

# Photovoice Project:

## Engaging Families in School

This past summer, I took part in two of Debbie Pushor's graduate classes at the University of Saskatchewan. For part of the class, Re/Presenting Families, each of the students took part in a photovoice project. The purpose of the project was to get to know a family better, and see the family through the family's eyes. This was a very powerful project!

To complete my photovoice project, I chose to work with a family that I had taught in the past, but had since moved away. I had taught two of the children in the family, and in addition, had worked with their Mom when she was employed as an educational assistant in our school. I thought that I knew the family fairly well. I made contact with the family and explained the project to them. I asked them to work together as a family to decide on some important parts of their lives that they would be willing to share with me. I left them with a camera, and asked them to take photos of things that were important in their lives. We made arrangements to meet again the following week. I came back to view their pictures and hear their stories the next week. As we went through the pictures, each of the family members took turns telling me why the pictures were important. As they told their stories, I took notes that I would be able to use later when presenting their story. After our meeting I went home and began to create a scrapbook that would represent what was important in their lives. In doing this project, I came to realize how much I didn't know about this family. They told me amazing stories that showed the love and community that existed in their house.

Through this project, I came to realize the importance of knowing the families that we teach. By knowing more about the families that we work with, as teachers, we are able to form a relationship with the families and work together to meet the needs of the child.

This is a project that I would like to incorporate into my classroom on a smaller scale. Each family would use our class camera or their own to take pictures of several important things in their lives. Examples will be provided so that they can get a feeling of how the project will work. I want the families to brainstorm important things in their lives; people, places, objects, etc. The families will have several days to take their pictures. When the students bring the pictures back to school, the pictures will be used as speaking and writing prompts. After we have explored the pictures in class, the photos will be sent back home, and the families will be asked to write about the significance of the photos. After they have been returned to school, the photos will be displayed with both the family's text and the child's text next to the pictures. I think it will be interesting to have the children's perspective next to the family's perspective. I am excited to see what families will take pictures of! I think that this knowledge will help us to build a relationship - we will have a starting point for conversation when we meet together.

Knowing more about the families I teach, will help me invite families to be engaged in their child's learning. If each family trusts me, and knows that I really care about their children, then we will be able to work together, knowing that both at home and at school, we both want what is best for the child.

Knowing what is important to families, and where their interests lie will also help me with the planning for my lessons. I have been striving to teach the emergent curriculum and focus on the interests of the children in my class. By having information from the families, I will have a

stronger sense of what the children are interested in. I will know their hobbies, interests, likes and dislikes. I hope to incorporate this knowledge into my planning. I want to teach critically, using meaningful and relevant information.

More information about creating photovoice projects can be found in the book:

Allen, J. (2007). *Creating welcoming schools: A practical guide to home-school partnerships with diverse families*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Some examples of some locally made Photovoice projects entitled, *Looking Out/Looking In:*

*Women, Poverty, and Public Policy* can be found at

[http://www.pwhce.ca/program\\_poverty\\_photovoice.htm](http://www.pwhce.ca/program_poverty_photovoice.htm).

~Karen Hadwen