
Autophotography

Joan Wink, November 1, 2010

This activity evolved 15 years ago with a group of teachers; since that time, teachers in the Central Valley of CA extended the process in multiple ways. The primary process is shared below, but we encourage readers to adapt to fit their own context. The basic activity can take a week, a month, or a semester. This activity is particularly good to begin the first day or week of an academic year.

Introduction: Students often believe that teachers "just don't understand." List the differences between your life and the life of one or two of your students. Do you understand their world? The following activity is one way that teachers can attempt to understand each student's life more fully.

First: Teacher and students privately write 20 words in 12 minutes, which answer the question: **Who am I?**
This may be followed by small group sharing and eventually whole group sharing, by those who choose to share.

Notice: at this level, we learn about the student, but we learn very little about the context or her perspective of her world.

Second: Students are given disposable cameras and ask to take the camera home on Monday and return on Friday; another group of students take the cameras the following week. Students are asked to take pictures of their world from their perspective. Usually, this takes 3-4 weeks to rotate the cameras through a class and create the accompanying classroom posters and sharing. At the university level, often this takes less time, as so many teacher educators have digital cameras.

Notice: on this activity we learn about the student's environment and how the student sees the world. Allow adequate time for sharing.

Third: In the classroom, students categorize photos according to any cultural perspective; for example: family; work; play; etc. Categories are created to fit the needs of the class.

Notice: We are creating the culture of the classroom based on the students and their background.

Fourth: Students select pictures, generate an outline for a narration of their own autobiography/autophotography. For example, each photo can represent a chapter, a paragraph, a sentence. At the university level, this part of the process can be incorporated into existing portfolio requirements of a class or of the state.

Notice: Students need to plan carefully.

Fifth: Each student finishes a self-published story of their life and world or their portfolio, which includes written and artistic representations of his life and his worldview.

Towell, J. (2010, pp. 66-67). *Hooked on books: Language arts and literature in elementary classrooms, PreK-Grade 8*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.