A Mentored Partnership Project Using PhotoVoice in a Nutrition Nursing Course

A semester-long PhotoVoice assignment was developed for undergraduate nursing students enrolled in a sophomore-level nutrition course and a senior-level applied population health course at a private university in the United States. This study engaged sophomore-level students with a limited number of volunteer senior-level student research assistants in a university campus health and wellness assessment.

Project Theory and Goals

Transformational learning theory guided the project and assignment design. The goals of this assignment were based on the implementation of digital photography and analysis and included (a) engaging nursing students in exploring perceived barriers to wellness; (b) engaging nursing students in exploring perceived community assets, which could be leveraged to support wellness in their community; and (c) developing a conceptual framework of the environmental, ecological, and social realities affecting wellness at the university.

Method

The PhotoVoice qualitative method was implemented. It is a type of participatory action research that strives to create knowledge through the resourceful analysis of photography (Wang, 1999). This required assignment was repeated in the same sophomore-level nutrition course for two consecutive semesters to enhance students’ knowledge of nutritional and other health determinants to promote wellness (N = 70). In addition to usual course subject matter, students received faculty mentoring support on PhotoVoice data collection techniques with qualitative data analysis and focus group facilitation training for senior student research assistants.

Prior to project implementation, project approval by the university institutional review board was obtained, and key campus personnel were notified about the nature and purpose of the campus-wide project. Photograph consent was obtained for any photographs of individuals. Photographs were uploaded to a password-protected Web site created by the group, which was accessible only to those participating in the study.

The sophomore-level students had two photograph assignments and two class sessions devoted to this project, facilitated by the senior-level students during the semester. Students were asked to take photographs of the campus environment, primarily focusing on aspects of nutrition, fitness, and wellness. During the first class session, student photographers discussed selected photographs of the campus environment that were most salient to them, while senior research assistants took field notes. Students were asked to identify any factors they believed were missing in the definition of wellness assets and deficits in the taken photographs. Following this first class session, students found additional photographic examples to support their health and wellness perceptions on campus (N = 125 per semester) and submitted them online. The senior-level research assistants then analyzed all photographs and field notes for major theme categories with faculty mentorship. Senior students also facilitated a second class discussion to complete member checking, foster further discussion and prioritization of themes, and explore potential implications for campus policies and resources related to the themes.

Results

Student-driven thematic analysis was conducted between senior students and faculty mentors, with the following themes derived regarding health and wellness at the university: sexual health, nourishment, health services, mental health services, social activities, and campus organization, including environmental concerns. Project goals and outcomes to explore perceived barriers to wellness and community assets to leverage support for wellness were met with positive student support for the implementation of digital photography and analysis. Students examined barriers and assets in the university environment, such as dining food options and costs, hydration access issues, fitness options, and resources for mental and sexual health. Examples included students’ comments regarding an appreciation for local, fresh food sources (photographs included fresh salads with local ingredients), despite the impact for higher food costs; and students felt the Green Dot® program (photographs of Green Dot program signs), designed to address sexual assault campus issues, was an asset to sexual health, safety, and respect in the campus community.

The final project goal regarding the development of a conceptual framework of the environmental, ecological, and social realities influencing wellness at the university was achieved through the implementation of PhotoVoice as participatory action research. It prompted active student engagement through the critical examination of the current campus environment wellness themes and realities, with policy recommendations for future campus wellness enhancements (Robinson-Keilig, Hamill, Gwin-Vansant, & Dashner, 2014). The senior students also identified the study as valuable, with benefits for a mentored undergraduate research opportunity that included the dissemination of findings through a formal campus project presentation to advocate for health and wellness policy recommendations for the university community (Seitz et al., 2012).

References


Barbara J. Braband, Ed D, RN, CNE
braband@up.edu
School of Nursing
University of Portland
Victoria Warren-Mears, PhD, RDN,
FAND
Northwest Portland Area
Indian Health Board

The authors have disclosed no potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise. doi:10.3928/01484834-20170421-12