

Third Grade Memoirs

Claudia M. Hughes
L.L. Pugh Elementary

INTRODUCTION

Literacy through photography has become a very interesting topic to me. As a bilingual teacher and an immigrant to the United States, I am aware of the difficulties of communicating with people who do not speak our language or do not know our culture. I became more aware of this when I came from Mexico in 1995.

Photography helps us to communicate with all kinds of people, regardless of the language they speak, their culture, or the country they come from. Photographs can tell us our own history or the history of the world. We can see the world and learn what is happening elsewhere. I think of photography as an international language.

I worked at Philips Petroleum Company from 1996 to 2002 as a Spanish instructor, trainer for Latin American culture, and liaison between the Mexican government and Phillips. The use of photographs to teach Spanish was a spontaneous practice in my daily job. I had students from the United States, Taiwan, Australia, France, England, Germany, and Canada. Most of my students worked in the international division. They traveled very often and to different parts of the world. They started bringing photographs, books, and postal cards from all their business and vacation trips. The reading of photographs enhanced my classes and increased the vocabulary of my students. This visual tool helped my students to express themselves better in Spanish. It was a wonderful experience for me because I learned about the oil business, remote places, diversity, and people from many parts of the world.

One example of this experience was a trip of one of my students to the wilderness of Peru. Through his photographs I could see the jungle, some of the people who live there, the Amazon River, and the Russian helicopters Phillips contracted for the exploration of this part of the Amazon. I even saw a building of a Christian American mission. I saw the houses that Phillips built for the employees and for the workers. At the same time my students were learning Spanish, I learned many interesting things by reading photographs. I am glad to say that my students learned to speak the Spanish language very fast.

Photography is an excellent tool for teachers to use in their classes, no matter the subject we are teaching. It will be an excellent aid to better understand our students and learn about their lives, families, and previous experiences. Photos can be a complement or a starting point for writing. We can use photographs as a device for developing observation, critical thinking, analysis, and free expression. We can develop creativity in the students by having them take their own photos and write about them. Photography can be therapeutic for those students who have trouble communicating by writing or speaking. Photography can become a means by which students and teachers can communicate what is going on in a classroom during the school year with parents and teachers. We can use e-mail and communicate with teachers and children from other parts of the world. I plan to trade photos and essays with other teachers from other countries as part of the project so we can learn what is going on in other places in the United States and the world.

One strategy to increase visual literacy is for teachers and students to use digital cameras, which are becoming cheaper, easier to use, and more commonplace in K-12 schools. Many schools have effectively used classroom sets of laptop computers, but there are only a few successful models for using a set of digital cameras (Wilhelm).

When I started working with pictures in my classroom at Pugh Elementary, I opened a window to my students' lives and spirits. I learned about their likes and dislikes. I could see who the most popular students in the classroom were and who needed more recognition. Using cameras in our classroom has increased oral and written communication skills.

OBJECTIVE OF MY CURRICULUM

My objective in this essay is to document the development of a curriculum unit based on literacy through photography. Photographs will become an instrument to see the world through my eyes and the eyes of my students. The students and I will learn through experience how to take better photos. We will document by writing what we learn as we see and take photographs. When we observe pictures, my students will learn to read beyond what they see in the picture. They will see the picture and infer the place where the picture was taken and what kind of weather they believe there was at that time. They will see how the people in the picture were feeling about of the situation in the picture.

When my students take pictures, they will explain in a few words what their photos represent and what they want to communicate with them. They will criticize their photos and define what they can do to improve them. Then they will write about their experience, explaining what they discovered while taking photos and what features are important to take good photos. I will encourage them to understand that it is very important to plan their photos ahead of time if we want to get good pictures. Whenever the students follow all the steps to take pictures and write about them the teacher should keep in mind the following strategy. "We developed the visual literacy strategy: What do I See? What do I Think? What do I Wonder? (STW)" (Richards, and Anderson).

It is important in this unit to lead my students to learn to see photographs. Literacy through photography does not have to be different from the process of teaching and learning reading and writing. Students have to read and analyze readings in order to learn how to write. Students have to practice thinking about the pictures by observing photographs, analyzing them, talking about them, and seeing all the details of the photos in order to take photos and talk and write about them. The students will wonder about the picture, creating different stories to describe it. Wondering will help the students to infer. When we were working on a project about friendship, one of my eight-year-old student wondered if she could represent friendship with a flower. I asked, why a flower? She answered that people give flowers to their friends and that roses represent love. I thought that she was connecting several ideas by wondering.

We can use the same exercises in teaching students to read photographs that we do when we teach reading. When the students look at photographs, they can look for titles for each photo. The students can develop a story of one picture or of several pictures. They can imagine possible sequences of events by arranging pictures. They can describe characters. They can express their feelings about photos they see in the newspaper. The students can travel around the world with photos from travel magazines or travel brochures. They can research on the Internet how things were before and how they are today; for example, how the first trains, airplanes, or cars were and how they are now. These are only some ideas of the creativity that students and teachers can develop to increase visual literacy in their classrooms. But, what all teachers must know is that it is a lot of fun. Teachers will also be amazed that one event will follow another.

Students get more creative and interested in topics like light and shadows, brightness versus darkness, focusing on the object, developing observation, cropping, enlarging, setting the stage, and creating choreography. If you are a teacher in the city of Houston, you can complement, with pictures, the Reading Project Clear curriculum used by Houston Independent School District. We will focus our attention on different aspects of the photograph: topic, author, main idea, setting, characters, cause and effect, inference, and conclusion.

My unit will teach that photographs tell a story. We will write about the photos my students and I have taken in our classroom during the year. We will tell the story of my students, their activities, their knowledge, their dreams, their achievements and their sorrows. All stories are interesting but our own story is the most important story for our families and ourselves. Our story will help other people to understand Hispanic culture better.

BASIC TECHNIQUES

It is important to learn the basic techniques to take photos with a digital camera or a 35 mm, disposable camera.

There are some prerequisites to implementing the use of digital photography. Besides obtaining a camera and getting comfortable with its technical aspects, it is necessary to obtain photo releases from parents before taking pictures of the children. Photo releases typically include a statement about how pictures will be used and where they will be displayed. Teachers should be sensitive about photographing children with special needs, children who are enrolled in Head Start, or children whose religious or cultural backgrounds prohibit facial images. It is particularly important to have permission if the photos may be public in a newsletter, on a Web site, or for other purposes outside the classroom. (Good)

I expect other teachers to work with pictures in their classrooms and leave a legacy for future students and teachers, as well as provide the students and their families with a memoir of a very important and pleasant period of their lives.

MY STUDENTS

Pugh Elementary is located in the northeast part of Houston in a neighborhood called Denver Harbor. The population of Denver Harbor is mainly Hispanic. It is a poor neighborhood. Most of the parents in my classroom work in construction, gardening, cleaning offices and houses as well as taking care of babies while other parents go to work. Most of my students live with several members of a family. For example, the grandmother lives with the family or two families live in the same house, or they rent a room for the whole family in a house.

When I started working at Pugh Elementary in Houston, I had several stereotypes of American Schools. I thought schools in the United States were all modern and comfortable. Pugh Elementary is an old school. By Houston standards, Pugh is a small school, with a population is of about 500 students. I teach third grade bilingual. Most of my students' parents do not speak English, but rather their regional Spanish plus an interesting dialect that is a mixture of English and Spanish.

I have often heard on television and elsewhere that Mexicans living in the United States do not want to speak English. This is a misunderstanding. People want to learn English, but they cannot learn it for different reasons. One important reason is that they do not interact with English speaking people. Their level of Spanish is low; they often do not speak good Spanish either.

All the above are fundamental reasons why it is so important to me that my students learn to express themselves in good Spanish and English. To speak a second language opens many doors

when looking for a job. Literacy through photography might be another way to teach students to express themselves better in their own language and become more fluent in English.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO TEACH LITERACY THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY?

It is important to teach literacy through photography because visual communication is everywhere now. We are bombarded with advertisements. Children watch TV at least two hours a day. Children's books and textbooks have pictures and photographs. At least once a year all schools sell parents pictures of their children taken by commercial photographers. By the third grade, one way or the other, most of our students have some knowledge about visual literacy.

However, the students do not read photographs using all the information sources that a picture contains. Pictures and illustrations are more than a drawing or a figure of someone or something. Pictures and illustrations always tell a story, a story in the present, in the past, or even in the future. Richards and Anderson state that:

Storybook illustrations are essential to stories. Illustrations depict characters' actions, expressions, and emotions. They create and capture moods such as humor, poignancy, or sadness. Illustrations also establish settings--both time and place--convey story plots, and help readers determine whether a story is realistic or fantasy.

Not only are storybook illustrations an important tool for teaching visual literacy, but individual photographs, postcards, photographs in magazines or newspapers are also excellent sources for teaching literacy. In my teaching experience I have discovered that of the four aspects of literacy: talking, listening, reading, and writing. The one that is most difficult for the students is listening. They have a hard time listening to the teachers or to each other.

The use of photographs to teach reading can be an excellent source to develop listening skills. If the students take the pictures, they want to explain what their picture is about. At the same time, they want their classmates to listen to their explanations. Our students want to talk about themselves and their experiences, but they get very interested when other students are talking about their own lives.

When the students are able to talk without fear of personal or academic considerations, they improve their vocabulary and oral expression. Their language is more fluent and accurate and they learn to speak properly. In the process of speaking well their skills for writing improve automatically.

Another excellent reason to teach literacy through photography in a third grade bilingual class is to teach English as a second language (ESL). As I explained before, when I taught Spanish to adults, photographs were a great help in teaching fluency in Spanish. The students took the pictures and brought them spontaneously to class. They had the desire to tell the story of each photo. In the case of third graders, this happens very seldom. Some times my students bring their pictures and want to share them with the other students and talk about them. As teachers, we have to take advantage of these unique opportunities and appreciate the students desire to share their lives with the group. If this does not happen and the students never bring pictures, then we have to promote the idea of bringing pictures to the class by taking our own photos and telling the story of the photos in English. The students will make an effort to express themselves in their second language because they want to tell their own story and students, like adults, enjoy talking about themselves.

There are many reasons to teach literacy through photography. Robert Frank, a Swiss photographer, produced a book, *The Americans*, with 86 photographs (1955-1956), showing the life of the American people from his point of view. (Many of these photographs can be accessed on the website by Jno Cook.) I thought that each one of my students could take 10 photographs,

showing how they live and what is important for them and their families. I can take some photographs about the same topic to encourage them to do a good job and take significant pictures. I am confident that I can collect good information of how immigrants from Denver Harbor live. This document will contain exceptional information, made by the third graders, that will tell us in a very simple way how these families live in the city of Houston. Our students can not only observe and analyze pictures taken by others, amateur or professional, but also they can take their own pictures and create their own stories.

HOW AM I GOING TO TEACH LITERACY THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY?

Four years ago, I started my photographing activity by having a reporter in our classroom. One student was the reporter. The reporter's responsibility was to take photographs of classmates and write something about the activity the classmates were performing. The students took turns being reporter. Everyone wanted to be a reporter, and considered it a great privilege. We used the photographs we took during the year to make an album for Mothers' Day. The mothers appreciated this activity very much. They were very grateful and pleased to have their children's "Third Grade Memoirs."

One of my students was very shy and did not want to let anyone take her photograph. I had a sincere conversation with her. I told her that I did not have photos of my school years and I could not show my children and grandchildren how I looked when I was in elementary school. I told her, too, about an article I found written by Daniel D. Huff, whose title thrilled me. "Every picture tells a story." This article talks about social photographers, but the title was what gave me a reason to continue taking photographs of the students and helped me convince my student to let other students photograph her. If every picture that we take in our classroom tells a story, then we are telling the story of ourselves.

I want my students to understand that we Mexicans are changing the history of the United States, just as other immigrants have done since people from all parts of the world have come to this country with dreams. If we keep in mind that we are making history every day of our lives, our lives will become more meaningful. We will develop self-esteem and pride. We will be proud of ourselves and of our contribution to the American society.

Writing our individual history and taking photographs of our experiences in third grade will help my students gain knowledge of themselves and their families. Knowing more about their families will make them feel proud of their origins. This concept can commit them to become good citizens and appreciate the opportunities that the United States is giving them. I expect them to do their best and be proud of themselves. Few poor Mexican immigrants bring photos from their families. Sometimes they have a very small photo in their wallets of someone special, like a mother, father, or children. Some of our students, who are second-generation immigrants, have some photos taken in the United States, but almost none of their past life.

Wendy Ewald

In order to organize myself better in this curriculum unit, I will try to follow the steps of an author who has a lot of experience in literacy through photography. Wendy Ewald has produced an extraordinary work of history and art combined. She has focused her work on children of different parts of the world, teaching them how to read photographs before she discusses how to take pictures. She wants the children to understand that there are different kinds of photographs and photographs have different intentions. After children can interpret photographs, they are ready to start taking their own photos.

It has been very revealing to see photos taken by children. They show their inner understanding of life. In one of Ewald's books, children photographed their favorite parts of their bodies, and they explained why they like that part, for example, their hair, feet, or back. In

another of her books, we can see a great diversity of cultures looking at the photographs that children from India, Mexico, Africa, and Native Americans from the United States have taken of their own lives.

Ewald has set an example for many photographers and teachers. She has opened a window to the world of children. I think that this practice of having children take their own pictures can be of great value to become more conscious of the world we are creating for future generations, and to try to improve the quality of life of the children of the world.

We are used to seeing photographs taken by adults. These photos are revealing from the point of view of an adult. The adult can manipulate the reality from his own perspective, but photos taken by children will reveal a true aspect of their environment and experience of life.

“Wendy Ewald (2001) has relied upon children from around the world as they use cameras as tools for self-expression. More scholarly uses of photographs as data have existed within fields such as visual anthropology” (Settlage). I chose to follow in her footsteps because before I found her books, and books that cite her, I had thought of doing some of the activities she has done. I think that it is important to learn from people who have done things well and try to recreate them from our point of view, perspective, and understanding. Using her experience as a guide does not mean that I desire to do photography and writing exactly like hers. I want to recreate a little of what she has done and use her knowledge to start my own program. I plan to insert the works of other photographers and teachers to enjoy variety and different opinions in my curriculum unit.

Using Photography to Increase Vocabulary

One of the main points of literacy is to increase the vocabulary the students use regularly. Vocabulary is usually a weak subject in our school. However, my students have an average above their grade level. What I do is quite simple. The students use a flip chart to write topics of vocabulary words. We hang the flip chart sheets on clothes hangers with clips. Each time we are working with a subject, we get the sheet with the vocabulary words on it, and review the words, trying to use them as much as we can in the topic we are working with. Sometimes we add more words to the sheet or make a new one. We are including specialized terms on photography and literacy on the flip charts in order to use proper vocabulary. These terms are included in the lesson plans.

Step by Step to Literacy through Photography

The first step in achieving literacy through photography will be learning how to observe and analyze photographs and to discover the story hidden in each photograph. What do photographs tell us? What do we see? What do we feel when we look at a photograph? What is different or similar in the photographs? What is the most important feature of the photograph and which are the details? Where do they think the photograph was taken? Where was the picture taken from? I think that their opinions and contributions will be very important because they understand the world from their own experience of life.

The next step is to write about the photographs they analyzed, and then read their essays to their peers to enrich their writings and oral communication. Finally, they read their final draft to the classroom.

Students will then need to learn the basics of how to use a camera. I think the best learning will come from practicing. Taking photos with a digital camera will help the students to evaluate their pictures. The students can delete all pictures that do not meet their expectations. They can save the photos that they consider good on a compact disc (one advantage of digital photography compared to regular 35 mm cameras).

My students have been using a digital camera and taking pictures of their classmates, or objects they choose. I am teaching them more about how to take photos and some techniques they should use to be successful. To take good photos, students have to understand that what they see on the screen is what will come out in the photograph. They have to practice shooting photos without putting their fingers on the screen or in front of the lens. It is important to learn about focus and image size. If they are far away from the target they will cover a larger area and the objects in the photograph will be small. On the other hand, if they are close to the target the object will be larger. Light is another important factor in taking good photographs. Another element is what is going to be in the photograph. What do they want to photograph. They have to plan their composition before shooting. Students have to develop their creativity in order to become good photographers. After taking a good photo, they can use the laptops to improve the size, brightness, and the objective of the photograph by cropping. Then I will encourage my students to write an essay for each topic they choose to photograph to improve literacy.

Finally, they have to plan their photo using a graphic organizer with the topic, setting, characters, details, expectations, cause and effect, and purpose. When they are satisfied with their picture, they will write an essay including their feelings and conclusions, using the visual literacy strategy: What do I see? What do I think? What do I wonder? (STW) (Richards and Anderson).

I will encourage them to be creative. The topics for their “Memoir” can vary depending on real life experiences. For example, as all of them passed The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), they will be inspired to create a topic of triumph, to photograph one way or another the taste of success and the feeling of happiness that they had when they achieved a 100 percent passing score in their reading TAKS.

As spring begins, they can develop a composition related to spring. They can create a photograph with spring motifs. They can look for areas where they can notice signs of spring, like flowers, birds, or butterflies.

My favorite gift for Mother’s Day is an album created with some photos taken by the students. In this album, we add poems written by the students and essays complementing their photos. Their writings have to add something to the photo, something that we cannot see when we are observing the photograph. This activity was a great experience because I learned many interesting things about my students that I did not know before.

LESSON PLANS “THIRD GRADE BILINGUAL”

Literacy through photography will create important documents for teachers to learn more about the diversity that the city of Houston offers in the school system.

Objectives

These objectives will apply to all the lesson plans:

- Use photography as an aid to read, write, and speak.
- Motivate students to take photos of their own lives.
- Motivate creativity.
- Develop an aesthetic taste to produce good photographs.
- Use expressive language to transmit emotions and feelings.
- Promote working in groups.
- Connect images to thoughts and thoughts to writing.
- Increase classroom and house connection through photography.
- Enhance academic work with photographs.
- Develop students’ observation by looking at pictures taken by other students their own age or a little bit older.

- Learn how to analyze photos, paying special attention to light, settings, characters, topic, and detail.
- Perfect the STW technique: What do I see? What do I think? What do I wonder?
- Increase student vocabulary and language expression skills.
- Get students to plan their photos before taking them.
- Increase students' creativity in order to understand photography as an art.
- Appreciate photography as a way to express oneself.
- Interpret and describe the student's own pictures and other people's pictures.
- Write to express with words what the student wants to communicate with their photos.
- Develop their word-processing skills.
- The teacher and the public will learn about the students' feelings about friendship.
- Accept suggestions of other teachers or students.

Materials Needed for the Lesson Plans

These materials will apply to all the lesson plans:

- Collection of photographs
- Memory stick, 64 Megabytes or more
- Digital cameras
- Disposable cameras
- TV, DVD player, computers, color printer
- Paper, photographic paper, dictionaries, pencils, scissors, scrap book materials, glue, markers, colored paper
- Cardboard
- Books about photography
- Magazines: *National Geographic*, others
- College catalogs

Lesson Plan One: Art Exhibition: Friendship

Overview

The school district invited our class to participate in an art exhibition called Extravaganza. I thought that it would be a great idea to create a small exhibition of photography. I have 20 students in my third grade bilingual class in 2006 and all of them have been together since kindergarten. These kids have been together four years and they have developed strong friendships among themselves. That is the reason why I thought that a good topic for our exhibition could be "friendship." The other reason for this topic is that friendship has a very special meaning in the Hispanic community. This event could be a good opportunity for my students to express their thoughts about friendship and participate in a district event. It is important to say that my third grade students have been working for a couple of months with photography. It is important to have previous experience in order to create a very small photographic exhibition.

Time

The preparation of the photographs and the written expression for the Extravaganza exhibition will take two weeks.

Procedure

I talked to my students about the art exhibition and asked them if they wanted to participate. They were very excited about it. We had a brainstorming session about the topic of the exhibition. Most of the children thought that friendship was a good topic.

My students have shown their ability to work in groups and teach each other. I have had the same experience using digital cameras in my classroom. The school only owns two digital cameras, and one of my own makes three cameras we can use to develop our activities. With only three cameras in the classroom, I had to think of ways to keep all the students interested and involved, and how everyone could use the limited number of cameras.

Each one of the students was going to take a photograph of their friends. They had to plan their photo:

Setting

The student had to look for the ideal place to take the photograph. They had to choose a place they liked with sufficient illumination. The students will set a time of the school day to take their photograph.

Characters

They had to pick who was going to be in the photograph.

Composition

They had to pose their friends, as they wanted them to appear in the picture. It was important to think how everyone was going to dress for the pictures and if they were going to use some extra prop like flowers or a fan.

I thought it was important for the kids to work by themselves. I did not want to be around when they were taking the photograph because I wanted the students to look relaxed and be spontaneous. Third grade students can be very thoughtful and responsible when they enjoy what they are doing. I was also very pleased with their creativity and freshness.

After all the planning, the students were ready to start shooting their pictures. As they were using digital cameras, they could have a preview of their photos and choose the one corresponding to their desires.

When everyone had their photo, they had to write a small note for each photo. All of us proofread the writings. When all of the students were pleased with their photos and writings, we framed each photo with the note and pasted it on a cardboard. I must say they were very patient with the decoration. The students cut very thin frames. They needed a lot of accuracy to present a clean and beautiful job.

Our exhibition was ready. We showed it in the “Extravaganza,” and afterward we showed it on a bulletin board so all the school students and teachers could appreciate it.

Lesson Two: Our Dreams

Overview

Our school is a Project GRAD School (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams). This means it belongs to an organization that motivates students to graduate from high school. This program offers incentives to students beginning in early childhood. We teach students the ideal of finishing high school and going on to college. Once a year all teachers wear their graduation caps and gowns, as well as T-shirts with our college names and insignia. This encourages the students to aspire to connect to a college, early in their school career.

It is important to understand that not one of my students’ parents has a professional degree. It is not likely that my students will gain an appreciation of college at home, so we must motivate them at school.

Time

This activity will require one week, including a Saturday morning.

Procedure

On a Saturday morning in February, close to Martin Luther King Day, teachers at Pugh visit families in their homes. It is a great opportunity to learn more about our students. In this visit, we talk to the parents about planning with their children to go to college. High schools that belong to the Project GRAD Organization offer a scholarship for all the students who finish high school. This is a good incentive to start saving for college. In this visit, we talk to the parents about their needs. This organization has provided glasses to all students who need them. This year six of my students needed glasses. It is of vital importance to see well to be successful in school.

During the following week, I talk to my students and other students about my degrees. I tell them my own story to motivate them to pursue a professional degree. I think it is important for teachers to understand that many parents and students do not understand the American system of undergraduate and graduate education. This can be an important reason why many Hispanic students do not go on into higher education.

My Story

I tell my students my own story about becoming a professional to inspire them to graduate. Some important anecdotes I will share with the reader because it can help other people to continue an education. I tell the students that if they do not have money to study in the United States, state universities in Mexico are free of tuition. I paid not one dime for my bachelor's degree.

When I came to the United States, I wanted to continue my education. I found many obstacles. I did not know that a transcript was the report card of my college years. There were too many choices of graduate schools. When I visited the colleges, they gave me huge catalogs, and I could not understand so much information. I did not know that people could make an appointment with a counselor at any college and find out all you need to know.

Activities

Brainstorming

I prepare some questions for the students. Are you planning to go to college? Have you visited a college? Do you know for what careers you can study? What is your dream? Is there someone in your family who has gone to college?

Photograph

I take a photograph of each one of my students wearing my graduation cap.

Technology

I put all the photos on the laptops and the students work on their photographs. They use the software features to improve the quality of the photograph. I teach them how to crop, resize, brighten, and rotate. When they think their photo is ready, we print it and paste on construction paper.

Writing

They write on the computer the famous words of Martin Luther King: "I have a dream." They write what they want to study after high school and why they want to study that degree. Finally, they print what they have written.

Door Decoration

We paste all the photos with their respective writings on the door so all the other students can see and read about our dreams. (All classrooms decorate their own doors as they please.) I take my students to see all the door decorations. Some teachers are very kind and explain what they did to get a college degree. The students ask questions of the teachers.

Contest

Some parents and people from the Project GRAD organization visit the classrooms with a survey and grade the door decorations. The survey questions are:

- What did the teacher study?
- Where did your teacher go to college?
- Do you plan to go to college?

Note: We leave the door decoration up for about a month. Later, we use the photographs and the writings for a Mother's Day present.

Lesson Three: Mother's Day Gift

What can be better for a mother than a photo album made by her children?

Overview

Since the beginning of the year, the students and I have been taking photographs of all the activities we have in our classroom. We take photos working with mathematics, science, reading, and social studies. Students love to take photos of field trips, special days like Halloween, birthday celebrations, Valentine's Day, Christmas, and contests.

Students are starting to write essays in third grade. My third grade students are 80 percent bilingual. They write their essays in English and Spanish. If the students have a photograph of something important to them they can write from their heart, with a lot of enthusiasm and conviction. Their photos are part of their third grade story.

At this age, they have a great desire to please their mothers. They want their mothers to like their photos and the writing that accompanies the photo. They always do their best.

Note: If teachers want to be efficient in the process of teaching and learning it is important for children to make connections between school material and their own lives. Our bilingual students bring other cultures to the class. At the same time, they have to adapt themselves to another culture. I have been amazed at the way they manage to speak English, considering that they cannot practice it with their parents at home. With photographs, we create a valuable connection between the student's life and the school. The students take photos at home and bring them to school; in addition, they take photos at school and take them home.

Time

This activity starts in the first day of class in August and ends with Mother's Day in May.

Procedure

- At the beginning of the year, I assign management responsibilities to the students. One of the management positions is to be a reporter. The reporters' responsibility is to take photographs of the classmates and write something about the activity they were performing. The students take turns being reporter. The students consider it a great privilege.
- The reporter assumes responsibility for a digital camera.
- The reporter has to look for all special moments to shoot good photographs.
- I save the photographs in my computer, using HP Image Zone software, all during the year.
- I paste a poster with vocabulary words related to our photographic and writing activities. We check the poster very often for the students to increase their vocabularies and use it to describe, explain, or talk about a photograph.

Literacy through Photography		Literacy Terms	
accurate	looking real	Analysis	Facts and opinion
camera	mass media	Anticipate an outcome	Generalize
computer memory	perceive	Author	Illustrator
contrast	photograph	Cause and effect	Inference
cropping	picture	Characters	Main idea
describe	prints	Clues	Persuasive
difference	realistic	Conclusion	Photographer
digital	reflect	Context	Predict the future
expression	representation	Contrast	Relationship
fake	similar	Detail	Sequence
focus	strategies		Topic
government policies	style		
imagery	symbol		
information	technology		
lens	visual communication		
light	visualization		
looks like			

Note: I add vocabulary words to this list as we need them.

- Each time we fill a memory stick I load the photographs in my computer and we analyze the photos and give suggestions to improve the quality of the photo.
- The students work in teams with the laptops to improve the quality of the photos. We use the HP Image Zone software to improve the photos: cropping, brightening, rotating, and adjusting contrast.
- At the end of April, we produce a CD Rom with the photos of each one of the students and print about ten photos of each one.
- I buy 4"x6" photo albums at the Dollar Store.
- At this time, the students have some photos with their corresponding writings. In addition to this, they will write a story about other photos that are important to them, or that they want to say something else about.
- The students decorate their albums and paste each photo with the corresponding writing.
- Finally, they gift wrap their album and give the album to their mothers on Mother's Day.

Other Activities

1. Take advantage of all visual devices in order to analyze them and create discussions in the classroom. Use photos from magazines, drawings, paintings, posters, photos taken by the teacher and by the students, photos from other children and from professional photographers. The first step will be learning how to observe and analyze visual devices and to discover the story hidden in each picture. Each time we find a visual device: we observe it and analyze it, asking: What do I see?
What do I think? What do I wonder? What is this photograph telling us? What do I feel when I see this photo? How is this picture related to your own experience? Where do you think the author took this photograph?
2. We can use photographs in the Science Fair Projects. The photographs can show each step of the experiment. The students can use their photographs in their journals, too. The students take one or two photos each day to illustrate their journals.

3. I encourage and guide my students to elaborate a book about any topic. One good topic is Health. The students can take pictures of healthy food, children working out or playing sports, brushing their teeth, or washing their hands after going to the bathroom. Other good photos for this topic are kids weighing and measuring at the beginning of the year and at the end to see if they kept a good weight. They can add photos of healthy eating habits, also. When they have all the photos they need for their books, they can do some research, using books, magazines, and the Internet to write under the photos. This is a very good activity to encourage research and become more responsible about their health.
4. Another idea is to give the kids a disposable camera and ask them to take photos of their favorite things and people at home. When I develop the photos, the students explain to the class why they took a picture of that thing or person. This is a great exercise to discover how our students live, what their favorite things are, and who the member of their family is that they love most now.

My Experience Using Literacy through Photography

The use of the digital camera in my classroom has been very rewarding and exciting. I have learned a lot about my students. I believe that it is important to know about their lives and culture because we can help them to have a healthier life. If a person is able to communicate ideas, feelings, desires, and personal issues then they can understand themselves better. They also acquire very good writing skills.

I want to share some of the things my students wrote and experienced while working with photographs.

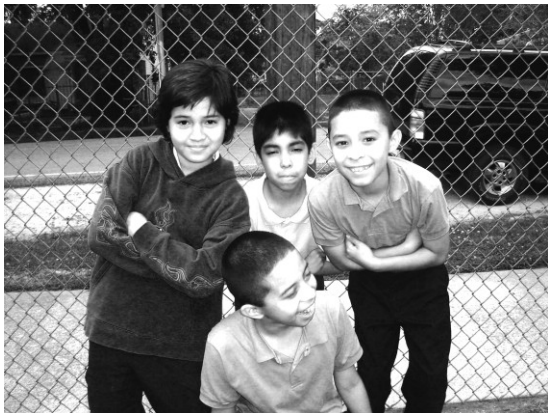
- One boy in my class took a photo of a rose. The rose was red, open, and beautiful. The observation of my student was that a flower lives a very few days, and by taking the photograph he was making that lovely flower live forever.
- When the students were working with the topic “Friendship,” another boy wanted to take a photo of five boys, he considered his friends. One by one, the boys got impatient or angry and only one of his friends stayed with him to participate in this boy’s photograph. He wrote that he wanted for all, who see his photograph, to feel as sad as he felt when four of his friends left. However, he wrote at the end that it was better to have one good friend than none.
- Other students wrote about the place they chose to take the photograph. They wrote that they tried several places without success; finally, they found a spot where the photograph looked clearer. One also said that his friends look like good brothers. He added that one of his friends opened his shirt because he looked cool that way, and looks like his favorite cousin. He mentioned, also, that when people see their photo they want people to see their friendship as if they were members of the same family.
- One of the girls took a photo of a rose because she said she did not have friends. This was the first time I was aware that she had trouble making friends in the classroom. After she took this photograph and explained her feelings, she started to relate better with the other girls in the classroom. J. wrote that a rose represents love between two persons. When you see a rose, it creates an emotion. When you are sad, a rose raises your spirits. The smell of the rose is relaxing. When you sleep you can imagine the flowers and they will protect you from having nightmares. My mom says that roses give you good luck because the aroma gets into your body and helps you to solve your problems.
- One kid moved to a house after living in an apartment. He was very enthusiastic, talking about a crystal chandelier that he had in his new house. This incident gave me the idea of giving the kids disposable cameras to photograph their favorite things and family. Before he took the photograph, he had a lot of trouble describing the lamp. He took the photo and the explanation was clearer and better organized.

- The students took photographs of their computers, parents, little siblings, trucks, plants, a backyard with a barbecue grill, family photos, religious images, and much more.

I could go on with so many examples that touch my heart. I felt my students become closer to me and to one another. More and more they shared their intimate thoughts.

I would have liked to have more time working with photographs. I encourage teachers to work with their students taking photos, talking, and writing about them to improve their speaking and writing skills.

Photos Taken by Students



Photos Taken by Students



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During our seminar, we saw several photographs by Robert Frank; he is the author of a book named *The Americans*. All photographs in this book show daily life of the American people. All 86 photographs are very revealing and highly controversial. On this web site you can see some of the photographs and the analysis of each one.

Good, Linda. "Snap It Up! Using Digital Photography in Early Childhood." *Childhood Education* 82.2 (2005): 79+.

This is a great article. It communicates the advantages of teaching photography to small children. I agree with the author on her opinions about photography building a sense of community and belonging, promoting feelings of security, building children's self-esteem, aiding in classroom management, communicating with parents, documenting children's growth, promoting language and literacy, and enhancing other areas of the curriculum.

Huff, Daniel D. "Every Picture Tells a Story." *Social Work* 43.6 (1998): 576+.

This journal talks about American photographers who were social workers and helped the American public to be aware of the dilemma of working children. The title of this article is what motivated me to take and make my students take photographs.

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Supplemental Resources

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Burns, Mary, and Danny Martinez. "Visual Imagery and the Art of Persuasion: A Political Campaign Project Teaches Students How to Read and Analyze Persuasive Imagery." *Learning & Leading with Technology*. Mar. 2002.

This article is an excellent source to understand the politics behind visual imagery and give us some elements to teach our students how to be analytical about visual imagery.

Cesarone, Bernard. "Visual Literacy." *Childhood Education*. 82.1 (2005): 60+ <<http://www.questia.com/>>.

This article is a must read if teachers are interested in helping their elementary students to develop visual literacy.

Ewald, Wendy. "Black Self-White Self." *Whole Earth* Spring 1999: 46. Questia. 15 Apr. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/>>.

In this article, Wendy Ewald uses photographs to develop a program of racism, white versus black using photographs. This is an example of the great aid that photographs are to help students to write about difficult issues.

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This is a great book to use as a guide and an example of what teachers can do with students in the photography field and how photography helps children to write and express themselves better.

---. *The Best Part of Me: Children Talk about Their Bodies in Pictures and Words*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2002.

Teachers and students in the Durham, North Carolina Public Schools developed this book. The author used photography as a starting point for writing.

Flood, James, Shirley Brice Heath, and Diane Lapp, eds. *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy through the Communicative and Visual Arts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005.

This handbook is an extensive attempt to bring visual arts to an important level in literacy and language in conjunction with the art of speaking and writing. The authors assure that the role of the visual arts in the leisure activities of young people enables their extensive practice in essential skills, such as self-presentation, role-shifting, empathy-building, sense of plot development, and ability to focus on several things simultaneously. Yet they say these skills too rarely receive notice in classrooms.

Jacob, David, Professor's lecture, Houston Teachers Institute, 18 April 2006.

Professor Jacob, showed photographs by Robert Frank, a Swiss photographer, who came to the United States and photographed the daily life of American people. In his book, there are only photos, no textual information. The viewer has to recreate the story.

Messaris, Paul. "Four Aspects of Visual Literacy, 1-40." In *Visual "Literacy: Image, Mind, and Reality*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994.

If we want to understand the cognitive development of students by using visual literacy in our classroom, we can read the first chapter of this book: Four aspects of visual literacy. This chapter will give us ideas, meanings, insights, and knowledge about this fascinating topic.

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"Picturing Life through Young Eyes." *The Washington Times* 26 Jan. 2002: D01.

This journal article talks more about the work of Wendy Ewald. She has worked with children of many parts of the world. Children take photographs of their experiences of life. Corcoran Gallery of Art, 17th Street and New York Avenue NW exhibits Wendy Ewald's photographic work of children.

Web Sources for Teachers

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<<http://www.temple.edu/photo/photographers/spring03/photographers/heatherduffy/levitt/levittpics/index.html>>.

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This is an interesting web address to visit. I think Ms. Ewald is a must read author for photography because she is a teacher and has taught photography to children and young people around the world. This web address can introduce teachers to her work and other sites of Wendy Ewald.

"The Casio Classroom." *1001 Uses for a Digital Camera*. 12 Jun 2006.

<<http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~ucfcasio/qvuses.htm>>.

In this site they advertise that is designed as a reference tool putting educators in touch with creative educational applications for digital cameras in educational settings. I have found this site of great help because it includes lesson plans for different subjects.