

Improving Student's Performance and Writing Skills by Using Photography, Autophotography and Music

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ABSTRACT

The following study deals with the use of photography, autophotography and music when improving the students' writing skills. The author stipulates that the use of various media as is photography, autophotography and music would not only help students to improve their writings, but will also increase their interest in a free-style and creative writings. Based on his own experiences as a teacher and college instructor and various scholarly publications together with his own research of the gr. 7, 12 and Alternative Studies program students at the School District No.70, Port Alberni, the author confirms previous findings that the use of various media increases students interest in their own writings.

The author suggests that due to the positive results of his study the similar approach should be implemented not only in the Language Arts classes but in any program dealing with students writings. In addition, he believes that there are no age limitations for students or any other persons using this method to improve their writing skills and to generate their interest in writing. Furthermore, the author proposes that another positive output of this method is the increase of students' and other peoples' self-esteem due to their growing abilities of expressing themselves, dealing with their personal issues and with other people as well. Therefore, the author believes that the use of photography, autophotography and music should be incorporated into current curricula at any educational level.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	IV
CHAPTER I	1
Introduction	1
Definition of terms	4
CHAPTER II	7
Literary Review	7
Autophotography	7
Music	12
CHAPTER III	16
Methodology	16
Researcher	18
Research Limitations	19
CHAPTER IV	21
Case Study	21
CHAPTER V.....	33
Conclusion and Recommendations.....	33
REFERENCES	36

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: Phase I: Photograph I	40
APPENDIX II: Phase II: Writing Samples	41
APPENDIX III: Phase III: Photographs Samples	44
APPENDIX IV: Phase IV: Writing Samples	48
APPENDIX V: Phase V: Writing Samples	51
APPENDIX VI: Phase VI: Survey	54

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Chapter I

Introduction

Every photograph tells a story, every story can be expressed by music but it is only up to us to see or hear the story that is told and can be written. The following paper will explore the influence of photographs and music on free-style and creative writings. It would examine how the use of photographs and music can improve students' self-expressions during the free-style and creative writings and increase their interest in writing. In addition, it will analyze the influence of this approach on the free style and creative writings of marginalized students. I believe the use of photography, autophotography, and music engage adult learners, students and people in general in their pathways to self-discovery and their ideas of belongings. In addition, it may help them to find a community of people who share similar interests or are connected to each other through belonging to a group of people sharing similar or 'different' backgrounds.

I would try to prove that the combination of photographs and autobiography (autophotography) together with music is an important tool helping students to express themselves by writings. I would, based on my findings, summarize which approach towards free-style and creative writings seems to suite the students the best: (1) a teacher selects a photograph and music, (2) a student selects a photograph from a group of photographs provided by a teacher and listens music selected by the teacher and (3) students either take their own photographs or select an image on their own together with a selection of their own music. I believe that any of the above approaches are important and can be used in any form by others when dealing with today students and adults and,

mainly, when dealing with marginalized groups of people. The major reason is that media (art forms) used during this research method are accessible to a large variety of people.

I believe that using photography and autobiography (autophotography) in combination with music would help students to engage themselves more deeply in written expressions dealing with their search for their placement in our society and build a community of people that is based on some common goals. Furthermore, it would help them to define needs for social justice and democracy “because life stories and photographs are a record of social interaction and the inevitable power relationships among the people interacting” (Armstrong, 2005, p. 34). The use of music at the same time would enrich learners’ mood that is in my view an important factor when they are engaged in self-directed writing.

In 1996, I was working for Keewatin Community College, now The University of North, in northern Manitoba. I was preparing First Nation Students for their entry to the post-secondary education. Besides teaching many courses I was responsible for, the focus of the program was to help the students with their adjustment to higher learning. One of the important factors of their adjustment was, as it was viewed by the administrative bodies of this project, to help students with their awareness of themselves and to learn about empathy towards others. Since I had some academic freedom in designing my courses, I decided to explore the use of photography and music with a combination of creative writings to accomplish this task. The result was amazing. The majority of students in my program usually refused to write, not because they did not know how, but because they did not know what to write. Like for many of us, having an empty page on

which they should write their ideas was extremely challenging. I had empathized with them, knowing how hard it is to write a first letter, a first word and then compose a first sentence on a blank piece of a paper.

I decided that there must be some other easier way how to accomplish this task. A one day I brought into my class two photographs, a one of an older woman from the community and the second of a young European woman. I asked the students to write anything they want about these two women. The result was amazing. In a few minutes the students were able to write not a one page but two to three pages reflecting their ideas about those two women. The most interesting was that they did not only describe the photographs, but wrote stories including feelings. They reflected not just what those two women may have, but also the feelings and empathies of individual students towards these two women as well. After the project, I asked the students how we should improve this approach. They suggested using their own photographs. I asked them if playing the music during this project would help them with their abilities to express themselves. Their answer was that we should explore it.

The next class the students brought their own photographs or images they wanted to write about. I selected some songs that I thought would be appropriate for this assignment: a classical music and music of Tom Waits and Leonard Cohen. I believed that songs would be appropriate for this task since they represent more than a pop music. It is need to note that at that time there were no MP3s yet, so it was impossible to have each student listening to their own music. During the project many students became emotional. The music and the pictures had evoked in them emotions connected to their own self discoveries. Their works, their piece of writings, become for them the tool that enabled

them to express their own beliefs, feelings, happiness, fears sadness and dreams. It was their own writings that was not forced upon them and, therefore, become a part of their personal expression. The emotional part of the writing, although important, may cause some difficulties for all parties, therefore, it is a factor than cannot be controlled, but must be considered. Due to this fact, the teacher or instructor must be prepared to be able dealing with the emotional part of the assignment; in addition, if needed the counselling service should be available. Overall, results of the project and the students' appreciation for this approach overweight the possible difficulties.

Definition of Terms

Autobiography:

On Encyclopedia.com Mijolla-Mellor (2005) describes autobiography as follows: "As a literary genre, autobiography, narrating the story of one's own life, is a variation of biography, a form of writing that describes the life of a particular individual.

Autobiography in the modern sense began as a form of confession (Saint Augustine), even though there are memoirs in classical literature (Xenophon's *Anabasis*, Julius Caesar's *Gallic wars*). Such introspective works can be considered attempts at self-analysis before the psychoanalytic discovery of the unconscious. The function of autobiography is to use scattered bits of memory to create the illusion of a sense of continuity that can hide the anxiety of the ephemeral or even of the absence of the meaning of existence, from a purely narcissistic point of view" (p. 1).

Autophotography:

“Autophotography is a process whereby in the beginning a person interprets the content of photographs (photographs he or she has taken or photographs the person is asked to critically reflect on) of both people and places that are actual or metaphoric examples of his or her life world. These critical reflections are that shared with a group of people trained to raise critical questions about what they see or sense in the photographs. Soon the participant begins his or her critical reflection about the photographs, sharing with people in the group. This is usually a time of epiphany and awakening for the participants” (Armstrong, 2009 p. 34).

Creative Writing:

“Creative writing is writing that expresses the writer's thoughts and feelings in an imaginative, often unique, and poetic way. Creative writing is guided more by the writer's need to express feelings and ideas than by restrictive demands of factual and logical progression of expository writing” (What is creative writing, 1996).

Free-style Writing:

“Freestyle writing revolves around the belief that being able to get words down on paper is a central step in the writing process. Freestyle writing allows you to experience success in writing” (Hennessy, 2009, p.1).

Music:

“An art of sound in time that expresses ideas and emotions in significant forms through the elements of rhythm, melody, harmony, and color” (*The American heritage dictionary of the English language*, 2009, p.1).

Photography:

Photography “is vision, imagination, or seeing; it all comes down to the same thing: the ability to envision a final result in your mind's eye, and then to make it so with your tools at hand. It's never been about the gear. It's always been about seeing something, knowing how you want it to look, and making it so. Making it so is the easy part; seeing it in the first place is what makes a photographer. Powers of observation are everything” (Ken Rockwell, 2007, p.1).

Self-esteem:

According to Huitt (2009) self-esteem is “the affective or emotional aspect of self and generally refers to how we feel about or how we value ourselves (one's self-worth). Self-concept can also refer to the general idea we have of ourselves and self-esteem can refer to particular measures about components of self-concept. Some authors even use the two terms interchangeably” (p. 1).

Chapter II

Literature Review

Autophotography:

Although the literature dealing with autophotography is well developed its main focus is on adults. The majority of research studies deal with psychological and sociological implementations of autophotography. It is used as a research tool when focusing on students' or other peoples' self-esteem and their attitudes towards the cross-cultural societies. The studies dealing with the improvement of writing skills is minimal. Nevertheless, one may point out that improving peoples' writing skills would indirectly improve their self-esteem as well. Their increasing ability to express themselves and to deal literally with some of their problems and issues influencing their lives would, in my opinion, have a positive impact not only on their self-esteem but also would help them to define their place in today society. This is the most important for members of marginalized groups that may not have other voices than writings to express themselves.

Armstrong (2005) suggests that using photographs taken by the students and their use for autobiographical writings (autophotography) would deliver students' awareness of their private and social space. Similarly, Jones (2004), and Ziller & Lewis (1981) point out, when dealing with variety of adult learners from different ethnic or social backgrounds, the importance of autophotography as a vital tool for their self discovery and understanding of democratic principles of societies they live in. In addition, the autophotography becomes an important factor in their growing interest being involved in their further education.

The autophotography approach was developed by Ziller from the tradition of the Twenty Statement Test (Who Are You) towards the photo-essay approach (Dollinger et al., 1996, Dollinger & Dollinger, 2003, Jones, 2004). Jones (2004) and Noland (2006) define autophotography as a tool of freedom. Brück & Kainzbauer (2009) extends the meaning of autophotography as a tool that “use to compare two cultures [dominant and marginalized] on basic of photographs” (77).

The autophotography can be used during the multicultural studies to discover peoples’ attitudes towards others, towards marginalized group of people and attitudes between various ethnic groups (Allison & Rehm, 2007; Brown 2005; Brück & Kainzbauer, 2009; Noland, 2006 and Ziller & Lewis, 1981). Ziller & Lewis (1981) points out that “since photography may be described as ‘the universal language’ the approach lends itself to international and cross-cultural studies” (p.343). The cultural aspect of the autophotography is defined by peoples taking photographs defending their and others cultural identity. Noland (2006) and Brück & Kainzbauer (2009) point out:

As in cultural standard comparison studies autophotography can be used for a bilateral cultural comparison by asking members of one culture who live in a second culture to make photos expressing certain aspects of the second culture and vice versa (p. 80).

This is important when developing perspectives of one group of people about another group or people or individuals. It would help them with understanding of their place within the society and their ways of interacting among the various members of the society (Brown, 2005). The understanding of cross-cultural differences is vital when establishing the peoples’ attitudes towards others. The ability to accept different perspectives,

visions, lifestyles, beliefs and attitudes people may have is important for creating a democratic society established on the principles of social justice. The use of autophotography as a research tool to understand various people attitudes towards this idea is undisputable.

The use of autophotography is important for people to be able to develop their understanding of their inner I. This allows them to better communicate their ideas with other people. During my autophotography approach at the Keewatin Community college I asked the students if they would like to share their writing with other people. What surprised me was that only a small number of students elected not to share their writing with the class. The majority of the students saw it as an opportunity to share and explore their own ideas and personal/emotional feelings with others. When I asked them why they would like to share their personal stories evoked by the photographs with others their answer was that sharing helps them to cope better with their emotions. In addition, some of them saw it as a step to belong to a large community of people who share either similar tasks or place in our society. This corresponds with similar conclusions by Armstrong (2005), Clancy & Dollinger (1993), Dollinger, et al., (1996), Jones (2004) and Ziller & Lewis (1981) who used autophotography as an exploratory tool to students 'inner I' together with improving their educational performance. Dollinger, et al. (1996) points out that "one uses the photos to define who one is" (p. 1274). Ziller and Lewis (1981) point out that "photography provides the medium, and the theory of orientations proffers a means of discovering the meaning of the percepts" (p. 341). Armstrong (2005) quoting Dollinger (2001) suggests that

the process of autophotography [is] as ‘taking photos to answer the classic question; that is, the participant must think about the self as an object that is capable of being depicted through the external focus of the camera but, at the same time, with a goal of describing aspect of the inner self (pp. 37-8).

The importance of developing the understanding of persons’ inner I is vital for their self-esteem. (Dillinger et al., 1996) Developing individual self-esteem is significant for the members of marginalized groups. In addition, it is vital when we dealing with students who have a low performance at school. The increase of their self-esteem, usually, improves their performance at school.

Overall, the important aspect of the autophotography lies in the peoples’ freedom to photograph or to choose a photograph that is important for them and their ability to describe photographs in their own words (Jones, 2004 and Noland, 2006).

Jones (2004) writes:

Autophotography allows participants freedom-freedom to use their actual surroundings, freedom to pick and choose the people [or objects] who are important to their self-concept, and freedom to decide what issue and what artifacts are most salient to their construction of self. It is this immense freedom which the camera gives to the participants which distinguishes it from traditional paper and pencil test (p. 190).

The freedom of expression that autophotography offers is important in developing peoples ability to express their thoughts freely. This aspect is a key factor when dealing with free-style or self-directed writings.

The fundamental aspect of autophotography in education is that “the contribution of autophotography to knowledge transfer relies on the role of images and their influence on learning” (Brück & Kainzbauer ,2009, p. 85). The significance of autophotography for education can be further characterized by Brown (2005):

Prior studies on the use of photography in education reveal the value of auto-photography as a teaching strategy in K-12 classrooms to: (1) connect student’s prior experiences to content instruction and current events, (2) help students organize and comprehend materials and (3) celebrate, share and incorporate into the learning process the cultural capital students possess (p. 151).

Armstrong (2005) sees the importance of autography when working with the marginalized groups of students and at-risk students; he points out:

High school students with high risk of dropping out, even in areas of high crime, poverty, and gang activity, could become more self-actualized through autophotography, as measured by more frequent completion of homework, more successful interaction with other students and staff (fewer reports of fights and detentions), a graduation (p. 40).

In addition, the autophotography, due to its ability to expose students towards cross-cultural societies and their attitudes towards different lifestyles, is an important teaching tool in culturally diverse schools settings (Allison & Rehm, 2007). Furthermore, the use of autophotography within the educational system is a necessary tool when teaching social justice and democratic principles of our society.

Music

During the autophotography approach at the Keewatin Community college I have realized that something was missing. The silence of the classroom was, in my opinion, an unproductive and sterile environment. I wondered if using music would add a positive state of mind to students' abilities of expressing themselves. Some authors point out that using music as stimuli during writing exercises produces positive results in students' approach to their work (Brown & Brown, 1997; Dean & Gross, 1992; Donlan, 1976; Lems, 2001; Lems, 2005 and Olson, 2005). Lems (2001) writes, "music can be used in the adult ESL classroom to create a learning environment; to build listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing skills; to increase vocabulary; and to expand cultural knowledge"(p.1). Olson (2005) explores the importance of music as media that can develop self-conciseness. Although, he focuses on composing the variety of music by marginalized groups of people, his foundlings can be applied to any kind of music. Olson (2005) says that "music, to them (Adult learners), has the potential for "teaching" adults in four ways: fostering self-identity, physical or emotional therapy, awakening consciousness and spiritual connections that cannot be achieved otherwise, and forging connections to past experiences and cultural heritage" (p. 57).

The main reason employing music in than classrooms and when working with adult learners is that "music works. Almost without exception, music centered classroom activities ... have yielded untold treasures – for the whole class, the individuals, and the instructors" (Lems, 2005, p. 13). Music becomes stimulus for students who try to express themselves by writings (Brown & Brown, 1997 and Donland, 1976). Dean & Gross (1992) points out that using music as stimulus is a part "of many enrichment programs

provided for gifted and talented students” (p. 613). It “reduces mental fatigue, calms tensions, focuses thinking and stimulates creativity and sensitivity” (Brown & Brown, 1997, p. 349). This is because music provides “ an artificial environment ... eliminating outside distractions, such as classroom noise, which occurs when such environment is not provided” (Donland, 1976, p. 116). This confirms my own experience during teaching. To create a friendly environment I have played music during my Mathematics and Science classes. At first, I was worried that it would distract the students from their work, but it had an opposite impact on the students. It eliminated unnecessary talking and the student concentrated on their work better.

The music positive impact on the students can be explained by its interaction with our brain. Brown & Brown (1997) point out that “music evokes alpha and theta brain wave states, which are conducive to memory and enhanced creativity” (p. 350). Lems (2005) by summarising others suggests:

Recent developments in brain-based research note that central features of music and language are housed near one another in the human brain, suggesting they may share features of a ‘grammar’ that orders musical elements and language elements similarly (p. 14).

This correspond with Brown & Brown (1997) statement that music “stimulates and unifies brain function and automatically touches three of the four modalities by which the brain processes information: the auditory, kinaesthetic-tactile, and emotive” (p. 350). The interacting impact of music and literally activities should, therefore, promote students writing activities. It would not only impact their memory but, also, their ability to express themselves thought free-style or creative writing activities.

The important factor regarding the use of music in the classroom environment during regular classroom activities is the selection of music that would stimulate the students and keep their attention towards writings or other activities. Donland (1976) differentiates between two kind of music: a background music and as a stimulus for writings. He points out that “when music is used as background, it is generally not intended to affect or control the writing behavior of the student nor shape the content of the writing” (p. 116). The background music can be used with the autophotography if our intentions are to have the students reflect only on the photographs. The stimulating music is then intended to provide students with music that they would reflect on (Donland, 1976; Lems, 2005 and Register, 2001) or when used in combination with autophotography is being complimentary to photographs. Therefore, the stimulating music directly influences the students’ writings. It can be any kind of music from the classical music to pop or rap (Donland, 1967 and Lems, 2005). The impact of the music on writings varies depending on the music and participating students (Donland, 1976), therefore, it is mostly up to the teacher and the students selecting music that would work. Another possibility is that students select their music on their own when producing their free-style or creative writings.

The positive impact of music on students’ learning and on their classroom activities is undisputable. Music is used in enrichment programs, with the at-risk students, ESL programs and with adult learners (Dean and Gross, 1992; Lems, 2005 and Register, 2001). Due to the music flexibility it can be used in almost all classroom settings and with the majority of students of any age. Furthermore, it can be applied not only in the Language Arts programs but in other educational programs as well. Many

various programs using music as supplements to regular teaching methods were developed. It is up to teachers and instructors to incorporate them into their teaching programs (Brown & Brown, 1997; Dean & Gross, 1992; Kariuki & Honeycutt, 1998; Register, 2001 and Ridout, 1990). Similarly to autophotography, music influence on the students' intellectual growth results in their development of self-esteem. This is important mainly when dealing with the marginalized groups of students.

Chapter III

Methodology

The majority of studies that deals with autophotography are based on quantitative research. I believe that different approach is needed to define how autophotography and music influence students' writings. Creswell (2009) describes the qualitative research as:

Means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's settings, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final report has a flexible structure (p.4).

The qualitative approach is, therefore, more suitable to identify if autophotography and music when employed during students writing activities improve their writing skills.

The settings of the following study have been located at the participants' classrooms. Therefore, the participants have been prevented from anxiety of the unfamiliar surroundings during the project. Furthermore, data collected during the project were more correlated to the participant's real-life settings. This makes the study more reliable than a research designed outside of the participants' familiar areas.

To collect data needed for the project I employed the *Case Study* strategy. Creswell (2009) by summarizing Stake describes the *Case Studies* as

a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over sustained period of time (p.13).

The following study is based on researching the students' writing skills during four different phases. In addition, I base my conclusion on the students' observation during the activities, literally reviews, students' writings and a survey completed by the students participating during the project.

The vital part of the project is, beside observation and the literally review, a survey designed by me. The questions developed for the survey and data analysis reflect Creswell's (2009) general idea of using:

a theoretical lens or perspective in qualitative research, which provides an overall orienting lens for the study of questions of gender, class, and race (or other issues of marginalized groups). This lens becomes an advocacy perspective that shapes the types of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed, and provide a call for action or change (p.62).

The questions help guiding the study towards the "*end point*" (p.63). In the *Case Study* Creswell (2009) by interpreting Stake points out that the *end point* is an assertion as a *propositional generalization* – the researcher's summary of interpretations and claims – to which is added the researcher's own personal experiences, called 'naturalistic generalizations'" (p. 64).

The survey questions are centered around a "central question" (p.129) which as Creswell (2009) points out "asks for an exploration of the central phenomenon or concept

in a study. The inquirer poses this question, consistent with the emerging methodology of qualitative research, as a general issue so as to no limit the inquiry” (p. 129). The following questions developed from the central question are designed to give the readers the opportunity to answer the questions in broadly approach rather than yes or no answers; therefore, it is important to use open ended questions that help the readers to express themselves (Creswell, 2009).

Researcher

Creswell (2009) writes that “researcher’s own personal training and experiences also influence their choice approach” he points out that “individuals who enjoy writing in a literature way or conducting personal interviews or making up-close observations may gravitate to the qualitative approach” and that “qualitative approaches allow room to be innovative and to work more within researcher-designed frameworks” (p. 19). As a trained educator with a focus on history and social issues I believe that I reflect Creswell (2009) of “advocacy/participatory writers [who have] undoubtedly a strong stimulus to pursue topics that are of personal interest – issues that relate to marginalized people and an interest in creating a better society for them and everyone” (p. 19).

I have been working as a teacher and a collage instructor for more than ten years in different parts of Canada predominately with the First Nation Students. During my work I have accouter many times students that had difficulties to express themselves by writings. Therefore, I became interested in different approaches that should help students to literally express themselves and, at the same time, improve their attitude towards writing. I realized that by using autophotography the teachers and others are able to reach

their students and to improve not only students' self-esteem, but also their writing skills. Based on the facts that majority of studies deals with autophotography as a tool to improving students' self-esteem, I decided to approach autophotography as a tool improving students' writings and their attitude towards writing. I realized that students' self-esteem would improve students increase their self-confidence due to improving their writing skills.

Research Limitations

The research limitations can be characterized by three major aspects of the research: researcher biases, researcher's inexperience and the small sample of participants. All these three aspects may limit the project validity, but nevertheless, the findings and recommendations based on this project are important when dealing with learners and marginalized group of people. Furthermore, this project may lead to a further and larger project to confirm or to reject my findings.

My personal bias influencing the end result of the project is my belief that using autophotography and music as a stimulus during the students' literally exercises would improve their approach towards their writings. The major reason for this opinion is that I had successfully used the similar approach before with a small group of adult students. The positive results accomplished by using this approach persuaded me that it should work with students and people of any ages and in many different settings.

Creswell (2009) points out that based on the difficulty to carry qualitative research, the researcher should be an expert in this field. The inexperienced researcher may have difficulties to formulate correct qualitative questions needed for the valid

survey. Formulating accurate questions is important for obtaining correct answers from the participants. The accurate answers are vital for researchers' ability to gain the most reliable data for their project. It was a challenge for me to formulate questions that would reflect qualitative research survey.

The limited number of participants may negatively influence the results of the project. During the project I was able only to work with the students from one school district. In addition, the number of participants was limited to a few students: 10 gr. 12 students, 9 gr. 7 students and 6 Alternate Program students. The larger sample of participants and diverse school districts would be necessary to increase the validity of my research.

Chapter IV

Case study

During my employment at the Keewatin Community College I was, unfortunately, restrained by time and financial limitation fully employing the autophotography method as described by Armstrong (2005) and Jones (2004). Instead of having students to use their own photographs, I selected photographs that were related to their community and other places around the world. Students were asked to select two photographs, one related to their community and one that was unrelated to them. Then they were asked to write freely as much as they could about their feelings and emotions that both photographs evoked. In addition, they explored how these photographs are related to their placement with in our social order. Later on I added music during their writings to create a better atmosphere. Not until now, I have an opportunity to explore this approach deeper. After reading Armstrong (2005) article I decided to design a case study to obtain more data regarding the use of autophotography and music during students' writings.

Prior the project, I approached a few teachers at the School District 70, Port Alberni and asked them if they would like to participate with their students in the *'Improving Student's Performance and Writing Skills by Using Photography, Autophotography and Music'* project that is a part of the requirements by the University of Victoria Leadership Studies MEd program. At the same time, I gave them a package including the basic information regarding the project. After they agreed to participate in the project, I approached the principals of the schools where I intended to conduct the project and presented them with the written information about the project. In addition, I

told them that there are some teachers willing to participate with their students during the project. When they agreed to use their facilities to implement the project I informed the interested teachers about their decision. Then we approached their students and informed them that they may be a part of the research project focussing the improvement of their free-style and self-directed writings abilities. At the same time I submitted the Ethic Application to the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board for an approval. When approved, I asked the School District 70 superintendent, Cam Pinkerton for an authorization to conduct the project. After his approval I informed the participating teachers and principals about his decision.

When the decision was made by all interested parties that the project can be conducted I went back to selected classrooms: gr. 7, gr. 11/12 Social Justice and Alternate Program. I distributed a letter of consent including the detailed information about the project to the students and informed them that their participation in the project is the volunteer based and anonymous. I told them that only students who return a signed letter of consent would be able to participate. Furthermore, I informed them that the project would have four phases: (1) classical music and photograph selected by the researcher, (2) contemporary music and assorted photographs selected by the researcher: they would choose only one photograph, (3) they would choose their own photograph/image and music that they would listen individually on their MP3s and (4) questioner that is designed to give me information about the project. I told them that the importance of the project is to find innovative ways to improve students attitudes towards free-style and creative writings; the positive results from the project may be, later on, incorporated into various educational programs. I informed them that individual tasks

would be limited to 20 minutes and that all their entries would be anonymous. Not all students decided to participate during the project: 11 gr. 11/12 students, 9 gr. 7 students and 6 Alternate Program students participated during the project.

Phase I

During the *Phase I* all students from the Social Justice class chose to participate but only those who submitted the consent form letter handed in their works. The activity was conducted in their own classroom during their regular teaching hours. Similarly, the Alternate Program students participated in their classroom during the regular teaching hours. The gr. 7 students participated in a different classroom during regular teaching hours. It was agreed, prior the activities, that the students would participate during the regular hours and that their activities would become a part of their regular teaching activities.

The settings for the *Phase I* activity were similar for all participants. Prior the activity, I setup my laptop and external speakers to play the music. Then, I distributed the photocopy of B&W photograph to the students (APPENDIX I). In addition, I gave them a line-paper. I told them that grammar is not important during this assignment; the reason why it is not important is that this is only a draft and, therefore, it is essential for them to write their ideas free of being pressured by grammar. They would be able to improve their writing after the project is finish and their writing are returned to them, if they would like to do it.

I started playing music in the following order: Beethoven's Moon Light Sonata, Mozart's Requiem and J. S. Bach's Toccata and Fugue. There was some talking among

the participants within all three groups at the beginning, but it was short lived. The students engaged themselves into the writing task in a short period of time, about 3-4 minutes. They needed time to adjust to the environment and the task that was, due to the music and photograph, different from their regular tasks. The gr. 12 students adjusted to their activity fastest. It was hardest to adjust for the Alternate Program students.

The Alternate Program students spent the shortest time on the task. Their concentration runs out in about 10 minutes. The majority of students from other groups used all 20 minutes; some students asked if we can extend the time to finish their ideas. The shortest entries were from the Alternate Program students, one or five sentences, but even that was, according to their teacher, an important accomplishment because for most of the time they do not write at all. Most of the gr. 7 students and the gr. 12 students wrote more than one single page. The samples of all three groups are included in the APPENDIX II. After the written part, the students from all there groups and I had briefly discussed the activity. The interesting part was that some students in all three groups recognized the music and the change of the music mood. I did not observe any disturbing emotional state by any student. In addition, the feedbacks from the participating teachers were positive as well.

Phase II

The setting for the phase two was identical as for the *Phase I*. I used my laptop and external speakers to play the music. I remained the students in all three groups that they will have about 20 minutes to write and that their works are anonymous. I told them that this project differs from the previous: instead of one photographs they would be able

to choose from multiple B&W images, each of them having 3 copies. I brought 60 images all together. I had the students to pass them around and to select the one they were able connecting to. The samples of images are in the APPENDIX III. Some of the students had a hard time to select the correct image; even after selecting one they sometimes exchanged it for another image. Therefore, this approach may be a time consuming compare to the previous approach. On the other hand, it gives the students more freedom to decide what they would like write about.

After they had selected the images and settled down I started to play the music in the following order: Kylie Minogue and Nick Cave 'Where the Wild Roses Grow', Tom Waits "Hold on", Asian Dub Foundation "Fortress of Europe, Gipsy CZ 'Romano Hip Hop' and Leonard Cohen 'Teachers'. Some of them were surprised by the music. I could see that some did not like it and, therefore, had a hard time to concentrate and to start their tasks. The gr. 7 student exhibited the most difficulties to concentrate. It is important to know that the music must be appropriate for the various age groups as well the students must be able to connect with music. When I talked to them after the activity, they told that they disliked the music and, therefore, had a hard time to concentrate. The music selection was better received by the other two groups.

Similarly to *Phase I* the gr.12 and the gr.7 students wrote the most. On the other hand the Students from the Alternate Program wrote more than during the previous phase. Some students were able to write a one page. This supports the idea that music and images when used during writing activities help student to not only to concentrate on their work, but also to motivate them during their writings. I did not observe any

emotional stress among the students during this phase of the. The samples of student writing are in the APPENDIX IV.

Phase III

This phase was the most interesting not only from the point of the project, but from the students' point of view as well. Prior this phase the students were anxious to participate during this activity. The most excited about this part of the project were the gr.7 and Alternate Program students. I reminded them that during this part of the project they would be allowed to use their own photographs and music. I told them that the image can be their own made or any image they can relate too. In addition the image and music must be appropriate for the school settings. One of the Alternate Program students asked me if he can, instead of the photograph/image, bring his own painting and write about it. I told him that it is fine. The preparation was not easy; all depended on students bringing their photographs and MP3s. We set up a date for the activity. They were repeatedly reminded to bring all their stuff on the setup date. The selection of music, photographs/images and having the students to bring it all on the given day may be the most challenging task. Nevertheless, if the students become customized to it, the problems should be eliminated over the time.

The students' excitement was exhibited during the written activities. The gr. 7 students were the most excited. It took them longest to concentrate on the activity; once they were able to submerge in their music they focused on their writing without being disturbed by their surroundings. The Alternate Program students acted similar way. The students did not exhibit any negative emotional stage. Their reactions seem to be positive

and I could see smile on their faces during the writing. They would like continuing to participate even after they had passed the time limit allocated for this activity.

I was, unfortunately, unable to be present during the gr.12 Social Justice class participation in the *Phase III* of the project. The classroom teacher delivered and supervised this part of the project. In addition, she observed the students and gave me all information needed to make conclusions about the students' participation. According to her, the students were engaged directly in the activity. Most of them brought family pictures to write about. She could observe that all pictures were important to them. It took them a minimal time to get started. She told me that many of the students exhibited emotional stage; some of the students needed to stop writing and went for a short walk either around the classroom or outside the classroom. She observed that some of the students had tears in their eyes. It was important for her to deal with this situation immediately. She talked to the individual students, giving them her support and asking them if they need more counselling. None of the students needed extra counselling to deal with their emotions. This is an important factor to keep in the mind when implementing similar exercise. The teacher needs to be prepared for the similar situation and have the ability or resources to deal with students' emotions. The supervising teacher told me that she have had never encountered a similar situation before when students would exhibit their emotions during writing assignments. I accoutered a similar situation when working at the Keewatin Community College. This confirms Armstrong's (2005), Dollinger & Dollinger's (2003) and Ziller & Lewis' (1981) findings that the autophotography participants usually display emotional stages.

The *Phase III* confirms that the use of autophotography is an important tool for students and others to discover their inner I; it helps them to define their place within our society. In addition, they are able to release, sometimes, their hidden traumas that they would not be able to do it another way. This was confirmed by a participating teacher who told me that one of her gr.12 students had approached her after the activity and told her that he wrote a story about his grandfather; he was never able to tell this story before. In addition, he approached another teacher and told her about it. He asked her if she would like to read his story as well. The examples of students' works are in the APPENDIX V.

All three phases confirm the importance of using music, photography and autophotography as an educational tools during writing activities. This, besides improving students' attitudes towards writing, opens for the educators and the students a road to understanding of our divers and multicultural society. In addition, it helps the students to explore their inner I that is necessary for them not to only to understand themselves, but others as well. Furthermore, this approach can be applied to all range of the students with varieties of social backgrounds, mainly those with the marginalized groups of students, and with diverse intellectual or academic levels.

Phase IV

The *Phase IV* is the questionnaire submitted to the students immediately after the *Phase III* and collected by participating teachers. The answers are, beside the observations and students works, another important part of this project. When summarized, they give us the inside information about the success of the project and additional information about using this approach with the students or other people in the

future. The questions are based on the Qualitative research approach. The example of the questionnaire is in APPENDIX VI.

Based on the answer the participating students prefer the use of their own music and the photographs (autophotography). Here are some reasons outlined by the students:

I liked my own music and photograph, because I know the lyrics and what was happening when I took that picture and I know the story behind it, so it was a lot easier to write.

I liked the part when you got to bring your own music and pictures because it connected with me more so I could write better.

Listening to my own music. Music usually makes me happy. So when I'm allowed to plug myself in during class it's pretty sweet. Sometime it really gave me time to think without feeling rushed which was nice.

Your own music/photographs, because it is personal and you can keep the writing close to your heart. It was hard to write. I had to take a brief walk to shake off what he said to me before he passed away.

Listening to our own music and images was way more personal. It is easier to write on personal experience than to music and images that you don't really have any connection to. Writing to my own music was like opening a vessel of creativity that had been locked up. I was totally indulged in my own mind with images ahead of me.

When asked if they would rather have only music or photographs or both the students answers were:

I think the music is more influential. The lyrics of the songs gave me ideas on my writing when I got stuck.

I hardly noticed the picture. To me it is more important to have a class full of images. I think we need the music 100x more than the one single photo.

If you only played music there would be very random answers! People connect with music differently but a photo is one image in someone's mind. It can be looked at differently but it's the same picture. If I just listened to music I would probably write about what ever is on my mind, in the mood of the song. A picture is like a topic.

I think sometimes certain music styles help us write about the images. Music also just makes our brains work better and even write better, it makes us become more creative.

Many students believe that this kind of approach to writings helps them with their abilities to express themselves better:

The music totally assisted me in my writing. It was a constant source of creativity and new ideas. It also kept me involved and 'encouraged' me to continue writing. The different pieces of music invoked different feelings and ideas and can be used tastefully in creative writing.

Having music definitely helped with the writing, as it created a different atmosphere rather than silence.

I think it showed in the last part of the project when we choose our own image and music. This helped because I could connect the music and the picture and write about them.

Yes, both parts helped because it put me in a mood. It put me in a direction with my writing.

I learned that listening to music and looking at the picture helps me write a story.

When asked if they would like that this approach to writing is used during regular classes the students answered:

I think that listening to your own music would definitely increase creativity and inspiration in self-directed writing in school. I think it frees them up and they can get into it better.

Yes I would, because it would help bring out all the inner creativity.

It encourages the mind to make images and make certain emotions which could help very much in the self-directed writing process.

I would because kids write better when they listen to music. Music helps kids write better, and it helps us write creatively.

Yes, maybe in English class or even in Planning. When I got to listen to my own music and write about whatever it made me actually think about my thoughts. It was cool I think. I could have learned more about myself if I did this more.

I think it is a great idea to have a time for students to help them write. Not only will their writing skills improve, but they will feel better, I started of writing being frustrated and annoyed but now I feel much better because I was able to let out some of things that were bothering me.

It is a very good way to start writhing a story because if you are having trouble starting a story, look at the picture and it will help you to get started.

I think that it would be better if we could do this when we write stories. It would give me more ideas and I would enjoy it more.

Based on the students' answers it is evident that the students prefer to use music and in some cases images during the project. Furthermore, they notice that this approach would be useful during writing exercises because it eases their anxiety from writing and increases their creativity.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion and Recommendations

I believe that only further testing of this approach can show how songs and photography influence students' moods of writings. During my experiment at Keewatin Community College the songs and photographs that were related to students' community belongings evoked emotional state that may not be, in my opinion, experimented if music and photographs would be community neutral or selected from them. I believe that this was because some students were able to associate their own feelings with the words in the songs and the images on the photographs. Similarly, when applying autophotography approach with the School District 70 students, some students exhibited emotional states when using their own music and photographs they could relate to. This directly influenced their written responses; their final projects and their understanding of community belongings can be directly influenced by their music and photographs selections. Therefore, the variety of different approaches would result in variety of outcomes. In addition, this experiment can be extended by having students to compose their own music. The further study of the various music selections on students writing is important to expose its influence.

I believe that the use of symbolism of various art forms is important for delivering cultural awareness in today society. The autophotography in combination with music is a vital part of this vision. It can be used as an art form (an educational tool) of marginalized groups of people to express their ideas and emotions. In my opinion, it will help them to develop their senses of belonging and community awareness. This will be in contrast when using a 'high' art that is the symbol of a dominate group as a teaching tool.

Furthermore, by focusing on media that is accessible to all we will be closer in delivering social justice and democratic principles in our classrooms and communities.

Based on the above findings I would like to outline a few recommendations and suggestions. The use of photography, music and autophotography when correctly implemented can become an important factor in today educational settings. The quality of this approach depends on a few factors. During the teacher centered approach (a teacher selects music and photographs) attention needs to be paid towards the selection of music and photographs. This is important for having positive results of the project and students' involvement in the project. The photos and music must relate to the students' age and interest. In addition, prior of the project the teacher must decide on the goals they want to accomplish. According to Donland(1976) different kind of music has different outcomes on the student work. He suggests that the selection of the music relates to either the quality or the quantity of the students' works.

During students' self directed approach the teachers need to make sure that the music and the photographs are appropriate for the school settings. Although this may seem to be hard to accomplish some level of trust must be given to the students. This would result in a increased trust among the teacher and the students and, therefore in rising of students self-confidence leading to their increase of self-esteem.

Based on the positive results of the project and positive students' responses I would recommend that more teachers use this approach within their programs. Furthermore I would suggest using photography, music and autophotography, due to their positive impact on students' academic growth, as parts of the any grade level curricula.

The approach can be applied not only in the Language Art programs, but in any program dealing with students' written expressions.

To conclude I would like to point out that using autophotography in combination with music can be done with the majority of students/people including a wide age range. In addition, it can be used with any ethnic, gender and social group of people from female to the First Nation people and immigrants. It will help them, by using inexpensive media and art forms, to express their beliefs and ideas that they would not be able to articulate when only dominant social group art and media forms are being used. The developing the sense of community, own and collective ideas, exploring the inner 'I', knowing who we are, understanding others together with social justice and democratic principles are the vital parts of the autophotography/music approach. Overall, it may help us to develop a society build on social justice for all.

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APPENDIX I

All photographs © Richard Pesik



APPENDIX II

....I have seen grown man cry and more disturbing sights, they burn into my mind. I cannot forget, I am not meant to forget. For everyone is guilty of the good he did not do, and every action or attraction has an equal and opposite tension. Divine retribution, Karma, Tao all mean the same

Moonlight sonata plays in the background ... I can't help thinking about my weekend though – my endless list of tasks and the apparent lack of check marks beside the 'to-do' list I feel like many people do on a Monday morning and like this guy in the photograph looks: tired and stressed... This kind of music flows through me constantly, pulsing and pushing. The full lower parts that make the speaker buzz and vibrate in protest against it's strength does the same to the inside of me – causing up and down each vain stimulating emotions and memories. Memories of being under the bright scrutiny of an audience of hundreds....

So many regrets and nothing you can do to take them back, to make it better, to prove you're better than that! Knowing your possible of change.

But you can't.

No number of drinks will take the pain away. You're just everyone else. You want to be loved, you need to be loved ... Who does this man have now? He may be rich but he's all alone drinking away his sorrow....

... Being lonely is different to everyone. For some maybe they lost a loved one and feel lonely. Maybe someone has a ton of loved ones but doesn't feel like they can go to them to talk. Another way might be if you have no family or friends, or if you were in a relationship that ended. Perhaps you feel like an outsider at school or work. There are many reasons people can feel alone

The music makes the picture look sad. The music is beautiful and it gets my attention right away and it makes me think about things

The man in the picture looks like me when out for coffee, because he is thinking what to do next.

The man in the picture is alone and sad. He sits with his hand over his mouth, deep in thought, leaving the people and music unnoticed. The frown lines on his forehead represent stress, but we will never know how long he has suffered or what from, but the blank face he shows hides undealt with pain.

Her dress gorgeous dress swayed as she twirled on the ballroom dance floor. Magnificent. As he remembers his one and only. Sitting in the store. Wishing she could come back, wishing ...he could die to be with her. He continues only memory of ... her.... The memory fades. Forgotten. Forgotten what happened the day he met her. No more memory, missing his loving wife, that he has forgotten.

As the boy sat in his chair with his hand on his face, thinking of his music and piano. He did not know what to write, but his thoughts slowly started to change to flying beast with wings. A world of misery black and the color of blood on the walls, floors. Monster attacked all that

Ronnie walked into a café. He sat down in a seat near the window. “What can I get you sir?” the waitress said with a blank emotion on her face. “One cup of joy.” He said blankly, staring out the window.... As Ronnie was looking out the window, it struck him. “It all makes sense now!” He zipped up his coat and lunged out the door in to the streets of London....

APPENDIX III









APPENDIX IV

This cat chases its accessory roots in the woods. It wants to be a lion. In the woods it can pretend to chase its prey through the dense scrubs. All is still in the woods. Once the cat leaves its forest heaven, back to an original civilization it goes

When I look at this picture I think of a great huge green yard with a beautiful garden. I also think of comfort and trust. The cat in this picture is extremely cute and makes me think of a warm summer day or Halloween day.

The setting makes me think of a nice yard out at the lake or my aunt and uncle's house out Chilliwack. I feel happiness when looking at this photo. I have no bad thoughts or images looking at this photo. I can almost smell freshly cut grass when looking at it.....

The window stands. A door, a wall to another world. I gaze at it, hopeless, never to pass through. I gaze through it, to a girl of beauty. Elegant dancer fly through the air High-heels and black leather glides across the floor, slowly gracefully....

So many doctors told me I have cancer, my first thoughts were oh crap. I then thought of my family what legacy had I left to my three sons; have I been a good enough father. I decided to take my wife to a far off place. I shaved my head and waxed my arms. I decided that we need to go somewhere warm. I grabbed my backpack and left right away. My wife is a rock star; she has loads of money....

I picture a couple traveling in Venice or somewhere nice. They walk down the road. They go buy lunch and do some shopping, but it's the old days they miss when they'd laugh at everything they said; they'd complimented each other and each one believed no one else in the world could make them happier....

The cobblestone brick felt cool under my cracked feet. So many days have I spent this way, pacing, pursuing. Isn't the pursuit of happiness more than just a promise? It implies we're allowed to chase often something that is unreachable. Like trying to grab smoke. I've been walking in search of this smoke most of my life.... The pursuit is tiring me. Flashes zip through my mind. Family, friend, life. Life, love, love....

I was always the kid in the class that never really spoke. Never know to crack a smile, would not joke. Use to know my culture. Then I lost I wish I kept the language We weren't learning anything about it once we left elementary

This woman looks lonely; she's just staring out into the streets/town/world looking for hope. Maybe someone she knows had something happen to them or maybe she's just curious. Maybe she's looking out into the street or maybe a view; perhaps she's just watching one person studying them trying to learn from their happiness.

Desiree was uptown shopping for a new wardrobe when she realized her friends weren't with her anymore. Fifteen minutes later she got a text saying; "Where are you?"

We thought you left so we went home.” She wrote back that she was still uptown and she had left the stores and was waiting to catch the buss at the bus stop...

The music pounded shaking the floor. The dance floor rock with the feet pounded on the ground. The bodies moved with the music than the floor collapsed under the hundreds of feet. Most people were trap under piles of cement not able to escape.

APPENDIX V

... the horror of the cries of being shoot, the sound of death. Nothing scared me more than hearing one of my friend of my family members being shoot, I cried myself to sleep after losing my closest and only brother I ever had. He dies in my arms. I never had this happen. After his death ...I god mad. I wanted revenge. I wanted those Germans dead all and every single one of them....

Grandfather ...

When I think about Calvin and Hobbes I remember my grandma and how such amazing person she was. She was such a kind person, and everyone around her loved and adore her.

When I look at Calvin and Hobbes I feel so happy, I think about how this small boy believes that his stuffed tiger is alive, and their best friends. Hobbes is like Calvin's security blanket, he's always there, they do everything together.

I think women should be treated equally. The poster 'We can do it' shows that women can do anything men can do. Women have been treated different from men since many years ago....

The music that was playing made me picture that these women had a dream to have rights. They had dreams to not have to worry about going out in public. They just wanted to be treated equally

I've got a dream. My dream is to be selfless and prejudice free. I've got a dream to be the change I want to see in the world. I've got a dream to help those who can't help themselves....

I want to set an example for those who need someone to follow. I want to be an inspiration for those who want to lead....

Who grew me like a plant? Who gave me fresh soil when I needed it? Opened the curtains when I needed light or injected me with vitamins, nutrients, and most important water? My family.... I have such a distinct relationship with each of my family members. Jazz like Sinatra from my mom, Katie Perry with my dad Without them I feel anorexic and deficient I love you dad. I love you mom. I love you Robin, Dave, Joshua, Caleb...

Sometimes I just want to close my eyes put on my Ipod and curl up on couch, ignore my homework, ignore my chores, and most importantly turn off my phone. Running in the woods also gives me a good feeling. It's almost like freedom. Like I can be myself with no worries....

I hate having expectations in a relationship. I get upset, disappointed when he doesn't say right things, he never compliments and I'm always the one to blame if we're fighting....

This picture makes me think about the water, fishing and swimming. When I look at this I think about eating, I like fish. I also think about First Nations and rights or residential schools.

3. Would you prefer if only music would be used without the use of photographs? Why?

4. Which style of the project (classical music/one photo, contemporary music/selection of photographs, your own music/photograph) would you prefer? Why?

5. Did any of the parts of the project help you with your writing? Why?

6. Would you suggest that this approach to self-directed writing is used at schools? Why?