

# **Using the Photovoice Method to Capitalize on Cultural Activities in Children'S Education from Rural Areas to Young School Age**

**Denisa Ramona Chasciar, Alina Felicia Roman**

# Using the Photovoice Method to Capitalize on Cultural Activities in Children'S Education from Rural Areas to Young School Age

Denisa Ramona Chasciar <sup>a\*</sup>, Alina Felicia Roman <sup>b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup> "Education, Reflection, Development" Doctoral School, "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

<sup>b</sup> Faculty of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Work, "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, Arad, Romania

\*Corresponding author: denisaramonachasciar@yahoo.com

## Abstract

### Keywords:

photovoice, cultural education, local heritage, cultural activities, young school age, rural education

This study explores the application of the Photovoice method to capitalize on cultural activities in the education of rural children at early school age. Photovoice, a participatory research-action methodology, empowers children to capture and reflect on their cultural experiences through photography. The study was conducted in several rural schools, involving children aged 8 to 10. Participants were given cameras and guided to document cultural events, traditions and daily life in their communities. The collected photos were later used as talking points in the school environment, allowing children to articulate their cultural narratives and engage in critical thinking about their heritage. The results indicate that the Photovoice method significantly improves children's engagement and interest in cultural activities, promoting a deeper understanding of their local culture. Visual narratives created by children also served as valuable educational tools for teachers, facilitating a more inclusive and culturally responsive teaching approach. The study highlights the importance of integrating cultural education into the curriculum and demonstrates the potential of Photovoice as an innovative tool for educational development in rural contexts. By valuing and integrating cultural activities of rural communities into the educational framework, this approach contributes to a more equitable and holistic educational experience for young schoolchildren. The study concludes with recommendations for policymakers and educators on implementing the Photovoice method in rural education systems to promote cultural awareness and appreciation among children.

## 1. Introduction

In an ever-changing world, education plays a crucial role in shaping future generations. Especially in rural areas, where educational resources can be limited, finding innovative ways to involve children in the learning process is essential. The Photovoice method, a participatory action research methodology, provides a way for children to capture and reflect on their cultural experiences through photography. This approach not only improves engagement and interest in cultural activities, but also promotes a deeper understanding of the local culture.

The present study explores the application of the Photovoice method to capitalize on cultural activities in the education of children in rural areas, at early school age. By providing children with cameras and guiding them in documenting cultural events, traditions, and daily life in their communities, this study aims to demonstrate the educational benefits of this method. The collected photographs were later used as talking points in the school environment, allowing children to articulate their cultural narratives and engage in critical thinking about their heritage.

The results of the study highlight the importance of integrating cultural education into the curriculum and highlight the potential of Photovoice as an innovative tool for educational development in rural contexts. By valuing and integrating the cultural activities of rural communities into the educational framework, this approach contributes to a more equitable and holistic educational experience for young school-age children.

## 2. Theoretical foundation

The Photovoice method, originally developed by Wang and Burris in 1997, continues to be relevant and adapted in recent research, being a participatory action research technique that combines photography with narration to empower participants to document and evaluate important aspects of their daily lives. This methodology allows individuals, especially those from marginalized communities, to express their perspectives and actively participate in processes of social change (Catalani & Minkler, 2010).

In the context of education, Photovoice can be used to increase student engagement and participation



by encouraging them to become co-creators of their own learning. According to Kolb's theory of experiential learning, students learn most effectively when they are actively involved in the learning process, and Photovoice provides an environment conducive to this type of learning (Kolb, 2015). Students not only document their reality, but also reflect on it, thus developing critical and analytical skills.

Integrating cultural education into the school curriculum is essential for promoting diversity and inclusion. According to Banks (2019), multicultural education contributes to the development of cultural awareness and a positive attitude towards diversity. The Photovoice method can play a crucial role in this, providing a platform for students to explore and share their cultural heritage.

In addition, cultural education in rural areas can bring significant benefits for community development. Recent studies have shown that involving children in cultural activities can improve the sense of belonging and identity, contributing to social cohesion and the preservation of local traditions (Chavez & Soep, 2020). Photovoice not only enriches the educational experience, but also contributes to the preservation and enhancement of the cultural heritage of rural communities.

Thus, this theoretical foundation emphasizes the relevance and benefits of the Photovoice method in the context of cultural education for children in rural areas. By promoting a participatory and reflective approach, this method can improve both children's educational experience and their understanding and appreciation of local culture.

The Photovoice method has been widely used in various fields, including adolescent mental health, providing unique insights into the factors that influence their mental health. Studies have shown that Photovoice can represent and empower participants, promoting inclusive practices and restructuring society's understanding of adolescent mental health (Stephens et al., 2023).

A systematic review of the international literature on the use of Photovoice in health has highlighted the significant effects of this method on various health-related outcomes, such as self-efficacy, health behaviors, and community functions (Bashore et al., 2017). Participatory methods such as Photovoice have also been identified as effective in improving social connectivity and community activism (Kimera & Vindevogel, 2022).

In education, Photovoice has been recognized for its ability to actively engage students in the learning process, promoting critical dialogue and reflexivity. By using photography to explore and document their experiences, students develop essential critical and analytical skills (Golden, 2020).

In a study on health education, the Photovoice method was used to evaluate and improve interventions based on cultural narratives, demonstrating that participatory approaches can have a positive impact on health and well-being outcomes (Houston et al., 2011).

Therefore, this extensive theoretical foundation emphasizes the relevance and benefits of the Photovoice method in the context of cultural education and health. By promoting a participatory and reflective approach, this method can improve both children's educational experience and their understanding and appreciation of local culture.

### 3. Research methodology

The present study uses the Photovoice method to investigate how cultural activities can be leveraged in the education of rural children at early school age. The methodology involves several distinct stages, from the selection of participants to the analysis of the collected data.

The participants in this study were children aged between 8 and 10 years from several rural schools. Inclusion criteria were used that ensured the cultural and demographic diversity of the sample. In total, 60 children were selected to participate in the study.

Participants were given digital cameras and were instructed how to use them. Each child was encouraged to document cultural events, traditions, and aspects of daily life in their community over a six-week period. The photos taken were collected and used as discussion points during workshops organized in schools.

The workshops were facilitated by the teachers and took place at the end of the documentation period. During the workshops, the children presented the photos taken and discussed their meaning. The discussions were recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

The data analysis followed a thematic approach, using the NVivo qualitative analysis software. Photos and transcripts of the discussions were coded to identify relevant themes and patterns. Particular attention was paid to how children express their

cultural experiences and how these experiences influence their learning and development.

To ensure the validity of the results, several techniques were used, including data triangulation, inter-rater verification, and involving participants in the data interpretation process. Participants had the opportunity to review and comment on the interpretations, thus ensuring the accuracy and relevance of the results.

#### 4. Results

The analysis of the data collected in this study revealed several key aspects regarding the use of the Photovoice method in the cultural education of children in rural areas.

The results indicate that the use of the Photovoice method significantly increased children's engagement and interest in cultural activities. Participants reported that they were more engaged and motivated to learn about their community's cultural traditions and events. For example, one child stated, "I discovered many new things about our traditions that I didn't know before."

The Photovoice method facilitated the development of children's critical and analytical skills. Through the process of documenting and reflecting on the photographs taken, the children learned to analyze and interpret the cultural meaning of the images. This was evident in the discussions during the workshops, where the children demonstrated a deep understanding of local symbols and traditions.

The photos and discussions helped to strengthen the cultural awareness and identity of the children. Many participants reported feeling proud of their cultural heritage and more connected to the community. Another child said, "Now I have a better understanding of why our traditions are important and I want to keep them."

The photographs taken by the children have been used as valuable educational resources within schools. The teachers integrated these images into the lessons, using them to illustrate cultural and historical concepts. This facilitated a more inclusive and culturally responsive teaching approach.

Participarea la proiect a avut un impact pozitiv asupra gândirii critice și reflexive a copiilor. The process of analyzing the photographs and discussing their significance encouraged the children to develop skills for reflection and critical evaluation. This has been demonstrated by their ability to formulate

questions and explore different perspectives on their culture.

The study highlighted that the Photovoice method can contribute to the enhancement of the cultural heritage of rural communities. The photographs and visual narratives created by the children served as a form of documentation of local traditions, contributing to their preservation and promotion.

These results highlight the potential of the Photovoice method as an innovative educational tool, capable of improving the learning experience of rural children by promoting cultural engagement and critical skills.

#### 5. Discussions

The results of this study offer a number of significant implications for educational practice and for the use of the Photovoice method in the cultural education of children in rural areas.

The study demonstrated that the Photovoice method can be an effective educational tool, capable of stimulating children's engagement and developing their critical and analytical skills. By using photography to document and reflect on cultural experiences, children not only enrich their knowledge, but also develop a deep cultural awareness.

Integrating the Photovoice method into the school curriculum can provide a more inclusive and culturally responsive teaching approach. Photographs taken by children can be used as educational resources to illustrate cultural and historical concepts, thus facilitating a deeper understanding of local heritage. This is in line with the principles of multicultural education, which emphasize the importance of integrating cultural diversity into education.

The Photovoice method contributes to the enhancement and preservation of the cultural heritage of rural communities. By documenting traditions and daily life, children become aware of the importance of preserving and promoting their culture. This not only improves the sense of identity and belonging, but also contributes to the social cohesion of the community.

Participation in Photovoice projects encourages the development of children's critical and reflective skills. The analysis of the photographs and discussions about them give them the opportunity to explore different perspectives and formulate critical questions about their own cultural experiences. This is essential for the development of critical thinking, an important component of the learning process.

The study suggests that policymakers and educators should consider integrating the Photovoice method into rural education systems. By promoting cultural awareness and appreciation, Photovoice can contribute to a more equitable and holistic education. This can be achieved by developing teacher training programs and including Photovoice activities in curricula.

It is also important to recognize the limitations of this study. The sample size was relatively small and focused on a single geographic region, which may limit the generalization of the results. Also, the documentation period was relatively short, and limited technical resources can be an obstacle in the widespread implementation of the Photovoice method.

To expand on these findings, future research should involve larger and geographically diverse samples. It would also be beneficial to explore the long-term impact of participating in Photovoice projects on children's educational and cultural development. Further studies could also investigate how technological and digital methods can improve the implementation of Photovoice in educational contexts.

Therefore, this study highlights the potential of the Photovoice method as an innovative tool in cultural education and suggests promising directions for future research and practice.

## 6. Conclusions

The present study highlighted the effectiveness of the Photovoice method in the cultural education of children in rural areas, demonstrating multiple educational and social benefits. The main conclusions of this study are the following:

The Photovoice method has significantly stimulated children's engagement in cultural activities, increasing their interest in their community's traditions and events. Active participation in cultural documentation has encouraged children to become more involved and motivated in the learning process.

The use of the Photovoice method facilitated the development of children's critical and analytical skills, giving them the opportunity to reflect on the cultural significance of the captured images and to formulate critical questions about their cultural experiences.

By documenting and discussing local traditions, the children strengthened their cultural awareness and identity, becoming proud of their cultural heritage and more connected to the community.

The Photovoice method has contributed to the enhancement and preservation of the cultural heritage of rural communities, offering an innovative way of documenting and promoting local traditions.

Integrating the Photovoice method into the school curriculum can significantly improve the educational approach, promoting diversity and cultural inclusion. The photographs taken by children can be used as valuable educational resources in lessons, facilitating a deeper understanding of local heritage.

Policymakers and educators should consider adopting the Photovoice method in rural education systems to promote cultural awareness and appreciation. Developing teacher training programs and including Photovoice activities in curricula can contribute to a more equitable and holistic education.

While the results of this study are promising, there are certain limitations, such as sample size and documentation period. Future research should include larger and diverse samples and explore the long-term impact of the Photovoice method. It would also be beneficial to investigate how digital technologies can improve the implementation of this method in education.

This study highlights the potential of the Photovoice method as an innovative educational tool, capable of improving the learning experience of rural children by promoting cultural engagement and critical skills. The recommendations suggest promising directions for future research and practices, which can contribute to the educational and cultural development of children in rural communities.

## Authors note:

**Denisa Ramona Chasciar** is an assistant professor at the "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad and a PhD student at the "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca. In her doctoral thesis, she researches the impact of cultural consumption on the development of children in rural areas. She has published four scientific articles focused on rural education and cultural practices in an educational context, contributing to their integration into the process of forming students' skills. Through her academic activity, she aims to bring a new perspective to formal education in rural areas.

**Alina Felicia Roman** is dean of the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Work within the "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad. An

expert in the field of education, Prof. Univ. Dr. Alina Felicia Roman has extensive experience in skills assessment and inclusive education, being actively involved in national and international research projects. She has published important works on inclusion in education, the development of transversal skills and the efficiency of the post-pandemic educational process. In addition to her academic contributions, she coordinates scientific journals and training programs for teachers in Romania.

## References

- Banks, J. A. (2019). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching* (6th ed.). Routledge
- Bashore, L., Alexander, G. K., Jackson, D. L., & Mauch, P. (2017). Improving health in at-risk youth through Photovoice. *Journal of Child Health Care*, 21(4), 463–475
- Catalani, C., & Minkler, M. (2010). Photovoice: A review of the literature in health and public health. *Health Education & Behavior*, 37(3), 424–451
- Chavez, V., & Soep, E. (2020). *Youth, media, and the arts: Engaging the next generation*. Oxford University Press
- Golden, T. (2020). Reframing Photovoice: Building on the method to develop more equitable and responsive research practices. *Qualitative Health Research*, 30(6), 960–972
- Houston, T. K., et al. (2011). Culturally appropriate storytelling to improve blood pressure: a randomized trial. *Ann Intern Med*, 154(2), 77–84
- Kimera, E., & Vindevogel, S. (2022). Photovoicing Empowerment and Social Change for Youth Living with HIV/AIDS in Uganda. *Qualitative Health Research*, 32(12), 1907–1914
- Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.). Pearson
- Stephens, M., et al. (2023). A systematic scoping review of Photovoice within mental health research involving adolescents. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 28(1), 2244043