Photovoice Empowerment Activity: Engaging High Risk Youth in Civic Engagement and Leadership Program

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Background

- High risk youth have few opportunities to engage in the community and have their voices heard.
- Photovoice is a creative community-based participatory research methodology that has been successful in giving marginalized populations leadership roles in assessing their environment and advocating for positive change.

(Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006; Israel, Eng, Schultz, & Parker, 2015; Wang 2006)
Research has established the positive impact of community service, community and school engagement, positive youth and adult relationships and enhanced self image on reducing youth risk behavior

(Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006; Israel, Eng, Schultz, & Parker, 2015; Wang 2006)
Purpose

(1) To enable individuals to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns,
(2) to promote a dialogue and knowledge about important issues through discussion of photographs, and
(3) to reach key stakeholders in the community.
This presentation will share results from a Photovoice activity and a program evaluation of high risk teens participating in a civic engagement and leadership program.
Procedure

● The Youth Leadership and Civic Engagement (YLCE) curriculum is six workshops designed to guide participants in critically thinking about their personal identities, perceptions and stereotypes, individual power, conflict styles, community power, and advocacy.

● The Photovoice activity was embedded in the workshop activity.

● Participants attended a Photovoice training session where they learned how to ensure privacy and avoid potential for harm.
Procedure

- The teens were asked to go out into the community and take pictures and caption them.
- Participants presented their interpretations in a session the next day of the workshop.
- The teens were asked to consider, “With your selected photographs/images, what information can you convey to others about youth empowerment?”
Methods

● An exploratory qualitative method was employed to examine the impact of photovoice combined with civic engagement and leadership program participation on eleven high school students in Southern Massachusetts.

● An interview guided focus group was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

● The data was coded and themes were summarized.

● In addition, photographs from the photovoice project and their accompanied narratives were coded and summarized in themes.
Sample

- The participants were a convenience sample of eleven teens from Southern Massachusetts that participated in the Civic and Leadership Program in the years 2015-2016.
- Written parental consent and IRB approval were obtained before participation and participants were given $20 gift cards.
Sample

- 9 Females, 2 Males
- 10-12 Grade
- Ethnicity: 2 Hispanic/Latino, 9 Non Hispanic/Latino
- Race: 4 Black, 3 White, 2 Other
- GPA 2.6-3.8
The overcrowding in urban schools is a problem because so many kids fall through the cracks. Especially in a community like ours, better facilities are a necessity. Attempting to acquire additional space may be necessary to ensure equal learning opportunities for all students.

The two things I would like to impact in the community are the drug problem and the messes it creates. I am interested in the possibility of establishing a needle distribution center.

Results

These are pictures of my sports. These are my teammates. They empower me to do better and always cheer me on when I'm playing on the field.
Theme: “Little things in our community”

- The teen experienced empowerment, identity awareness, and community awareness through the workshop and photovoice activity.

“Little Things in Our Community are actually valuable to us, and sometimes we would just look at Fall River and not pay attention to Fall River because we live in Fall River, but when we go out and explore what actually Fall River is, and what it means to us, and what we feel like we identify with, we actually can see that we’re connected to Fall River, regardless.” (teen participant)
Theme: “different parts of your identity”

- Participants said the workshop helped them realize their identities by prompting them to consider every day factors that they had not previously contemplated in great depth (e.g. religion and socioeconomic status).

“...about different parts of your identity and I remember one of them was socioeconomic status and I was like ‘Oh, I haven’t thought about that’ because when I think of my identity, I think girl, you know? I don’t know, I don’t think complicated things, I guess...” (teen participant)
Theme: Perspective through diversity

- Participants gained perspective of other participants as well as themselves when sharing thoughts and stories. This perspective was derived from the group being of diverse backgrounds.

“I think that it [the workshop] helped me just to see that everybody has their own battles, and everybody has their own way of seeing things kind of made me a little more open-minded, and understanding of other people and how they think and just show that I’m not the only one that thinks the way I think and has the same kind of perspective that I have.” (teen participant)
Theme: Challenges

- The teens recognized challenges such as racial discrimination, gender discrimination, struggles related to having immigrant parents, anxiety about college

“Well, I’m black so I’m a minority, so we live in America and it’s never going to be the same as a white girl is going to be, just because the way that the country is, there’s a lot of racist people and a lot of people who see me as lesser...it’s always going to affect me, like when I go to get a job, or when I walk into a store, and all those types of things.” (teen participant)
Challenges

“I reflected upon a challenge that I’ve been going through since I was young. Without having my parents speak English, coming from a different country, all they do is work and try to make the money because they didn’t go to college, so I’ll be the first generation to go to college. It’s not anything I’m embarrassed to talk about, either. They don’t speak English so I always had to kind of...do everything on my own and figure out school on my own.” (teen participant)
Theme: a wish for change

- Teens were concerned about the crime rates in their community

“I feel like just, being a teenager, especially in where we're from, we're influenced by a lot of things; I’m not saying that the other kids aren't influenced in other places, but being in an urban city, being influenced by drugs and gang rivalry, you want to distance yourself from it as much as possible.”(teen participant)
“I took more pictures...It was one of them was what would you like to fix in your city? And I found a lot of negative things when I did that when I was really looking for the negative things, I saw a lot of the negative things, needles on the ground.... I wanted to change was the needles and the litter around the city that’s harmful to people.” (teen participant)
IDENTITY
Each of us comes from a different background. When we come together, we identify as one.

COMMUNITY
We educate fellow teenagers throughout the Fall River Community to help empower them to make healthy decisions to grow into their best selves.

EMPOWERMENT
We are positive role models in Fall River as we are confident in what we teach. Being Peer Leaders has helped us become who we are today and it is shaping us for who we will be tomorrow.

CHANGE
With the support of state funding, we will continue educating our fellow peers on making proud choices to that will decrease the rates of teen pregnancy.

CITIZENS FOR CITIZENS
TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION
Theme: “Planting the seeds”

● Participants expressed their desire for civic engagement

“I feel like it’s good because we’re the future of the community, so the older people just have authority to change things but in reality if we start planting seeds now, while it grows in the future, it would be good for us, you know? So, it should start with us because we’re the future of our community...the next mayor, the next school council, the next principal, the next everything, so yeah, we should try to start changing our community, now.” (teen participant)
In addition the teens expressed short and long term plans for education attainment, graduation and productive life goals.

“I see myself graduating from diamond, my shop, my co-op job shop with that job, and then eventually, getting a high-paying same with that, and then saving all my money and getting a big house, and then taking care of people who took care of me, when I was struggling, and take care of my mom, because she’s a big part of my life, and I know that she’ll be proud of me one day. So, I’m going to make her proud of me one day.” (teen participant)
At the end of the year the group had an exhibition of their photographs in their high school and community library, to raise the consciousness of the community and key stakeholders to their view and vision for their community.

The community, parents and the mayor of the city attended.
“Well, speaking about things that change our community, if I ever come across another chance to have the voice to speak on my community, I’ll know how and I’ll know how to represent myself [be]cause here, we got the chance to talk about our community, and talk about our identities, so if it ever comes up in a debate or conversation, I’ll know what I want to say but I’ll know how to say it, without offending anybody or without sounding any type of way.”(teen participant)
Conclusion

- This program and its evaluation has implications for professionals and researchers engaging with high risk minority teens in the community.
- Photovoice methodology can complement any program that has teen empowerment among their goals.
- The ability to digitally communicate their identities, the context of their lives, and express changes that they believe need to be made on individual and societal levels has given these teens a voice.
Thank you
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