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Using Visual Imagery to Enhance Student Writing

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WRITING RESEARCH FELLOWS CO-INQUIRY BRIEF

Researchers' Names/Department:

Rachelle Redd (Student-Human Services) and Dr. Diana Jones (Instructor-Human Services),

Project Title:

Using Visual Imagery to Enhance Student Writing

Research Question:

What is the effect of the Photoresponse assignment on student writing?

Method & Data Studied:

We collected data from students enrolled in the HSP 302 Introduction to Human Services course during winter and spring quarters 2011. On the first day of class students were asked to respond, in writing, to the question "what inspired you to be a human service professional?" Over the course of the next four weeks, students were further asked to respond to a series of questions by taking a photograph meant to capture their answer to a question. Students then prepared a brief narrative explaining their rationale. The final question students were asked to photograph was the same question asked on the first day of class, "What inspired you to be a human service professional? Photos were uploaded onto a PowerPoint presentation and students presented their photo and narrative to the class each week. At the end of the course students were given a brief survey meant to capture their feelings about this assignment and its effect on their writing. The initial in-class and final photoresponse writes were analyzed using the rubric to determine if GUR competency 1 had been met. Together we analyzed 20% of the narratives to ensure that we were rating each assignment the same. Data was then entered into SPSS to determine if any statistical correlation existed between the in-class write and photoresponse write.

Key Findings:

1. In the areas of contextual knowledge, focused development and organization, scores improved between the in-class write and photoresponse write. Improvements to contextual knowledge were statistically significant.
2. In the area of conventions, scores decreased, although differences were not statistically significant.
3. Students reported liking this assignment as it allowed them to be creative, apply theory to real life and gain a better understanding of other classmates' perspectives.
4. Students reported this assignment helped their writing to be more focused, but also admitted that they often did not spend much time on the writing piece.

Implications for Further Study:

We recognize several limitations to this study including a small sample size, repetition of the question asked naturally improving a student's ability to answer, and the difference in the amount of time students had to answer the question. Strengthening these aspects of this study could alter our results. In the future we would like to see how the use of guided questions contributes to student's ability to reflect on their photograph. We would also like to see how allowing students to discuss their photograph and writing with their peers would enhance their writing for this assignment.

Implications for Teaching and Learning:

Based on our findings, we feel that one helpful tool for enhancing student writing on this assignment would be more instructor feedback, specifically in the area of conventions. Also, based on student's response to the survey, we feel that more instructor feedback might encourage students to take the writing portion more seriously and to spend more time on it. Ultimately, this is an assignment that encourages student creativity and allows them the opportunity to better connect theory to real life situations as well as gain a better understanding of other student's perspectives. We find it interesting that through this writing assignment, students allow themselves to open up to their classmates and share something about themselves. This helps to create an atmosphere of trust in the classroom, which makes it much more conducive to both learning and teaching.