

Digital Narrative Photography as a Method to Improve Empathy in Health Sciences

Juan M. Leyva

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

Juanmanuel.leyva@uab.cat

This chapter explores narrative photography in health sciences education, highlighting its effectiveness in addressing the often-overlooked psychosocial needs of patients. Traditionally focused on immediate biological outcomes, healthcare has neglected the importance of empathy and reflective practice. Narrative photography, inspired by Photovoice and reflective practice, involves capturing and reflecting on patients' real-life narratives through visual and written means. Students create self-made photographs or drawings, articulate their interpretations through short reflective narratives, and engage in group discussions to foster deeper empathy and reflection. Originally dependent on face-to-face interaction, narrative photography has been adapted to hybrid formats with digital tools, enhancing accessibility and cost-effectiveness. This chapter examines the origins, methodologies, technological advancements, and real-world applications of narrative photography, along with variations developed by the author. It also provides recommendations for assessing learning outcomes, evidence of effectiveness, and evaluations of student and faculty satisfaction.

Keywords: art-based methods, narrative photography, teaching innovation, active learning, hybrid learning.



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Introduction

What is Narrative Photography?

Narrative photography is an arts-based educational approach, that combines visual storytelling with reflective thinking. This innovative method involves students in creating and analyzing photographs to express and explore personal or observed experiences and emotions emphasizing learning through reflection on experiences (Leyva-Moral et al., 2022). The narrative photography intervention is grounded in the theories of reflective thinking and Photovoice methods. Reflective thinking, as articulated by Donald Schön (1983, 1987), emphasizes the importance of reflecting on experiences as a key com-

ponent of professional learning and development. Photovoice, developed by Caroline Wang (1999) and Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris (1997), is a participatory method that empowers individuals to capture their community's strengths and challenges through photography, aiming to promote social change.

Narrative photography has become a valuable teaching tool, especially in health sciences and nursing education in the last few years. In health sciences education, narrative photography is particularly effective in cultivating empathy, enhancing reflective thinking, and fostering a deeper understanding of patients' experiences (Dodd et al., 2022; Jih et al., 2023; Kolaiti, 2009; Leyva-Moral et al., 2021, 2022). This method follows a structured process that integrates visual and reflective elements to enrich the learning experience. Overall, the structured process of narrative photography in health sciences education not only improves students' observational and reflective abilities but also strengthens their empathetic engagement with patients, making it a valuable pedagogical tool (Rieger et al., 2016).

Later in this chapter, specific details on the implementation of the narrative photography method will be provided. To provide a succinct overview, the process initiates with students engaging in the *Feeling the Narratives* activity (Hall & Powell, 2011; Timpani et al., 2022). This preliminary step encourages students to observe and interpret the nuanced aspects of patient care, extending their understanding beyond clinical symptoms to encompass the human experience. This is achieved through the reading of real narratives or the viewing of real story videos. The materials selected by faculty include personal accounts available on the internet, podcasts, blogs, or verbatims from qualitative studies. Subsequently, students are tasked with *Creating Narrative Photographs*. Working either individually or in small groups, as determined by the instructor, students must produce up to three images that encapsulate their feelings and the meaning of what they have learned. No specific format is required for these photographs. The only guidelines are that the images must be original, creative, sensitive, integrative, and explanatory of the theoretical concepts discussed. Following the creation of these visual narratives, students move on to *Reflective Narratives* (Dunn, 2024; Smith et al., 2015). In this phase, students write short reflective essays or commentaries that elucidate the emotions, thoughts, and meanings behind their images. This reflective writing fosters deep introspection and critical thinking, as students articulate their observations and insights. It also helps students to connect emotionally with the patients' experiences, enhancing their ability to empathize and respond compassionately. Finally, these visual and written nar-

ratives are brought into *Group Discussions*. During these sessions, students share their narratives with peers in small or medium-sized groups moderated by experienced active-learning methods faculty. This collaborative environment promotes a rich exchange of perspectives and reflections, allowing students to gain deeper insights and broaden their understanding. Through discussion and feedback, they refine their interpretive skills and develop a more comprehensive view of patient care.

Why using Narrative Photography?

The primary advantage of narrative photography is its ability to enhance empathy (Leyva-Moral et al., 2021, 2022). By visualizing and reflecting on patients' experiences, students develop a better understanding and empathy for their patients' psychosocial needs. This method helps students to see beyond the clinical symptoms and engage with the human aspects of patient care.

Reflective practice is another critical benefit of the method. To create meaningful images students must critically reflect on their own experiences and those of others, improving their reflective thinking skills. This practice is crucial for health professionals who must continuously learn from their experiences to provide better care. Engaging in discussions about their narratives with peers sharpens students' ability to articulate complex emotions and experiences. This process not only enhances their communication skills but also creates a supportive learning environment where students benefit from each other's perspectives and insights.

Recent advancements in digital technology have enabled the adaptation of narrative photography to hybrid formats. These innovations have made the method more accessible and cost-effective, providing digital tools for creating and sharing visual narratives and facilitating remote collaboration (Abdulrahman et al., 2020; Smeda et al., 2014). This integration of technology ensures that narrative photography can be effectively utilized in contemporary educational environments, accommodating the needs of 21st-century students and faculty.

Narrative Photography and Empathy

Empathy is a fundamental element of nursing care that leads to better patient outcomes (Engbers, 2020). Empathic competence includes identifying patient distress, understanding patient perspectives, and expressing this understanding (Stepien & Baernstein, 2006). Innovative pedagogical approaches, such as narrative photography, have proven effective in educating nursing students about empathy and humanised care. There is a significant

gap between the skills learned at university and the demands of employers (Hayter & Parker, 2019; Moore & Morton, 2015; Pang et al., 2018). Despite this, university teaching remains heavily based on traditional methodologies like lectures (Lai et al., 2018; Pelger & Nilsson, 2017; Rasool & Chaudhry, 2012).

Active methodologies that emphasise learning, creativity, and motivation are necessary to bridge this gap (Betihavas et al., 2016; Calimeris & Sauer, 2015). Research shows that health science curricula incorporating visual arts help develop clinical observation skills (Mukunda et al., 2019). However, few human science-based educational interventions have included reflective and artistic methods (Bas-Sarmiento et al., 2017, 2020). For instance, Leyva et al. (2021) found that using photographs in the classroom helped Spanish nursing students understand the effects of HIV on individuals. Similarly, Photovoice has been found to help develop empathy, reduce stigma, and encourage nondiscriminatory treatment of patients with HIV/AIDS (Dermatoto et al., 2016).

Studies on narrative photography as a teaching method for nursing students have reported high levels of satisfaction and empathy. Leyva-Moral et al. (2022) highlighted that narrative photography is associated with enhanced empathy and student satisfaction, demonstrating the effectiveness of innovative and active strategies in nursing education. The use of narratives and images through books, autobiographical accounts, and other visual arts has helped nursing students develop critical and creative thinking, empathy, and meaningful interpretations (Stone & Levett-Jones, 2014).

Implementing Hybrid Narrative Photography

The implementation of a hybrid format of narrative photography in university settings can be regarded as an innovative approach to teaching and learning, particularly in nursing education. The uniqueness of this innovation lies in its integration of traditional face-to-face classes with the use of digital technologies to promote student creativity, sensitivity, engagement, and deepen understanding of complex healthcare concepts. The successful implementation of Narrative Photography methodology in hybrid format necessitates careful planning and execution. This process entails several fundamental steps to ensure effectiveness and engagement from both teaching staff and students. In this introduction, we will explore the key elements required to execute this innovative methodology.

Concept Clarification and Assessment: An introductory session must be conducted to clarify the concepts to be addressed and the evaluation method, directed at both teaching staff and students.

Table 1 example of evaluation rubric

	Fail	Pass	Good	Excellent
Use of theoretical concepts	The student does not use or demonstrate understanding of relevant theoretical concepts	The student uses some theoretical concepts appropriately, but application is inconsistent or shows partial understanding	The student applies most relevant theoretical concepts clearly and appropriately, demonstrating good understanding	he student consistently and accurately applies all relevant theoretical concepts, demonstrating comprehensive understanding
Integration of theoretical content covered in class	Does not integrate theoretical content covered in class into the narrative photography. The work shows no evidence of applying classroom concepts	Demonstrates partial integration of theoretical content covered in class in the narrative photography. Some classroom concepts are applied, but connections may be superficial or inconsistent	Demonstrates good integration of theoretical content covered in class in the narrative photography. Most relevant classroom concepts are applied effectively and show clear connections to the work	Demonstrates excellent integration of theoretical content covered in class in the narrative photography. All relevant classroom concepts are applied comprehensively, showing deep understanding and seamless incorporation into the work
Creativity and originality	Shows little to no creativity in the narrative photography. Ideas presented are conventional, predictable, or cliché. No evidence of original or innovative thinking	Demonstrates some creativity in the narrative photography. While there are elements of originality, the work could be more innovative or unique in its approach	Exhibits considerable creativity in the narrative photography. The work demonstrates clear originality and innovative thinking in most aspects	Displays outstanding creativity in the narrative photography. The work is highly original throughout, showcasing innovative thinking and unique perspectives that go beyond expectations
Sensitivity in Emotional Capture and Message Conveyance	Demonstrates minimal or no sensitivity in the narrative photography. Fails to capture emotions effectively or convey meaningful messages. The work lacks emotional depth or empathetic understanding	Shows some sensitivity in the narrative photography. Captures basic emotions and conveys simple messages, but may lack nuance or depth in emotional representation	Exhibits considerable sensitivity in the narrative photography. Effectively captures a range of emotions and conveys clear, meaningful messages. The work demonstrates a good understanding of emotional nuances	Displays exceptional sensitivity in the narrative photography. Masterfully captures complex emotions and conveys profound messages. The work shows a deep, empathetic understanding of the subject matter, evoking strong emotional responses
Reflexivity and Critical Analysis	Shows minimal or no reflexivity in the narrative photography. The work is largely descriptive, lacking critical analysis or self-reflection. No evidence of considering multiple perspectives or questioning assumptions	Demonstrates some reflexivity in the narrative photography. There are attempts at critical analysis, but these could be more in-depth. The work shows basic self-reflection but may not fully explore implications or alternative viewpoints	Exhibits considerable reflexivity in the narrative photography. The work demonstrates clear critical analysis, showing thoughtful self-reflection and exploration of multiple perspectives. Assumptions are questioned and implications are considered	Displays deep reflexivity in the narrative photography. The work showcases sophisticated critical analysis, demonstrating insightful self-reflection, thorough examination of multiple perspectives, and challenging of assumptions. Implications are fully explored, and the work shows a transformative understanding of the subject matter
Group discussion participation	Rarely participates in group discussions. When participation occurs, questions or answers are often irrelevant, off-topic, or lack coherence. Shows little engagement with the subject matter.	Demonstrates partial participation in group discussions. Contributions include some relevant questions or answers, but they may be superficial or show limited understanding of the topic. Minimal reference to theoretical concepts or evidence.	Shows active and informed participation in group discussions. Regularly contributes relevant questions and responses that demonstrate clear understanding of the topic. Some comments are supported by theoretical concepts or evidence from the literature	Demonstrates leadership in group discussions by actively participating and encouraging others' involvement. Consistently poses insightful questions and provides thoughtful answers that are highly relevant to the topic. All contributions are well-informed by theoretical concepts and evidence from the literature

- *Creation of the Virtual Campus*: A virtual campus was established to provide all necessary instructions, evaluation tools, and a space for students to submit their assignments.
- *Facilitation of Experiential Materials*: Students received experiential materials, including real-life stories, podcasts, videos from various platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, as well as short films or series scenes. Additionally, verbatims from published qualitative studies were included.
- *Creation of Images and Reflective Narratives*: In groups of 3–4, students created original images representing the concepts studied. These images were accompanied by reflective narratives, where students expressed their emotions and reflected on their impact on nursing practice. A deadline of 7 days was set for submitting images and narratives on the virtual campus.
- *Discussion Seminar and Evaluation*: Seven days later, a synchronic virtual seminar was held where each subgroup presented their creations. A group discussion space was opened to share reflections and emotions, and works were evaluated using a specific rubric (see Table 1). A patient expert's participation enriched the discussion.
- *Selection of Best Images and Dissemination*: Through voting by students and faculty, the best images from each topic were selected. These images were exhibited through a photographic exhibition (physical and virtual) to educate and sensitize the community and future generations of nurses. Additionally, dissemination through written reports, books, pamphlets, or short videos, always with student participation, was encouraged.

In 2019, the Nursing Department of the Faculty of Medicine at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) initiated a targeted educational program exclusively tailored for nursing students, with a primary focus on fostering the humanization of care towards individuals living with HIV. This specialized curriculum delved into three overarching thematic areas, meticulously designed to provide comprehensive insights into the complexities of caring for individuals affected by HIV/AIDS. These areas encompassed: a) the emotional journey of receiving an HIV diagnosis, b) the profound impact of societal stigma and discrimination faced by those with HIV, and c) the multifaceted aspects surrounding antiretroviral medication management and the life-long management of chronicity. The instructional format comprised a series of three face-to-face seminars, each spanning two hours, strategically complemented by curated reading materials and educational videos accessible



Figure 1 & 2 Photography Exhibition 'Feeling and Creating to Care' at UAB After Using Narrative Photography Method.

online. Additionally, to extend the reach of awareness and understanding beyond the participating students, the program culminated in a thoughtfully curated exhibition displayed in the faculty corridors. This exhibition served as a poignant testament to the shared commitment towards advocating for compassion and inclusivity in healthcare practice among both students and faculty members alike.

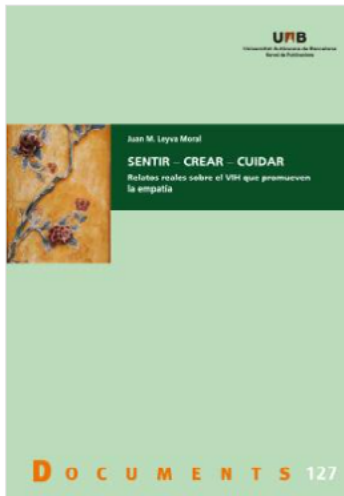


Figure 3 Book Cover 'Feel–Create–Care: Real HIV Stories That Promote Empathy'. More info here <https://publicacions.uab.cat/llibres/sentir-crear-cuidar>

In 2020, the Nursing Department of the Faculty of Medicine at the Autonomous University of Barcelona conducted an online training for health science students to enhance empathy and humanize care for people with HIV. This initiative comprised six two-hour seminars, followed by a closing seminar. Unlike traditional dynamics, exercises were individual, and image and reflection presentations were all done online via Teams and Moodle. At each session, a patient expert shared their experiences, enriching discussions. Topics covered included receiving a HIV diagnosis, facing stigma and discrimination, experiencing professional care, managing antiretroviral medication, and dealing with risk. The activity culminated in writing and publishing a book aimed at sensitizing the community and healthcare professionals about caring for people with HIV (see Figure 3). This example illustrates how Narrative Photography methodology can be used to promote reflection, understanding, and awareness in health-related topics.

In 2022, a comprehensive hybrid training program was introduced for students pursuing studies in health sciences, with a central focus on gender-based violence prevention, employing the innovative approach of narrative photography. The curriculum delved into multifaceted aspects, covering a spectrum of topics essential to understanding and addressing gender-based violence. Among these themes were explorations into the complexities of masculinities and femininities, elucidation of the concept of gender-based violence, categorization of various forms of gender-based violence, identification of key indicators signalling instances of such violence, examination of the cyclic nature of violence, and an analysis of the far-reaching consequenc-



Figure 4 Photography Exhibition 'Reflections on Gender-Based Violence From Creativity and Narrative Photography' at UAB After Using Narrative Photography Method

es it entails. Distinguishing this initiative was the integration of expertise from a seasoned medical anthropologist specializing in gender-based violence, whose contributions elevated the discourse within seminars, fostering critical engagement and deep reflection grounded in the realities of societal dynamics and the imperative of social change.

The seminars, complemented by thought-provoking readings and online video resources, provided a rich platform for students to grapple with nuanced concepts and ethical considerations. The culmination of the program was marked by the creation of a captivating photographic exhibition (Figure 4), meticulously curated to encapsulate the multifaceted dimensions of gender-based violence. This exhibition, conceived as a travelling showcase, traversed various educational and healthcare institutions, serving as a catalyst for awareness and dialogue. Furthermore, recognizing the importance of extending the reach of this critical discourse beyond physical boundaries, a dynamic virtual tour of the exhibition was meticulously crafted (visit the virtual tour here <https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8apG1r6p4A1>). This digital iteration was disseminated widely, reaching influential stakeholders including political leaders, healthcare administrators, educators, NGOs, community organizations, students, and beyond, fostering broader societal



Figure 5 Book Cover 'Reflections on Gender-Based Violence from Creativity and Narrative Photography'. More info here <https://www.bellaterra.coop/es/libros/reflexiones-sobre-las-violencias-de-genero-desde-la-creatividad-reflexiones-sobre-las-violencias-de>

engagement and advocacy for meaningful change. Finally, a digital book including academic content related to gender-based violence was written and illustrated with the pictures created by students (Figure 5).

Digital blackboards such as Miro® or Padlet® are an effective and inspiring space for students to share and disseminate information. International students attending the UAB Summer School course called 'Culture, Society and Health' are a case in point. Students shared their creations using one of these sources, following clear indications from faculty. These digital blackboards were invaluable for the group presentations, as images and texts were easily accessible and could be shown with ease. They also provided inspiration for students by allowing them to view their peers' creations. This encouraged healthy competition within the class, as the system allows participants to vote on others' creations, give likes, and engage in other social media-like actions (see example at Figure 6).

Teachers' Experience with Narrative Photography

The implementation of narrative photography in a hybrid format or with the utilisation of technology as an instructional method has elicited a diverse range of responses from educators, with the majority expressing positive and enthusiastic attitudes. Upon initial introduction to the concept, many teachers reported a combination of curiosity and apprehension. The novelty of the approach prompted interest, albeit accompanied by some initial trepidation regarding the ability to comprehend and utilise it effectively. As one educator noted, 'I was very curious, although the fact that it was a new methodology

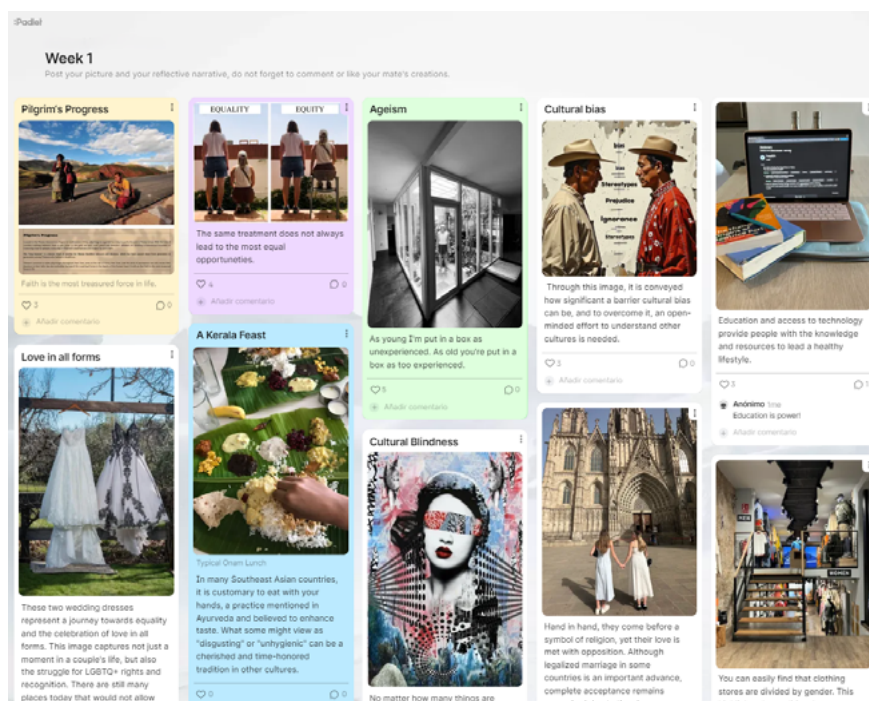


Figure 6 Padlet Screenshot

for me also made me a bit nervous at the beginning, or afraid of not knowing how to 'use' or understand it'.

From a pedagogical standpoint, narrative photography has been met with considerable approval. Educators commended its capacity to stimulate students' imaginative and creative faculties, emphasising its profound emotional impact. The method was described as innovative, with the capacity to promote proactive learning and facilitate the integration of complex concepts. It was also commended for its straightforwardness in terms of both explanation and evaluation, despite the inherent subjectivity involved. One participating teacher articulated this sentiment: 'A two thumbs up activity to be able to work on theoretical aspects in the seminars with a more reflective and critical view. The students, surprisingly, get involved and enjoy the activity. It brings out their most creative side, and with it they work, debate and question concepts that cannot be done with other activities or methodologies. And the best thing is that the debate and reflection does not stay in the group itself but has an impact on the rest of the class and the teacher'.

The impact of the activity extended beyond the classroom for numerous educators. Some respondents indicated that they had adopted a 'narrative photographic perspective' in their daily lives, employing a lens that seeks to capture meaningful moments and concepts. Others observed an enhanced tolerance for diversity and a commitment to ongoing enhancement in this domain. Teachers particularly appreciated the flexibility of the method and the absence of restrictive guidelines, which permitted a wide range of possibilities in representation. The educators valued the debates and reflections generated by the students' work, especially when these led to challenging preconceptions and addressed societal issues. However, some challenges were noted. There was discomfort when presentations failed to generate substantive discussions, and some difficulty in aligning certain rubric items with the nature of the activity, particularly for first-year students. As one teacher expressed, 'It makes me uncomfortable when one group presents their photographs, and the others just applaud and nod. I like it when thought-provoking discussions are generated, but not all photographs or themes achieve this equally. I love learning from the students'.

Overall, narrative photography has been embraced as an innovative and impactful pedagogical tool, fostering critical thinking, creativity, and deeper engagement with theoretical concepts among students.

Conclusions

The integration of narrative photography and digital technologies in nursing education represents a significant advancement in pedagogical approaches within health sciences. This innovative methodology has demonstrated considerable efficacy in enhancing students' empathetic understanding, reflective capabilities, and critical thinking skills. The hybrid implementation, facilitated by digital platforms, has proven particularly valuable in contemporary educational settings, enabling greater flexibility and accessibility. The process of creating, analysing, and discussing visual narratives encourages a profound emotional and intellectual connection with patient experiences and psychosocial aspects of care. However, successful implementation requires careful planning, adequate technological infrastructure, and ongoing support for both educators and students.

As nursing education evolves, the role of innovative approaches like narrative photography is likely to grow. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess long-term impacts on nursing practice and patient outcomes, and explore integration with emerging technologies. In conclusion, the hybrid implementation of narrative photography represents a promising

direction for nursing education, aligning with the profession's emphasis on holistic, patient-centred care. By fostering empathy, reflection, and critical thinking through creative and technologically-enhanced means, this approach has the potential to produce well-rounded, emotionally intelligent nursing professionals, ultimately contributing to improved patient care outcomes.

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Digitalna narativna fotografija kot metoda za izboljšanje empatije v zdravstvenih vedah

Pripovedna fotografija igra ključno vlogo v izobraževanju zdravstvenih ved, še posebej pri naslavljanju spregledanih psihosocialnih potreb pacientov. Ta metoda, ki izhaja iz načel Fotovoicea in refleksivne prakse, študentom omogoča, da s pomočjo fotografij ali risb zajamejo resnične zgodbe pacientov in jih interpretirajo skozi refleksivne pripovedi. Skupinske razprave nato spodbujajo globoko razmišljanje in empatijo. Zgodovinsko je bila pripovedna fotografija odvisna od osebnega stika, vendar se je skozi čas prilagodila uporabi digitalnih orodij, kar je olajšalo dostop do nje in uporabo. V poglavju so predstavljene izvirne metode in aplikacije pripovedne fotografije, vključno s tehnološkimi inovacijami in praktično uporabo le-te. Predstavljeni so tudi avtorjeve lastne

prilagoditve metode, priporočila za vrednotenje učnih izidov, dokazi o učinkovitosti ter ocene zadovoljstva študentov in predavateljev.

Ključne besede: umetniške metode, pripovedna fotografija, inovacije pri poučevanju, aktivno učenje, hibridno učenje