

Educators and scholars who believe the arts can play a central role in education and development commonly envision a space in which art-making is available across varied learning environments, allowing children from all backgrounds to become creative, socially-aware thinkers (Bae, 2004; Rufo, 2012). At the same time, we realize this space is shrinking as creativity and artistic engagement become casualties in the current environment of reduced arts-programming in educational settings (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2011; Sabol, 2010). The challenge for many educators is thus finding means of fostering creativity and artistic exploration that are accessible for a broad range of students across settings.

In search of a creative and artistic approach to eliciting deep and meaningful discussion of identity in children, we have developed the PhotoCLUB project. PhotoCLUB uses digital photography within an empowerment-based model (Serriere, 2010; Smith, Bratini, & Appio, 2012) allowing participants to learn photographic techniques and represent different facets of their identity through participant-generated photographs. The images they generate are shared with other participants, helping group members develop a sense of community as they explore their photographic images together and grow as artists and as individuals. In this paper, we describe the PhotoCLUB model and illustrate its implementation through three case examples of children aged five, eleven, and seven. Our goal in describing this work is to illustrate not only the applicability of the PhotoCLUB model for use with children of varying ages, but also its use as a mechanism to foster self-knowledge and self-expression among participants.

Research Design

This paper explores the process and products of three case studies utilizing an approach that is informed by principles of participatory action research (PAR). PAR is characterized by an emphasis on the active role of research participant-partners in driving the research process

and dictating the ultimate goals of a research project (Brydon-Miller, 1997; Israel et al., 1995). The goals are typically aimed at creating social change in the lives and communities of the participants. We chose to use a case study approach to illustrate the PhotoCLUB in action because it is an appropriate way of conveying the various themes reflected in the session notes taken by the PhotoCLUB facilitators. Moreover, the case study approach captures details of the applicability of the PhotoCLUB program to various issues in the lives of the students.

We initiated the PhotoCLUB program as an after-school program for the children of women residing in a domestic violence shelter in a large metropolitan city. This shelter specializes in serving residents with disabilities. While 60% of the children we have worked with in the shelter have no disability, some of the children have had disabilities including: dyslexia, ADHD, pervasive developmental disorder, and anxiety disorders. The PhotoCLUB program consists of a series of weekly sessions that can be adapted to range from one hour to two hours, depending on the size of the group and the demands of the particular setting in which the program is being delivered. Our PhotoCLUB groups in the shelter have ranged in size from five participants to twelve participants. Ninety percent of the children who have taken part in the project self-identify as Latino and/or African American, with an approximately 50% split between male/female, and an age range from five to fifteen. In this specific project, our work in the domestic violence shelter involved a program that lasted for a period of seven weeks, with sessions occurring every week for two hours.

At the beginning of the program, participants were provided with digital cameras which they used for the duration of the program; in some of the settings we have worked in, participants use or borrow cell phones to take their photographs. During the first session, the children were given instructions on how to operate the cameras. They were also taught various

photographic techniques (such as perspective, foreground/background, and framing) and were shown images illustrating how those techniques can be used to convey meaning, create emotion, and draw the viewer's attention to certain details. The participants took photographs every week following the prompts from the acronym "PHOTO:" *Pick Three Photos; Here & Now; Others; Tomorrow; Open Discussion; and Strategize*. These prompts will be discussed in depth later in this paper. Each week, the PhotoCLUB group met to discuss the photographs they were asked to take for that week's session and were also given their "photo assignment" for the next session. In between sessions, students took photos for their weekly assignment. During the sessions, the children's photographs were projected from a laptop computer onto a wall or screen so that they could be viewed and discussed. After the final session, a group celebration was held where students' printed photographs were displayed and family, friends, and shelter staff were invited to attend.

Since implementing the program in the domestic violence shelter, we have more recently expanded our program sites and have offered the PhotoCLUB program in a range of settings including a low-income public high school, additional domestic violence shelters, transitional and subsidized housing projects, and a university-based after-school mentoring program for low-income minority high school girls.

Theoretical Framework

The PhotoCLUB program for children and youth was developed through a collaborative process that combined a range of disciplines and areas of expertise (including psychology, art therapy, counseling and intervention science). The framework for the program was derived through an integration of three distinct theories that together inform the content and process of

our program model. These theories are: digital self theory, possible selves theory, and silencing the self theory.

Digital Self Theory

Digital self theory (Ching & Foley, 2012; Ching, Wang, Shih, & Kedem, 2006) plays a central role in the conceptualization of the PhotoCLUB model, arguing that self-representation through digital media (including digital photography) creates an image of self that reflects salient aspects of one's identity. This identity, when realized through a visual image, becomes a form of creative expression that one can share with others. The relationship between the creator of an image and viewers of that image is dynamic: while the individual's creation is personal and self-expressive, when shared and discussed in a group context, the personal expands, giving it communal and cultural meaning. Both creator and viewer are impacted by this exchange, and the resulting conversations allow for new insight and inspiration for future creation. The process of sharing allows the photographer to cultivate a sense of ownership of the image itself and of the story behind the image. A new story of self emerges when the image is shared with members of one's group or community. Additionally, the act of creating a self-representational image through photography can allow for reflection upon one's own-self-concept. For example, Ching et al. (2006) utilized photography and photo-journaling to allow children as young as five or six to represent their school experiences while reflecting with peers and considering others' perspectives.

In our PhotoCLUB model, we proposed the idea of a *collective digital self* where members of a group or community engage in co-construction of their digital selves through discourse around their photographic images. The phrase *collective digital self* represents the phenomenon emerging when students reflect as a group. By sharing the image with an audience,

the photographer is immediately placed in a position of personal reflection, allowing him/her to recount an experience and its associated feelings. The photographer is able to receive insights and comments from the other group members. As a result, the interpretation of the image grows, and the image becomes a catalyst for self-transformation. The photographs may also serve as tools for helping children to remember experiences, thoughts, or events more clearly. For instance, research by Ching and Foley (2012) found that children were able to creatively represent themselves through photographs and also effectively explain the photographs' deeper meaning. These findings demonstrate children's capacity for symbolically representing and interpreting their vision of self through photography.

Possible Selves Theory

Social psychologists, Markus and Nurius, first presented possible selves theory in 1986 as a means of capturing the experience of imagining a future self. The theory of possible selves states that the imaginative process of envisioning an ideal future self can provide an "essential link between the self-concept and motivation [for positive change]" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). Therefore, for young children and adolescents, a possible self can be a representation of one's potential future. In a 2004 study, Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, and Hart-Johnson examined hoped-for selves among low-income 8th-grade students. Students were asked to write descriptions of strategies they could use to work towards becoming the future possible selves they hoped for. Oyserman et al. (2004) describe this engagement as self-regulating "roadmaps" allowing participants to envision a concrete plan for achieving their possible selves. Their findings showed that self-generated strategies for achieving possible selves were significantly associated with positive educational outcomes for students, including improved grades and greater participation in class.

In designing our PhotoCLUB program, we speculated that the digital visual representation of a hoped-for future self could function for a young person as a symbolic roadmap of the person they can become. Additionally, in the PhotoCLUB program, we encourage students and their co-members to use their images to develop concrete strategies focused on achieving their possible selves. This is a collective process in which students help their group members in constructing step-by-step plans for achieving the possible selves they envision and represent in their photographs. In this way, our model both draws upon and adapts Oyserman et al.'s (2004) approach to self-development through the use of photography.

Silencing the Self Theory

Silencing the self theory was developed by Jack (1991) to capture the experience of a progressive devaluation of self coinciding with negative socialization. The participants in Jack's research were primarily women struggling with depression. In this research, Jack noted depression was often associated with a negative self-view closely tied to a loss of self and precipitated by silencing one's thoughts, feelings, and ideas. While Jack's original study represented only adult women, silencing the self theory has been applied to participants representing numerous populations and ages (Cramer & Thoms, 2003; Jack & Ali, 2010; Uebelacker, Courtnage, & Whisman, 2003), including samples of younger participants and individuals experiencing eating disorders, functional somatic symptoms, among other conditions (Ali, et al., 2000; Geller, Cockell, Hewitt, Goldner, & Flett, 2000; Jack & Ali, 2010).

Silencing the self involves a process that Jack (1991) described as *externalized self-perception* which consists of basing judgments of oneself on how others view you, rather than on your own self-perceptions. This leads to a feeling that one's true self is not understood or valued by others, a phenomenon labeled as the *divided self* (Jack, 1991). In our PhotoCLUB program,

we encourage participants to explore differences between their inner, private selves and the selves they project to others. Discrepancies between inner and outer selves can reflect vulnerability, loss of self, and ultimately a host of other psychological difficulties (Jack & Ali, 2010). To encourage self-expression in the PhotoCLUB program, we use a metaphor of *image as voice* in which students use their photographic images to present aspects of themselves to the other group members. This approach draws upon the empowerment model of intervention (Nelson, Lord, & Ochocka, 2001; Worell & Remer, 2003) in which one's self-representation is welcomed and validated, rather than judged. Silencing the self theory is in part a relational theory; as such, the theory focuses on interpersonal processes correlating with positive outcomes. In the PhotoCLUB project, we use the notion of image as voice to encourage young people to share their photographic images with each other and ultimately to give voice to their experience in a safe, shared environment. The creation of the PhotoCLUB model was based on the above outlined theories. Below, we will discuss specifically the development of the PhotoCLUB model as an extension of digital storytelling providing new techniques.

The PhotoCLUB Model

Our approach in this project is informed by digital storytelling, a process in which participants present narratives using technology (including computers, audio-visual equipment, and/or cameras) to depict stories reflecting their life experiences (Couldry, 2008; Davis & Weinshenker, 2013). Digital storytelling is a powerful tool for young people to explore future imagined selves and life goals with others by representing and sharing personal narratives or images. As Lambert (2013) outlines, this form of personal narration allows the storytellers to learn about themselves in relation to others and in relation to their communities. As an extension of digital storytelling, there have been examples of digital photography in educational settings

demonstrating the impact technology can have in children's development (Ching, Wang, Shih, & Kedem, 2006; Richards, 2009; Serriere, 2010; Sugie, 2004). As such, the PhotoCLUB model was developed out of established photo elicitation methods already used in research settings.

Photo-talk

One photographic approach informing the development of PhotoCLUB is the photo-talk methodology developed by Serriere (2010) for pre-school classrooms. In this approach, the researcher or teacher takes digital photographic images during part of the school-day and shares the images with the children using a laptop computer. During these individual "photo-talks" the child flips through a slideshow of the images and discusses the photographed scenes with the researcher. In the individual photo-talk sessions, the child is prompted by questions from the researcher to explore the context surrounding the scene, their feelings and responses. Researchers are also interested in the ways that they – or others - could have responded differently in that scenario. Serriere (2010) also included a "carpet-time democracy" component, in which the children explored and discussed the photographs as a group, re-enacting scenes together to better understand the dynamics and conflicts taking place in their classroom. Part of the goal of the photo-talk approach is to encourage the exploration of inequalities – including those in classrooms – and foster understanding of social justice, democracy, and positive change.

Photovoice

An influential method using social justice oriented photography is photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice was developed as a form of participatory action research (PAR). In the photovoice method, photography is used to document the realities of daily experiences within communities through photographs taken by community members. Photovoice's social change

component is realized when participants' photographs are used to call attention to pressing issues and sources of oppression in community environments.

In an extension of the photovoice method, Smith, Bratini, and Appio (2012) developed a youth counseling program that used a form of photovoice to develop a sense of agency in low-income youth. They found this program to be effective in providing emotional support and guidance to the youth participants in a way that traditional "talk-therapy" could not. Smith et al.'s (2012) program conceptualized photovoice as a therapeutic intervention and required a trained team working under the direction of an expert PAR researcher. Though this program was highly successful, the necessity of having trained PAR researchers to implement the program makes it inaccessible for sites lacking such experts.

PhotoCLUB

The original photovoice method (Wang & Burris, 1997) followed a guiding acronym ("SHOWeD") in which each letter described a different facet of the technique (e.g., the **S** represented "What do we **SEE** here?", referring to photographs taken by participants). In constructing our PhotoCLUB method, we created the acronym **PHOTOS** to guide each of the steps of our program as follows:

- **P: *Pick Three Photos***: students are guided in taking photos each week and, at the end of the program, will have chosen three photos that each represent different aspects of their identity (these aspects are outlined in the upcoming three steps);
- **H: *Here & Now***: students share with each other photos they took representing who they are right now;
- **O: *Others***: students share with each other photos they took representing how other people see them (this captures the self-silencing construct of "externalized self-perception" (Jack, 1991));

- **T: *Tomorrow***: students share with each other photos they took representing who they want to become in the future (this captures the construct of “possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986));
- **O: *Open Discussion***: students engage in open discussion of each other’s photographic images and of each other’s descriptions of their images;
- **S: *Strategize***: students work together to each devise specific strategies for achieving their desired “Tomorrow Self.” (The term “strategize” is taken from the possible selves literature (Oyserman et al., 2004) and refers to devising a concrete plan for working toward one’s desired possible self). Students are encouraged to identify both individual strategies that focus on changes they can make in their own lives and collective strategies that focus on creating changes together in their communities or surrounding environments.

Examples from PhotoCLUB Participants

We now present the three case examples of students who participated in our PhotoCLUB program. These students attended our PhotoCLUB sessions in the domestic violence shelter specializing in serving residents with disabilities. Given the nature of the setting, the PhotoCLUB method was implemented in a manner that required participants to take no photos of themselves or of any other individuals whose images could be identifiable. Additional precautions to preserve the safety of the shelter residents included the requirement that no photographs of the surrounding neighborhood be taken, and the requirement that no names would appear in or on the photographs.

Case Example #1: “Tim”

“Tim”¹ is a five-year old boy who had come to the shelter one month before the PhotoCLUB after-school program began, and he was a participant in the first round of PhotoCLUB sessions. He and his mother entered the shelter after leaving an abusive father they had lived with for all of Tim’s life. Tim did not have any disability, but the social workers who ran the support groups with the children at the shelter described him as often being extremely shy around adult residents and staff.

One of the Tim’s photographs is shown in Figure 1. Tim chose this as his “Here & Now” photograph. When asked to describe why he chose a photograph of a lone toy dog to represent himself, he described an incident occurring at home before he and his mother escaped to the



Figure 1: Tim's photograph

shelter. He stated that his father was abusive to his mother, but had never hit him; Tim had tried to protect his mother by shouting at his father to stop. As a means of punishment, one night the father told Tim that he would get rid of Tim’s puppy. In the morning, the puppy was indeed gone; Tim never

saw his puppy again. When asked why he chose this photograph, Tim said to the group because “that puppy is me.”

¹ All participants’ names used in this document are pseudonyms.

We have chosen this case example because Tim's social workers at the shelter explained to us that Tim had never disclosed this incident of abuse before. We view this as an illustration of the power that digital self-representation can have. Tim was described as being quiet and withdrawn in his counseling sessions and in his support group sessions with the social workers; however, in PhotoCLUB he became animated and excited about the photographs he was taking and the encouragement he was receiving within the group about his skill with the camera. As he described this incident, the group members were looking at the projected image of his photograph rather than looking at him (as they might in the support group sessions). It seems he felt supported and empowered enough to share the incident with the group using the photograph as a focal point for both personal and group discussion. When the group asked Tim about any techniques he used to show particular meaning, he said he "put the puppy in the front" (meaning the foreground) to show "he's the important one." Following this, the group discussed perspective, a technique they had learned during the first session of PhotoCLUB, and one of the older children in the group commented that Tim had used perspective to show he (i.e., Tim himself) is "important and matters". Tim nodded and stated again, "Yes, the puppy is me".

While viewing the image and after listening to Tim's description, the other participants in the group described feeling the same sadness Tim felt over the loss of his dog. Tim's story was so moving to the group that two other members described their own losses experienced prior to coming to the shelter. We view this collective experience as an illustration of the "shared and personal state" described by Richards (2009) in her examination of the positive effects of child-initiated digital photography. Tim and other group members were able to use the image of the dog as a shared focal point, allowing them to simultaneously reflect on both shared and personal experiences.

Case Example #2: “Jason”

Our second example is an eleven-year old boy, Jason. Jason arrived at the shelter with his mother one month before starting the PhotoCLUB after-school program. Jason’s mother switched him to a new school at the beginning of the school year, an event coinciding with the



Figure 2: Jason’s “Others” Photo

time they left the abuser². The social workers at the shelter described Jason as an outgoing child who struggled academically at school. One of the Jason’s photographs is shown in Figure 2. Jason chose this as his “Others” photograph.

When asked to describe why he chose a photograph of a clown to represent how others see him, he stated that his teachers and friends see him as a kid who is always clowning around. However, he then went on to describe the photograph as showing

the clown dissolving into the black background, as though soon he “would not be there any more”. Jason stated he sometimes feels that he does not exist in the present moment and, at other times, feels like he’s disappearing and “floating away, like how the clown is floating into the black.” During the group discussion of Jason’s clown photograph, the other PhotoCLUB members asked him to think about ways he could feel more connected to the present moment. The following week, he told the group he planned to try to join a sports team or an after-school club at his middle school – something he had never done before.

² His mother had him switch schools as a safety measure as she was concerned that her abusive husband would try to discover their whereabouts by speaking to Jason as he left the school building

He said he felt that he might be more connected to things in his overall life if he began by feeling more connected to school. In this way, the photograph he presented to the group, along with the group's discussion of the photograph, functioned as a catalyst for Jason to strategize a positive change in his life.

We view Jason's use of photography to represent his sense of disconnection as a paralleling Davis and Weinshenker's (2013) notion of digital storytelling as a tool to support youth making life transitions. Jason's photographic image became a catalyst for discussion allowing self and others to collectively examine ways he could begin to adjust to his new school environment. The group also discussed different interests Jason may have, encouraging him to find a club at school that supported his overall interests and goals. Even when discussing other group members' photographs, the group would sometimes refer back to the discussion of Jason's clown photo as an example of how they could use their photos to come up with a plan for the future. This experience became a source of pride to Jason as he would joke that "everyone keeps talking about [his] clown."

Case Example #3: "Janine"

"Janine" is a seven-year old girl who arrived at the shelter with her mother and two younger siblings two weeks before the PhotoCLUB after-school program began. Janine's mother is very young, and she and Janine are very close, often sharing the role of care-giver to the two younger children (for example, Janine reads them their bed-time stories each night). The photograph shown in Figure 3 is Janine's "Tomorrow" photograph, representing what she hopes to become one day.

In describing this photograph to the group, Janine explained that she wanted to become a ballet dancer but her mother told her ballet classes were too expensive. For this photograph, Janine used her mother's computer to find an image of ballet shoes, which she described as "the kind of shoes I'd like to dance in." She had a staff member at the shelter show her how to place an area of blank white screen beside the shoes. Janine stated that she didn't know if she would ever "dance like a ballet dancer or have ballet shoes, and the white there is me not knowing that."

In Janine's use of the blank screen to show her uncertainty about the future, we see she has used this photograph to creatively capture an inner experience as a "snapshot" of her

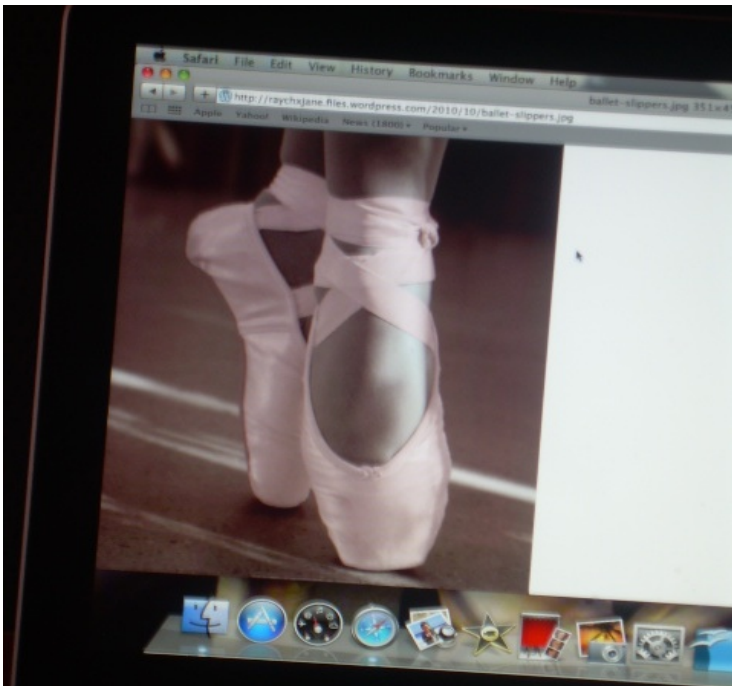


Figure 3: Janine's photograph

projected future. Janine additionally stated she chose to have "grown-up ballet shoes" in the photograph instead of showing a child's ballet shoes because it might be a long time before she can learn how to dance. In discussing this photo, the group members asked Janine to think about ways that she can do dance without taking formal dance classes. She responded by saying that sometimes they learn hip-hop dance during gym class at school and hip-hop could help her "start to learn some kind of dance before I am allowed to start to learn ballet." A group member who was a few years older than Janine suggested that they ask the youth workers at the shelter if they could learn some form of dance as part of the after-school programming at the shelter; Janine was excited by this idea. In some ways, this group decision to

projected future. Janine additionally stated she chose to have "grown-up ballet shoes" in the photograph instead of showing a child's ballet shoes because it might be a long time before she can learn how to dance. In discussing this photo, the group members asked Janine to think about ways that she can do dance without taking formal dance classes. She

request a new offering in the shelter demonstrates a form of collective change, illustrating the ways that individual experiences and documentation can motivate the group to advocate for change together. This group effort can be seen as a small-case illustration of the community change advocacy that is part of Wang and Burris' (1997) photovoice method.

Reflections on Using the PhotoCLUB Model

Through implementing our PhotoCLUB program, we have learned that children can create photographs conveying deep personal meaning and emotions through the production of images depicting actual objects. As Wang (1999) states: "Images contribute to how we see ourselves, how we define and relate to the world, and what we perceive as significant or different" (p. 186). Consistent with this notion, the children in our PhotoCLUB used photography to capture feelings, moments, or ideas, while simultaneously showing the object itself (e.g., a toy dog or a doll) and the meaning attached to the object using photographic techniques (e.g., placing a toy dog alone in the foreground for emphasis, or using a full-frame image of a clown doll to make the doll look life-sized and, as Jason stated in this description, more "person-like"). The children also showed excitement around the use of the cameras, indicating that including photography as part of childhood art education can be an engaging endeavor.

We also learned from the collective strategizing process that the PhotoCLUB members engaged in. Members were able to help each other devise plans for achieving their future goals, and this collective process brought them together as a group and gave several of the individual group members more hope for their futures. While this hope is of particular importance for children residing in a domestic violence shelter, the strategizing process reflects an approach that is similar to Oyserman et al.'s (2004) roadmap-planning with the students in their middle school

sample. The strategizing is also similar to the photo-talks that Serriere (2010) describes in which photographs were used to help children identify elements in their environment that they might wish to change.

Powell and Serriere (2013), in their examination of image-based participatory pedagogies, state that “dialogic encounters with photos can promote informed engagements and children’s imaginative capacity and hopefully lay a foundation for empowerment” (p. 21). Empowerment, of course, can take many forms and will look different in a school setting than in a shelter setting. For example, the restrictions of not including any identifying information in materials produced in a shelter setting – along with other safety issues pertinent to domestic violence settings – would largely not apply in schools; this allows for a broader range of subject matter and possible images for students in a school setting. We nonetheless maintain that the strategizing component of the PhotoCLUB model can apply to all children and youth – and indeed, adults - given the key orienting role of life goals in the construction of identity and self-concept (Gollwitzer, Maurquardt, Scherer, & Fujita, 2013; Was, Al-Harthy, Stack-Oden, & Isaacson, 2009). By envisioning their plans and goals through photography and by engaging in the shared act of strategizing for the future, our PhotoCLUB members strive together to create positive changes in their lives and in the lives of others.

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