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Picture Perfect: The Potential of Photos in the Tertiary Classroom

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Adrienne (Adie) Maree Haultain

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Abstract

Photos are taken in order to capture a moment in time. Their very nature inspires a desire to share that moment in time. Mystery surrounds the participants involved: Who took this photo? Who are the people in the photo? Why was the photo taken and what is the story they have to tell? Emotions are ignited and remembered every time we glance at a photo. Something so small, that can stir such power, deserves to be exploited as much as possible in the very visual world in which we live today. The purpose of this study was to investigate ways in which photos were currently being used by a group of tertiary teachers in an Institute of Technology and Polytechnic in New Zealand. The study was exploratory in nature examining reasons why teachers were using photos and investigating the benefits of doing so. Additionally, this study deliberated ways photos could be utilised more to encourage interactive use of photos in tertiary contexts, in order to enrich teachers' and students' educational experiences. A survey, interviews and classroom observations were carried out in data collection to help gain an insight.

Results showed many benefits in using photos to promote 'Huakina', the opening of the door to learning. These included encouraging student engagement, bridging knowledge gaps, enhancing and developing critical thinking, building relationships and social learning, and highlighted benefits for assessment purposes. The benefits of using photos in an interactive manner through the use of open-ended questions, as in the Huakina approach, was found to foster deep learning. The study revealed the need for teachers to carefully plan their use of photos emphasising the need for clear scaffolding and modelling of tasks, along with the need to ensure constructive alignment with the intended learning outcomes. A prominence was placed on the necessity for visual literacy guidelines to be delineated in order to utilise photos more, along with an emphasis for further professional development for teachers. The role of institutional sponsorship comes into play with staff requiring time and knowledge to plan for the better use of photos to enhance teaching and learning.

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