did not pose more than minimal risk. This meant that rather than a full signed consent, we were only required to supply our study participants with a study information sheet. The sheet included a stipulation that their photo and discussion posts would be used for research purposes; however, it did not ask students to sign a copyright release to allow for the

publication of their images or words. We had also not required that students obtain written publication permission from people whose likeness appears in the images.

Fortunately, with our IRB's advice and guidance from UCF's legal team, we were able to backtrack and obtain retroactive permission for the posts and images included in this article. In cases where we obtained permission to print a photo but could not locate a person depicted, we blurred their faces. Research on educational practices and instructional techniques is typically classified as "exempt" by IRBs, but it is important for anyone doing this research to remember that study participation and data ownership are two distinct processes. Any study which uses images or text produced by a study participant should also include stipulations about using these images and texts for publication and, if possible, obtain releases as part of the informed consent process.

A final concern is that the findings in this article were generated at one institution, in one course, by one instructor. Certainly, we'd encourage others to adopt this method in their online discussions in order to better understand the conditions in which it is most effective. In the time of COVID-19, with the tide of online learning stronger than ever, it is important for anthropology professors to design pedagogically sound classroom strategies that translate across modalities and honor our tradition of critical engagement and ethnographic research. More research into critical online pedagogical strategies, particularly in anthropology, is sorely needed.

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