First Year Teachers and Diversity:
Teacher Research through Photography

Kevin J. Graziano
Nevada State College
& Edmundo F. Litton
Loyola Marymount University

The moments of any experience can only be understood through the voice that has lived them. Traditional methods of inquiry, in which hypotheses are posed and statistical data is collected and analyzed, are often used to validate conclusions about a given problem and rarely, if ever, offer a partnership between the researcher and the participants (Ada & Beutel, 1993). In participatory research, "there is not a hypothesis that the researcher needs to prove. Rather, the researcher enters the research with a set of fundamental questions, concerns, issues, problems, and looks for solutions, insights, and a deeper understanding of these issues of concern" (Ada & Beutel, 1993, p. 69). Ada and Beutel (1993) argue that researchers and participants come together in a mutual and rigorous exploration of their lives, deeply respecting each other's ability to truly know and believing that through the act of knowing they can transform their reality. A result of this exchange is self-empowerment, made possible as a result of participation in which a positive sense of self is increased, a critical comprehension is developed, and the cultivation of resources and strategies is improved (Kieffer, 1981).

Kevin J. Graziano is an assistant professor in the School of Education at Nevada State College, Henderson, Nevada. He can be contacted at kevin_graziano@nsc.nevada.edu.

Edmundo F. Litton is an associate professor in the School of Education at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California. He can be contacted at elitton@lmu.edu.

Participatory research is an ideal theoretical framework for understanding the lives of teachers. While there is ample research on the experiences of teachers who work in diverse settings, most researchers have often described issues of diversity for new teachers. Far too often, researchers are not able to fully capture the difficult issues and everyday realities that new teachers have to face in under-resourced schools. For example, while it may be easy to write about how socio-economic status affects education, teachers who actually serve the poor present a different perspective to this issue. Using photography, teachers in under-resourced schools can be empowered to define these issues of cultural diversity for themselves.

This article presents a case study of using photography as a tool for teacher research. Twenty-five first year teachers (also referred to as Interns) participated in a four-month ethnographic study on their experiences and interactions with others as first year teachers in under-resourced schools in Los Angeles County. Specifically, the Interns were asked to document, through photography, areas that they felt needed to be changed to make learning and teaching more effective. The project tells multiple stories of the struggles of first year teachers as they strive to promote academic achievement and change in schools that are affected by poverty, racism, and social inequity.

Theoretical Framework

The methodology employed in this study is called photovoice. This methodology uses photographic equipment as a medium for research and change. Photovoice stems from the theoretical framework of Freire's (1970) education for critical consciousness, feminist theory (hooks, 1989, 2000; Kramarae & Spender, 1992; Smith, 1987), and nontraditional approaches to documentary photography.

Freire's education for critical consciousness stresses the importance of people's sharing and speaking from their own experience, identifying a common theme among their individual situations, creating an analytical perspective from which to relate their situation to root causes, and developing solutions and strategies for change (Freire, 1970; Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). Similarly, feminist theory suggests that power accrues to those who have voice, set language, make history, and participate in decisions (hooks, 1989; Smith, 1987). It is feminism that recognizes individual diversity, freedom, and equality, defined through and beyond north, west, south, and east dialogues. Such dialogues help shape a just world for everyone (hooks, 2000).

According to Wang and Pies (2004), participatory approaches to docu-

mentary photography developed by Ewald (1985), Hubbard (1994), Spence (1995), and other activist photographers suggest a grassroots approach to representation and ownership of one's personal voice. Documentary photography has been characterized as the social conscience presented in visual imagery (Rosler, 1992). Documentary photography can be used to promote a variety of concerns and purposes. It is especially powerful among a group of people whose voices are often ignored. The visual media affirms the reality of the situation, the need for change, and the cry for help of the dispossessed (Hubbard, 1991). The main objective in community photography, argues Spence (1995), is to enable people to archive some degree of autonomy in their own lives and to be able to express themselves more easily, thus gaining solidarity with each other.

Photovoice Overview

Photovoice was developed by Caroline Wang (1999) and colleagues as a research strategy for studying women's health issues. Photovoice involves giving people cameras and using the pictures they take to amplify their place in and experience of the world (Booth & Booth, 2003). It enables individuals to define for themselves and others, including policy makers, what is worth remembering, and what needs to be changed (Wang & Burris, 1997). Wang and Burris argue that "Photovoice uses the immediacy of the visual image to furnish evidence and to promote an effective, participatory means of sharing knowledge and expertise" (p. 369). With photovoice, researchers gain the possibility of perceiving the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead the lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world (Ruby, in Wang & Burris, 1997).

Not only does photovoice enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, it also promotes critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large and small group discussion of photographs (Wang, 1999). As participants engage in a group process of critical reflection on their photographs, they may discuss individual change, community quality of life, and policy issues (Wallerstein, 1987).

Aside from using photovoice for research on women's health issues, other researchers have used photovoice to study homeless and marginally housed young and older women (Killion, 1998), people with mental illnesses (Bowers, 1999), urban lay health advisors (Parker, Shulz, Israel, & Hollis, 2001), immigration experiences of newly-arrived Latino adolescents (Streng, Rhodes, Ayala, Eng, Arceo, & Phipps, 2004), the everyday realities of Black gay and lesbian South Africans (Graziano

2004), the perspectives of low-income African-American families regarding children's school-readiness (McAllister, Wilson, Green, & Baldwin, 2005), and at risk middle school students (Kroeger, Burton, Comarata, Combs, Hamm, Hopkins, & Kouche, 2004).

In a review of literature on photography usage in post secondary education, Brown (2005) found that researchers have used photography as a research instrument to investigate differences in the perceptions of a campus environment based on the race of the respondent (Perka, Matherly, Fishman, & Ridge, 1992). Taylor (2003) used photography to assist adult educators in connecting their prior school experiences to their current attitudes and behaviors toward teaching adults. Allen and Labbo (2001) explored the use of photography in a teacher training program to raise the self-awareness and multicultural consciousness of future teachers. More recently, Brown used photography to explore the link between residency status and subconscious beliefs of future teachers about the neighborhoods of students they will teach. Researchers conclude that when digital content is integrated into curriculum, a change in the learning process occurs that is characterized as being relevant, productive, and lifelong (Tapscott, 1999). To date, however, there is no research on the use of photovoice by beginning teachers.

Data Source and Methods

The 25 Interns in this study were first year teachers enrolled in a social foundations course during the fall 2004 semester at a university in Southern California. All Interns were enrolled in a two-year, graduate teaching credential program. The average age of Interns was 23 years old. Seven Interns were male and 18 were female. Twenty-one of the Interns were Caucasian, three were Latino/a, and one was Asian/ Pacific Islander. At the time of this study, all of the Interns were teaching full-time either in middle schools or high schools in Los Angeles County. These schools primarily serve students of color.

The source of data in this study was a PowerPoint project and individual, written action plans completed by the 25 Interns. Interns were asked to explore a question of their choosing that focused on any issue of diversity, broadly defined, that needed to be changed to make learning and teaching more effective. The Interns were then asked to create and reflect on an action plan based on their selected photographs. During the last class of the semester, Interns shared with each other their action plans, stories, and photographs. The professor then engaged the class in a dialogue on the commonalities of their projects. These commonalities were discussed and agreed upon by the Interns and later became the

findings of this study. All Interns signed a release form for the researchers to use their projects for publication.

Prior to beginning work on their project, the professor of the class invited a photographer to discuss some basics of photography with the Interns. During the presentation, the Interns were presented with various photographs from famous photographers. The Interns learned how photographs can convey messages. Interns were also asked to view two local photography exhibits. While the Interns completed their projects, they had the option of meeting with the professor to discuss the progress of their work. These meetings were also used as a mechanism for ongoing reflection.

Results/Discussion

The results will be presented in two sections: significant themes, and reflections from the Interns and implementation issues. The first section will summarize the major themes of the study: safety, issues of adolescent development and academic achievement, and community values that arose from the Intern's projects. These themes represent what Interns considered their significant experiences and concerns during their first semester of teaching that they believe need to be changed to make learning and teaching more effective. Participants' action plans for change in their respective schools and communities will also be discussed. The second section will discuss the Interns' reflections on using photovoice and present implementation issues that surfaced as the Interns used this methodology for teacher research.

Significant Themes

Safety

A major theme that arose from the projects revealed that the Interns were concerned primarily about the safety of the students they teach. Their projects documented the unsafe conditions that exist at their schools. Safety was the number one reason cited as an obstacle to raising achievement. The Interns presented photographs of enclosed campuses, security cameras, school fights, and police presence in their urban schools.

One Intern insisted that his classroom resembles a jail rather than an environment where ideas and minds should be free. "Whether looking in or out, one can feel the overpowering sense of confinement and that is only if the classroom has a window," he said. Using a photograph of a window with a wire fence attached to it, he argued that, "nothing in his school is free from bars, chains or gates, even the soda machines are

locked down under gates. Unlike other gated communities, the inhabitants here don't feel safe and protected."

Another Intern photographed walls of graffiti and argued that the makeshift marquee of both pride and disrespect instigates violence just blocks away from his classroom. The Intern wrote that groups struggle for recognition, tagging the rear wall of a car wash, displayed in his photograph, allowing students to predict upcoming acts of violence.

The projects also revealed that many students expect their teachers to keep them safe in schools. Many Interns did not feel prepared to act as "safety officers" when they began teaching. It is interesting to note that Interns who cited safety as a main concern often said that they started teaching thinking about their own safety but as the semester concluded, they began to accept the responsibility of making sure their students are safe. These Interns also concluded that providing a better education for students could decrease community violence.

Issues of Adolescent Development and Academic Achievement

Many of the Interns' projects explored issues of adolescent development and academic achievement. Interns discussed the connection between students' self-worth and academic achievement and reported that many of their students did not have a positive image of themselves. Further, Interns reported that many students have responsibilities more demanding than school. Photographs of students' friends and families demonstrate that outside pressures such as work, developing and maintaining friendships, and family obligations often supersede their commitments to school. Despite this lack of commitment, Interns photographed students working collaboratively in groups, students taking exams, and students actively participating in class and found that their students have a strong desire to learn and achieve. An Intern argued:

> Students believe they can achieve. Even those who have difficulties in class continue to come to class to learn all that can be taught. To them there is no difference between the education they are receiving and the education of other students. There is one reason why these students come to class day after day, and it is not because their parents send them to school; rather, it is because they want to learn something new.

One Intern concluded her project by acknowledging the power that teachers have in shaping a student's self perception: "We are the ones that can either encourage our students to be successful or discourage them from trying. It is unfortunate that there are many hurdles that these students will have to overcome before they reach their goal."

Community Values

Lastly, projects showed the importance of community, family, and teachers. Many pictures demonstrated the disconnection between home and school. Interns believed home life for many of their students is community oriented, participatory, and equal; whereas, school is often independent, passive, and subjugated. To demonstrate this point, Interns photographed celebratory moments where students where gathered as a group such as the school dance and compared them to photographs of students sitting in rows of desks. Interns agreed that adult role models (like teachers and parents) play an essential role in bridging the home and school cultures and that both, teachers and parents, should collectively contribute to students' perceived possibilities of success.

Although photography is limited to what the naked eye can see, collecting data through photographs and storytelling enables teachers to reflect on their experiences based on images that truly represent their reality and enables teachers to think critically and systematically about their practice and community. Using photovoice for teacher research can be empowering. Teachers who are empowered often pass on this energy to their students, as was the case with three Interns who later used photovoice in their high school social studies/history classes.

The photovoice projects administered by the three Interns addressed social issues in their communities. One Intern asked his students to photograph their responses to the question: "What does success look like to you in your community?" A second Intern asked her students to photograph the impact of violence in their lives. She concluded that photovoice taught her how to study the community and learn from it. "The participatory experience of photovoice helped shape my approach to teaching the curriculum and culturally diverse students," she stated.

A third Intern was awarded a small grant to purchase disposable cameras, which provided his senior economics students an opportunity to analyze the differences between poverty and wealth, study the causes, problems, and solutions related to poverty, and take pictures that connected these issues to their own community. "Through this project," he wrote, "I expressly accepted the unique cultural backgrounds of my students as important to the classroom experience, making them more engaged in their own education."

At the end of the semester, the three Interns sponsored a gallery night where their students displayed their photographs. Parents, school personnel, researchers of this study, and community members attended the gallery night and reacted positively to the event. There were informal discussions about structures in the community that need to be changed.

All Interns adhered to the consent procedures in place at their schools before displaying their students' photographs.

The gallery night provided a venue for the Interns' students to take action and speak out against social inequalities. While time can only tell if any change will occur, the photovoice projects allowed the conversations for change to begin. We should not forget that action is an ongoing process and demands time and a continued commitment (Freire, 1985).

Action Plans

The majority of action plans created by Interns focused on changing values and academic achievement. Interns spoke about the importance of involving parents and families in their child's education and stressed the need for a comprehensive, multicultural curriculum, one that reflects the demographics of their respective schools. Interns argued that educators should be sensitive to students' beliefs, learn to respect different family names, languages, and cultures, and address their own biases towards students and education.

One Intern stated in his action plan that he would like to present students with images and stories of positive role models of color who have achieved excellence in academics. Another Intern vowed to integrate more popular culture in her lessons to connect with her students and make teaching and learning more meaningful and engaging. She believes that creating a friendly, social environment can increase attendance and academic performance.

Interns agreed that having casual conversations and non-academic interactions with students may foster positive relationships with students and contribute to a better understanding of adolescent development. One Intern also mentioned the importance of taking time out of class to discuss with her students dispositions and worldly expectations of life after high school.

The photographs and reflections of enclosed campuses and graffiti on the walls prompted several Interns to identify the development of after-school programs as an action item necessary to promote school safety. One Intern wrote we need to identify community organizations that will not only enhance the curriculum during school but will also promote student involvement after school. Another Intern concluded: "I need to educate my students on the community resources available to them, promote tolerance within and in my class, and educate my students on the consequences of their actions."

Data from this study suggest that through education for empowerment, Interns and students were able to see themselves as community

advocates and as participants in public dialogue on issues that plague their school and community. This data is consistent with other photovoice studies in which participants take ownership and become more involved in the research/teaching process rather than have the process work on them (Graziano & Heeren, 2007; Kroeger et al., 2004; Streng et al., 2004). Ruiz (1997) reminds us that empowerment is not a gift that can be put into the hands of the powerless. The possession of power is the result of their efforts in taking over and controlling any given situation.

Reflections from the Interns and Implementation Issues

All 25 Interns successfully completed the course and agreed that the photovoice project was a powerful experience. One intern commented:

> My goal is for my students and I to look each other in the eye as dialoguing partners in an ongoing exchange of knowledge. The feedback I have received from students through this project has shown me that we are not there yet, but we have a worthy goal in sight.

Another intern said, "Going through the pictures, I realized how important these students are to me." The Interns also acknowledged the power they had as teachers and they did not want to use their students as "subjects."

Several Interns discussed their experiences using photovoice as a class project in their final comprehensive exam, the culminating assignment of their credential program. Interns expressed great appreciation for the introduction to photovoice. Several Interns admitted that the project helped shape their teaching philosophies. One Intern wrote:

> The photovoice project helped me understand how to negotiate the tightrope walk of a multi-ethnic classroom and actually utilize the diverse experiences to my and my students' advantage. I learned to recognize students as individuals with unique experiences, rather than label them based on their ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

The photovoice project, argued another Intern, "helped me form multiple lenses through which I learned to observe my school community". He stated:

> I was able to capture experiences in picture form that helped me determine what factors outside of school are relevant to students and how these factors affect them. I was then able to address those outside factors inside the classroom, which proved not only to motivate students but also allowed students to relate to the subject matter.

Another Intern wrote, "the photovoice project taught me that I need to affirm my students' gender, family, and achievement identities. In

learning how important external factors are in forming student identities, I realized how critical it is to project positive perceptions onto my students." Gouwens and Paull (2005) believe that as teachers continue to explore their personal teaching stories, they gain greater understanding of the essential connection between their work as teachers and their own identities, and they begin to develop the disposition to research themselves and their classrooms as a regular element of their teaching practice.

An Intern confessed that the project helped open her eyes to the reality of inner-city education. Similarly, another Intern wrote that the photovoice project allowed her to explore her students' home and after school environments that she had never seen before and brought a new level of understanding about the world her students live in. This Intern now volunteers at a community coalition for educational justice in Southern California.

As a result of this study, the following recommendations can be used to guide future implementation of photovoice for teacher research:

a. Participants should be provided with digital cameras whenever possible. This will ensure that participants have full freedom to take multiple photographs. Digital photographs can also be viewed instantly for immediate feedback.

b. Regular meetings with the professor, researcher(s), or peers should be mandatory. Participants who were constantly engaged in the reflective process felt that the project was more meaningful.

c. The project should be completed over a longer period of time, perhaps two semesters.

d. Future projects that exhibit participants' photographs need ample time and money to market the exhibit.

e. Future photovoice projects should include at least two workshops on the goals and methodology of the research. The first workshop should include the basics: who, what, when, where, and why. The how should be reserved for a second workshop where participants are trained on how to use a camera, if necessary, and given a practice roll to use for a week or two.

Conclusions

The unique nature of the information collected in this study makes it especially significant both inside and outside formal educational settings. Such a methodology often reveals information that would not normally be uncovered by traditional forms of research. Photovoice provided the

Interns and researchers with entry into a community that might otherwise be restricted or difficult to enter. Simply put, photovoice focuses on the voices of the people, voices that belong to groups of people who are not members of the mainstream population and often go unheard.

The idea is to raise the credibility of photovoice by encouraging researchers, classroom teachers, and teacher educators to implement such an approach in addressing educational and social inclusiveness both inside and outside our Nation's schools. In doing so, participants may see themselves as protagonists, the ones who speak and are listened to, the ones confronting the problems and issues and finding solutions to them. As such, participants become heroes, authors, generators of text, and see themselves as researchers and teachers, people who have knowledge that can be shared with others (Ada, Beutel, & Petersen, 1990). Rasinski and Padak (1990) argue that when individuals become empowered, they share responsibility for their own learning. Without voice, dialogue, and agency, there is no empowerment (Ruiz, 1997) and individuals are not able to "name their world to change it" (Freire, 1970).

Researchers, classroom teachers, and teacher educators are encouraged to implement similar studies at different grade levels with the following populations: second language learners, students with learning or physical disabilities, female students, adolescents, students of color, immigrant and migrant students and their families, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. University and college faculty can include photovoice in class syllabi and discuss its methodology in teaching, learning, and technology courses, courses on research methods, and courses on the digital divide and social justice.

References

Ada, A. F., & Beutel, C. M. (1993). *Participatory research as a dialogue for social action.* San Francisco: University of San Francisco.

Ada, A. F., Beutel, C. M., & Petersen, C. E. (1990, April). The educator as researcher: principles and practices of participatory research. Paper presented at the Conference of the National Association of Bilingual Education annual meeting, Tucson, AZ.

Allen, J., & Labbo, L. (2001). Giving it a second thought. Making culturally engaged teaching culturally engaging. *Language Arts*, *79*(1), 40-52.

Booth, T, & Booth, W. (2003). In the frame: Photovoice and mothers with learning difficulties. *Disability & Society*, *18*(4), 431-442.

Bowers, A. A. (1999). People with serious mental illness using photovoice: Implications for participatory research and community education. Paper presented at the American Public Health Association annual meeting, Chicago, IL.

Brown, E. L. (2005). Using photography to explore hidden realities and raise cross- cultural sensitivity in future teachers. *The Urban Review*, *37*(2),

149-171.

Ewald, W. (1985). Portraits of dreams: Photographs and stories by children of the Appalachians. New York: Writers and Readers.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury.

Freire, P. (1985). *Politics of education*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Graziano, K. J. (2004). Oppression and resiliency in a post-apartheid South Africa: Unheard voices of black gay men and lesbians. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 10*(3), 302-316.

Graziano, K. J., & Heeren, C. R. (2007, in press). Students as researchers: A photographic approach to teaching high school economics. In E. Litton & S. Martin (Eds.), *Justice, care, and diversity: Research and best practices in Catholic secondary schools*. Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association.

Gouwens, J. A., & Paull, C. (2005). Using digital storytelling to conduct and represent teacher research: Lessons we have learned. Paper presented at the 2005 American Educational Research Association (AREA) conference in Montreal, Canada.

hooks, b. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black*. Boston: South End Press.

hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Cambridge MA: South End Press.

Hubbard, J. (1991). *Shooting back: A photographic view of life by homeless children.* San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

Hubbard, J. (1994). *Shooting back from the reservation: A photographic view of life by Native Americans.* New York: The New Press.

Kieffer, C. H. (1981). Doing "dialogic retrospection": Approaching empowerment through participatory research. Paper presented at the International Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland.

Killion, C. M. (1998). Poverty and procreation among women: An anthropological study with implications for health care providers. *Journal of Nurse Midwifery, 43*(4), 273-278.

Kramarae, C., & Spender, D. (Eds.) (1992). *The knowledge explosion: Generations of feminist scholarship*. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Kroeger, S., Burton, C., Comarata, A., Combs, C., Hamm, C., Hopkins, R., & Kouche, B. (2004). Student voice and critical reflection: Helping students at risk. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *36*(3), 50-57.

McAllister, C. L., Wilson, P. C., Green, B. L., & Baldwin, J. L. (2005). "Come and take a walk": Listening to early head start parents on school-readiness as a matter of child, family, and community health. *American Journal of Public Health*, *95*(4), 617-625.

Parker, E., Shulz, A.J., Israel, B.A., & Hollis, R. (2001). Detroit's east side village healthworker partnership: Community based lay health advisor intervention in an urban area. *Public Health Reports*, *116*, 548-557.

Perka, P. L., Matherly, C. A., Fishman, D. E., & Ridge, R. H. (1992). Using photographs to examine environmental perceptions of African-American and White Greek members: A qualitative study. *College Student Affairs Journal*,

12, 7-12.

Rasinski, T., & Padak, N. (1990). Multicultural learning through children's literature. *Language Arts*, *67*, 576-580.

Rosler, M. (1992). In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography). In R. Bolton (Ed.), *The contest of meaning: Critical histories of photography* (pp. 303-343)*.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Ruiz, R. E. (1997). The empowerment of language-minority students. In A. Darder, R. Torres, & H. Gutierrez (Eds.), *Latinos and education: A critical reader* (pp. 319-328). New York: Routledge.

Smith, D. E. (1987). *The everyday world as problematic*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Spence, J. (1995). *Cultural sniping: The art of transgression*. London, UK: Routledge.

Streng, J. M., Rhodes, S.D., Ayala, G. X., Eng, E., Arceo, R., Phipps, S. (2004). Realidad Latina: Latino adolescents, their school, and a university use photovoice to examine and address the influence of immigration. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, *18*(4), 403-415.

Tapscott, D. (1999). Educating the net generation. *Educational Leadership*, *56*(5), 7-11.

Taylor, E. (2003). The relationship between the prior school lives of adult educators and their beliefs about teaching adults. *International Journal of Lifelong Learning Education*, *22*(1), 29-77.

Wallerstein, N. (1987). Empowerment education: Freire's ideas applied to youth. *Youth Policy*, *9*(11), 11-15.

Wallerstein, N., & Bernstein, E. (1988). Empowerment education: Freire's ideas adapted to health education. *Health Education Quarterly*, *15*(4), 379-394.

Wang, C.C. (1999). Photovoice: A participatory action research strategy applied to women's health. *Journal of Women's Health*, *8*(2), 185-192.

Wang, C. C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education and Behavior*, *24*(3), 369-387.

Wang, C. C., & Pies, C. A. (2004). Family, maternal, and child health through photovoice. *Maternal & Child Health Journal*, *8*(2), 95-102.