

The Benefits of Photo-Elicitation in Arts Administration Research

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Keywords: qualitative, photo-elicitation, rural arts, communication, arts administration, public policy

Abstract: This article explores the benefits of incorporating the photo-elicitation method into interviews within arts and cultural administration, leadership, and management research. Photographs are often used to open communications when traditional verbal communication is less reliable, or hindered by cross-cultural interactions. Within the arts and culture, researchers often use different terminology than administrative practitioners, and administrators often use different terminology than art makers and creative practitioners. Photo-elicitation serves to bridge those gaps in communication and open participants up to opportunities for deeper reflection. This article gives examples from one narrative inquiry study that utilized both exclusively verbal questions and also photo-elicitation in order to provide guidance for the usefulness of photographs as an interview tool.

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“Well, the old saying is that the most scary thing you will hear in Kentucky is a man walks up to you and says, “We’re from the government, and we’re here to help” (Star, 2.9.10). In that environment, how can state arts agencies effectively work with arts organizations serving rural populations? This article focuses on one research question that was part of a larger study.

Research Question: In what ways, if any, does sharing their stories and images with one another change perceptions between SAAs and SIRAOs?

In the English language, there is an expression, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” This saying has equivalents in many other languages and has been attributed to notable people throughout history (Turgenev, 1861; Janson & Janson, 1981). The phrase highlights the phenomenon that a single image, be it a drawing, painting, photograph, or other, can communicate more efficiently and effectively than many words joined together to create a verbal description. This sentiment can be incorporated as a tool into research to provide rich data.

For the qualitative researcher, photographs open pathways to richer understandings of experiences, thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions of study participants. Research participants might use many words to attempt a description that a single image can illustrate clearly and concisely. (Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, & Phoenix, 2008). Photo-elicitation has long been used in the fields of anthropology, education, and psychology (Collier, 1957). Collier first wrote about the method, as a way to evoke conversation around a unique cultural context. Because it is context-driven, it is especially useful in qualitative research exploring specific phenomenon.

One noted benefit of this interview method is its ability to break through colonial constructs by empowering participants to speak and represent themselves (Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, & Phoenix, 2008). This was a critical feature of the method for this study. I understood, entering the study, that there were misperceptions between the two groups of participants. Utilizing images, participants are free to reflect from their own perspectives, based on their individual beliefs and lived-experiences. Participants are accepted as “experts” in their ability to reflect upon the images and are granted authority to speak those reflections. No two people will interpret or reflect on the same image in just the same way. In the specific study described in this paper, participants were further empowered by being invited and encouraged to provide their own images for reflection. I, as researcher, did not impose the images upon them and mandate or imply any particular meaning.

This paper will provide an argument for the usefulness of photo-elicitation in arts administration research. Research in the arts and culture sector is often driven by the context of the population served, the art discipline under study, and the socio-cultural environment surrounding the research. The current urgency toward creative justice, including attention to access, diversity, equity, and inclusion, is just one reason that arts administration researchers might consider incorporating photo-elicitation into their research.

By examining one study conducted using both verbal interviews and photo-elicitation interviews, a comparison will be made of the data gathered in the interviews with and without the use of photo-elicitation methodology. This study crossed cultural boundaries and incorporated priorities from diverse stakeholders, and the conclusions formed relied on the reflective data provided through photo-elicitation interviews. Recommendations for implementation in future study will follow.

Methods

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry emphasizes the lived experiences of research participants. Those experiences are used to interpret and understand broader themes around the environment in which those individuals live and work (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Utilizing in-depth interviews including photo-elicitation, this narrative inquiry brought greater understanding to the experiences of arts administrators in Appalachian Kentucky and Tennessee.

Narrative inquiry requires emphasis on three commonplaces; temporality, sociality, and place. Temporality provides the researcher a picture of the past, present, and future of the environment under review. Sociality offers an understanding of the local cultures, norms, languages, and expectations of participants. Place narrows the study to the unique physical geography of the Appalachian region and the particular environment that brings to bear on the other commonplaces of temporality and sociality.

Feminist Pragmatism

This narrative inquiry was conducted and interpreted through the philosophical lens of feminist pragmatism. This philosophical framework enables the researcher to not only find information, but to use that information to provide practical, working solutions for the current climate under study. Specifically relevant for this study is feminist pragmatism's emphasis on solving "wicked problems," that is, those problems that persist despite variable and multitudinous efforts toward their solving (Addams, 1893). The problems persist, so the pragmatist must continue working and reworking potential solutions until they achieve a successful outcome. It is the hope that this research could successfully lead to recommendations that improve relationships between State Arts Agencies (SAAs) and small, isolated, rural, arts organizations (SIRAOs).

Despite the 1965 establishment of the Appalachian Regional Commission, wicked problems persist in the Appalachian region (ARC, 2019). Problems of poverty, low education, population decline, and access to services remain in the region. Little has changed to improve or further develop the region from that time until the twenty-first century (Sarnoff, 2003). Practical, working solutions based on thorough research are necessary to understand and approach these problems, including the issue of access to the arts through state arts resources.

Conceptual Framework

Understanding that the balance of power, interpreted here as knowledge and control over resources, lies in the hands of one party, the SAA, and SIRAOs face every day needs and obstacles without control over their access to state solutions. Therefore, I decided to approach this study using a framework that understands that disparity. This study recognized the relationship between SAAs and SIRAOs as similar in nature to the relationship between health care providers and their patients. One party, the physician, holds the expertise and power, while the other party, the patient, holds neither, but understands their individual lived experience. The patient might also struggle to communicate that experience in words that the doctor understands and the doctor might find it challenging to interpret the patient's explanations.

Feldman-Stewart and Brundage published this communication framework in 2008 and it establishes a method of interpreting patient-reported outcomes by recording, acknowledging, accepting, and interpreting the different motives, worldviews, educations, and priorities of doctors and their patients. I applied this same framework to the relationship between SAAs and SIRAOs, placing the SAA in the role of doctor and SIRAO in the role of patient.

The inclusion of photo-elicitation in the interviews between participants provided an opportunity for clearer understanding of perceptions and beliefs. It also allowed self-reflection from participants, in a way that verbal interviews had not. Interpreting photographs from their counterparts allowed for a democratization of the power disparity because everyone was encouraged to submit the image that was important to them, and others reflected equally on all submissions. Everyone had a voice.

Literature Review

“When native eyes interpret and enlarge upon the photographic content, through interviewing with photographs, the potential range of data enlarges beyond that contained in the photographs themselves” (Collier and Collier, 1986, p. 99). Photo-elicitation solves “memory problems” and “evokes responses” (p. 100–101): “Photographs sharpen the memory and give the interview an immediate character of realistic reconstruction” (p. 106).

Torre and Murphy (2015) described the tensions between research and practice that exist in the field of education. While researchers typically do not work within classrooms, teachers are often far removed from academic research and theorizing. The outcome is that often, research-based recommendations fail when applied in the classroom. To combat that disconnect, Torre and Murphy suggested that photo-elicitation interviews can serve to “help build bridges across the chasms that currently separate researchers, educators, and students” (p.2). Photo-elicitation empowers participants to speak more freely and openly than a traditional interview.

In 2018, Kieffer identified similar tensions between artists and administrators that exist within the field of arts administration. Rather than the bridge analogy cited by Torre and Murphy, Kieffer compared those tensions to a see-saw. Neither can function without the other, and the tension itself is necessary for success. The similarities in these existing tensions make the practical and useful tool of photo-elicitation relevant and productive in arts and cultural research, as it has been found to be in educational research.

Likewise, photo-elicitation has been effectively used in studies that explore vulnerable and marginalized populations (Torre & Murphy, 2016). The Appalachian region is included as one of five special population groups in the U.S., according to Ramirez (2003). This made my utilization of the method within a population of arts administrators working in Appalachia especially poignant and effective. SAAs work with the Appalachian region, but they are not located within the region itself.

Harper (2002) described photo elicitation during interviews as a way by which the researcher can evoke greater meaning and understanding as participants share and reflect on the image. Watson (2014) pointed out that conversations utilizing photo-elicitation can seem the same as interviews but they are different because the conversation centers on the image. Qualitative researchers can utilize photo elicitation to provide richer understanding of participants’ experiences and perspectives. Their lived experiences are interpreted and understood through their reflection on the image (Croghan, et. al., 2008). The use of photo-elicitation inspires different information that is often not shared by participants without its inclusion.

Traditionally, photographs used in photo-elicitation represent iconic or symbolic objects, places, or people, to evoke participants meaning making of those foci. Photos of “work, schools, or other institutional experiences, or images depicting events that occurred earlier in the lifetimes of the [participants]” (Harper, 2002, p. 13) are often utilized. During the reflection, participants

are enabled to connect their lived-experience with a particular event that might not be reflective of their actual life.

Another application of photo-elicitation, considered more intimate, are photos that portray the participant's family, social group, or body. I utilized this application, asking participants to submit their own photographs of their organization and its place within their communities. This usage of the method encourages participants to connect their experiences to broader culture, society, and local history (Harper, 2002). It also provided them a sense of autonomy and empowerment, as they chose their own photo for reflection.

Using photo-elicitation rather than word-only interviewing provides deeper memory and emotional recall, rather than strictly concrete information of facts and histories (Samuels, 2004). However, Harper noted that prior to his 2002 study, most uses of elicitation incorporated photographs, but that studies utilizing other images, ("paintings, cartoons, public displays such as graffiti or advertising billboards or virtually any visual image") could be equally valid and valuable (p.13). For this reason, when I prompted my participants to provide artifacts for use during the second interview, I specifically requested "images" as opposed to "photographs." The intention in this wording was to allow for any visual document that communicated their beliefs and perceptions. This wording proved valuable, as some organizations chose meaningful paintings and cartoons that provided rich information and understanding.

Including participant submitted photographs provided unique insight into how they saw themselves, and their organizations in the broader context of their state and its cultural sector. (Croghan et al., 2008). Photos also provided the opportunity for organizations to discuss the past. One submission featured a woman who is now deceased and another illustrated the organization as it had once been in the community. According to Harper (2002), "That extraordinary sense of seeming to retrieve something that has disappeared belongs alone to the photograph, and it leads to deep and interesting talk" (p. 23). The photographs submitted by those two organizations revealed a nostalgia for their organizations as they formerly existed, and opened the door to their thoughts on how their organizations have evolved over time within their communities

Trott, Tomsett, and Shaw (2019) studied the usefulness of photo-elicitation in management education. Their research focused particularly on classroom settings where students entered from diverse language backgrounds. They concluded that the use of photo-elicitation facilitated "learner-directed not teacher-directed" communication. This is applicable to research settings wherein the researcher seeks participant contribution without guidance, prompting, or shaping, by researcher intervention. They also determined that incorporating photographs promoted conversations, rather than educator dominated lecturing. This also transfers to a research atmosphere in which the research seeks deep reflection and narrative from participants.

Arts Administration Research

Arts leadership, management, and administration research takes many forms. Quantitative studies of financial systems, surveys of audience experience, curriculum analysis or myriad other methods reveal important information for our sector of practitioners and educators. However, qualitative studies of phenomenon, culture, communication, and more also abound within arts administration. In a field of varied, and often disparate perspectives, data that allows for both quantitative metrics, as well as reflections of lived-experiences can be immeasurably valuable and provide richer data than quantitative information alone provides. I propose that photo-elicitation, as an interview method, is uniquely situated to inform arts administration research.

Arts-Based Research, Visual Data, and Photo-Elicitation

As arts administration researchers begin to understand the usefulness of photo-elicitation within our field of study, it is important to distinguish between other research methods and information. Within the arts-practices we support as administrators, arts-based data is often incorporated into studies. As arts administration researchers, it is less common for our data to include strictly arts-based information. Visual data, on the other-hand, is often incorporated into studies that are quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods.

Arts-Based Research. “Arts-based research can be defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies: (McNiff, 2008, p. 83). Arts-based research can be conducted in any discipline of the arts, but the art-making process is part of the research itself, for researchers, participants, or both. Visual data and photo-elicitation, on the other hand, focus on photographs or images, to the exclusion of other forms of art (including but not limited to theatrical, musical, or dance expressions).

In arts-based research, the art information is coded and analyzed, then incorporated into findings. Also distinct from visual data and photo-elicitation, arts-based research explores the actual methods of the art-making data. Not only is the final art product part of the data, but the process itself is data as well (McNiff, 2008).

Visual Data. Visual data includes graphs, charts, maps, tables, and other tools that provide additional ways to understand data. Visual data can make the identification of trends and outliers more easily accessible to readers and researchers alike (Banks, 2018). Visual data is not coded independently or analyzed as part of the overall data analysis process. Rather, because human eyes tend to be drawn to colors and try to create patterns, visual data provides a readily accessible method by which data can be interpreted (Banks, 2018).

Additional visual data might include word clouds, which highlight frequently used words and themes or infographics which make the information easily digestible to readers. There are many other specific variations and modifications of visual data that are frequently utilized in arts administration research, whether it is quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods. Visual data creates an eye-catching, easily understood image that is created by the gathered data. The data creates the image, rather than the image being the data (Kieffer, 2020).

Photo-Elicitation.

Unlike visual data, the photographs incorporated into elicitation interviews do not specifically represent the data. The photographs are utilized to gather data. This is distinguishable in the name of the process. Elicitation indicates the stimulation of a response. The photo elicits the response. The response itself is the data that will then be coded by the researcher. Thus, as with visual data, in traditional photo-elicitation, the image is not coded along with the interview responses. The image might provoke additional inquiry from the researcher, in this way, eliciting a response from all participants.

Specific Arts Administration Application

I conducted a study exploring the communication relationship between arts administrators in Appalachian communities (SIRAOs) of Kentucky and Tennessee with their SAAs. The study included two interviews with each participant. The first interview and part of the second interview were conducted using a traditional question and answer format. The interview questions were open and the overall design was semi-structured, leaving room for me, as the researcher, to ask follow-up questions.

During the second half of the second interview, I introduced photo-elicitation. I implemented this method in a unique way, as compared to more common utilization. As previously noted, traditionally, when photo-elicitation is used, the researcher provides images with specific themes and asks the participant to reflect on the image, with the aim that their reflection will provide insight into their thoughts on that theme.

Some applications of photo-elicitation instead ask participants to create the images on which they will reflect. In my study, I wanted to learn about my participants' perceptions of themselves and others. I did not think that any image I might supply would be as meaningful or informative as one they would choose for themselves, and I thought the extra time required to create an image might prohibit their participation. Choosing an image for themselves allowed them to find the single image that communicated exactly the themes on which they wanted to reflect and communicate. Again, this choice empowered their individual voices.

I asked each individual to submit a photograph or image they thought embodied their organization. I further asked them to submit a photograph or image that they thought epitomized their counterpart organization. (Small organizations submitted a photo of their organization and of their state arts agency. SAAs submitted a photo of their SAA and of their perception of a generalized rural, Appalachian arts organization). This provided me entry into participants' perceptions and experiences uniquely and intimately. Their chosen photographs communicated visually how they believed they were perceived and how they perceived others (Croghan, et al., 2008).

Additionally, after asking participants to reflect on their own two images, I shared the image presented by their counterpart and asked them to do the same for that image. These reflections proved immensely fruitful, as I was able to compare the meanings and intentions of each participant. More details of these data will follow.

Photographs

The Star Theatre

One participating SIRAO submitted the following two images. To represent their own organization, they submitted Figure 1. To embody the Kentucky Arts Council, they submitted Figure 2. When talking during the first interview and first part of the second interview, participants from this organization discussed their perceived distance from the Kentucky Arts Council (KAC) and their own organization's family atmosphere. However, one look at their submitted images provides a deep understanding of how central they believe their organization is to their community and how important that role is to them.

A large part of the Star's identity also included their place and role within their town. They described their organization as a cornerstone of their community, and the place where everyone goes. This identity goes back to the earliest days of their facility, when it operated as a movie theater. "Everything that went on in Russell Springs happened on Main Street and the Star Theater was the biggest, and also the flashiest, building on Main Street and everything kind of centered around going to the Star" (Star, 2.7.8). In the 1980's the vacant cinema was renovated into the theater that occupies it today. Still they consider their organization is "the place you go."

I requested that participants submit images. I did not require those images to be photographs, although the vast majority of submissions were, in fact, photographs. The image submitted by The Star Theater was a painting created by an artist local to their organization. Printed replicas of the original painting hang in many businesses in that community, reinforcing their belief that the Theater is a central part of their community.

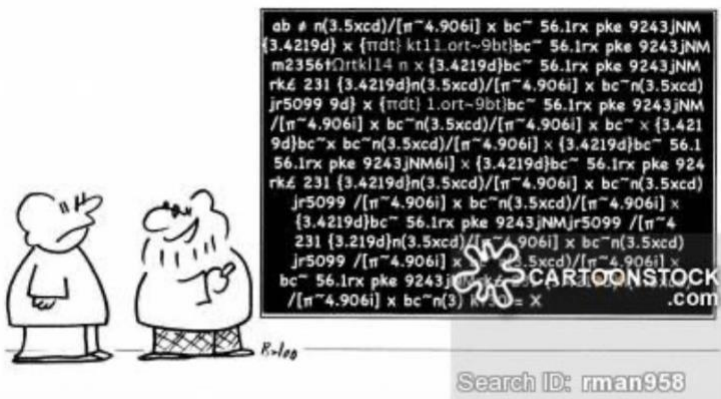
Likewise, their submission representing the KAC (Figure 2) makes clear their perception of their SAA as distant and inaccessible. In addition, their selected image establishes their understanding of the KAC as only a grantmaking organization. These two images communicate with great clarity the difference in how the SIRAO interprets their place in their state's arts sector.

The SIRAO participants' experiences working with their SAAs created a belief that SAAs are obtuse and generally unavailable for sharing information or resources. This was in direct contrast to both SAA participants who recounted stories aiding organizations across their states. Both SAAs spoke of fielding calls from all types of organizations and of offering a variety of resources to those organizations (TAC, 2.4; KAC, 2.4). Star specifically said they think the KAC would prefer for them to figure things out on their own: "don't call, just struggle" (Star, 1.10).

Figure 1 *The Star Theater: How We See Ourselves*



Figure 2: *How Star Perceives the Kentucky Arts Council*



"It's a foolproof formula for writing grant applications."

Open

Kentucky Arts Council

In contrast to how the Star Theatre perceived the KAC, the KAC saw itself as intricately and personally involved in the arts and culture sector of the commonwealth. Whereas the SIRAO saw KAC as only a funding agency, and an out of touch, out of reach one at that, the KAC submitted figure 3 on their own behalf. It is immediately apparent that this image shows hands-on, active involvement. The dissonance between these perceptions is apparent visually. “I think that this program and this event, especially, really gives everyone in the Arts Council a shared identity...[this event] is a major component of the culture of what the Arts Council is” (KAC, 2.6.14).

KAC submitted Figure 4 to represent a small, isolated, rural arts organization in Appalachia. While the Star Theatre perceived themselves to be integral to their community, the KAC did not immediately think of an organization such as a community theatre to represent the arts in the region. KAC perceived rural arts in Appalachia to be folk art, in this specific photograph, dulcimer making. There is incongruity in these photographs between how both organizations perceive themselves and one another.

Figure 3: *Kentucky Arts Council: How We See Ourselves*



Words vs Photographs

Before I started interviewing, I was a bit concerned that some participants might not be open with me if their perceptions of their counterpart organization were negative or perceived to be negative. In the question-and-answer portion of the interview, this proved somewhat valid. “I’ve met people...it wasn’t something. OK, I knew they were from the Arts Council but they didn’t do much...that’s really the only time I’ve ever really dealt with the Arts Council” (Barn Lot, 2.4.4). The verbal answer glossed over a strong sentiment that the participant was hesitant to verbalize. As the researcher, though, the hidden intention of the words was too vague to try to interpret or code. However, participants showed no such reluctance to submit seemingly negative photographs and those images supplemented their words, providing clear themes from which I could draw conclusions.

Figure 4: *How KAC Perceives SIRAOs.*



The value of the photograph submissions and the discord they make evident between those two participants was great. In verbal interviews, participants used polite words and occasionally evaded answers they thought might be considered negative. For example, “So, yeah. So a lot of, um... So I'd never like to do it [talk to KAC] again” (Star, 2.2). That quote was from an interview with the Star Theatre. In contrast, their images communicated their emotions (pride and affection for their own organization and frustration with KAC). In their lack of verbal response, it would have been inappropriate for me to try to draw too much emotional conclusion from their sometimes-vague answers. The images filled in any gaps that might have previously existed based on their verbal-only responses. Beyond the images only, the verbal answers the images evoked from participants was also much more detailed and elaborate than the answers they provided in solely verbal response to my questions.

One image evoked stark contrast and revealed extreme misunderstanding. Good Neighbors Theatre (GNT) submitted Figure 5. It is a photograph of a long line of climbers attempting to ascend Mount Everest. When their SAA, the Tennessee Arts Commission (TAC) saw the photo, his interpretation was positive. He believed it represented how TAC labors to support the cultural sector and particularly arts organizations within his state. Though the work is challenging and there are obstacles, there is a clear goal ahead and together, it can be achieved.

It looks like a snowy mountain with hikers. And backpackers. Going up in a in a straight line. Well, I mean. What, what that imparts to me is a difficult journey, but one that's done with, with others, so, you know, people relying on each other for safety and direction. So, I mean, I'd like to think that we provide direction and that and safety in a difficult journey (TAC, 2.8.7).

The reflection from GNT, who submitted the photo, was remarkably different.

Unattainable was the word that came to mind, although we're willing to wait. The picture was to show... it's Mount Everest and, of course, you know people waiting in line to get to the top. It's not that that's not a common goal. We have a common goal to make the theater succeed, but we don't know. We feel that the outreach to the arts commission, other than what we've done to apply for grants. We don't really have any direction (GNT, 2.6.4).

Figure 5: *How GNT Perceives the Tennessee Arts Commission*



The Everest image and the verbal reflections it evoked exemplified the complete contradiction between GNT and TAC with more clarity and strength than any of the words they spoke regarding one another.

Implications for Management

To the participants in this study, all arts administrators themselves, and others alike, I make a strong recommendation toward opening communication between their organizations and other arts organizations. This recommendation is not restricted to SAAs and SIRAOs communicating with each other. This call is for an opening of dialogue across the sector, between organizations, and even between disciplines.

As my study specifically sought to understand the relationship between two groups of arts administrators, this specific function of photo-elicitation proved invaluable. One of my research questions asked whether learning one another's stories changed each groups' perceptions of the other. What I found, was that sharing their words did not affect them, but sharing their images and the perceptions behind those images did, indeed, influence their thoughts toward one another. Photographs made a difference, where mere words did not.

Communication

One of the themes of my study on the communication between these entities was actual language use between specialists (SAAs) and general practitioners (SIRAOs). When specialized jargon enters a conversation, language becomes an obstacle. Through sharing images with one another, I was able to overcome that obstacle. Harper (2002) identified a primary benefit of photo-elicitation to be its ability to lead a participant into a new paradigm or perspective. The images themselves are able to create bridges between separate, and perhaps disparate, world views.

By asking open questions, "Why did you select this image to represent your SAA?" "Why did you select this image to represent SIRAO?" I allowed open space for the participant to reflect on the deeper rationale behind their choices. Where verbal descriptions had been guarded and somewhat clumsy, reflections of the photographs were vivid and thoughtful.

Following their reflections of their own photographs, I shared the photographs their counterparts had submitted to represent them and asked "What do you think this image communicates about your type of organization?" "Does that inform your perception of

SAA/SIRAO?” Again, some of the most emotional comments came following the sharing of images. “And this is what happens in rural Kentucky....I think it's pejorative” (Star, 2.9.8-9). “First of all, I want to stay that I feel the picture doesn't represent my type of organization...it only represents a portion of the arts in Kentucky” (Barn Lot 2.9.8).

From the SAA, “I hate that anybody feels that we are distant or don't care, that they think that that's our attitude towards them. That's not anyone's attitude in our agency toward them. I think like I just mentioned a few minutes ago, there is a lack of understanding about the way the government works” (KAC 2.8.18).

A key takeaway from all of my conversations was how each organization feels that they are on their own. SIRAOs feel isolated within their communities and SAAs feel isolated within their state governments. Yet all of these organizations share a common goal of advancing the arts. Collaboration, partnerships, increased interaction and communication between different organizations could serve to strengthen the arts sector as a whole. The benefit of photo-elicitation for practitioners is that it facilitates that communication.

Conclusion

Driven by the practical solutions required by feminist pragmatism, this is the most satisfactory answer to report. While during our interviews, organizations did not immediately express changes in their perceptions of one another, changes did occur. Following our interviews, GNT reached out to TAC. (GNT is the organization that perceived her SAA as a Mount Everest her organization was not ready to climb). They are now in regular dialogue and TAC is providing technical assistance for GNT as they journey through the grant application process.

Also, during our interview, Barn Lot said his perceptions had not changed. After the conclusion of the interview he emailed me and reported that he thought he had been unfair in his assessment of the KAC, and was more hopeful about their future working interactions. ACCC did not report a change in her attitude toward TAC, but sentiments I communicated to her from TAC changed her perceptions of her own organization and its capital within the community. Sharing images and stories did, indeed, change perceptions of others and beliefs about themselves.

Photo-elicitation works particularly well in studies conducted utilizing the lens of those theories and philosophies that include and incorporate a plurality of world views and the understanding of multiple, subjective truths. Even a group of people featured in the same photograph will have different reflections upon that photograph, based on their specific lived-experiences. Dependent upon their individual lives, circumstances, and experiences at the moment of the photograph, and their lives, circumstances, and experiences following.

A photograph of a tornado might evoke reflections of awe, power, mystery, or adventure for someone who has only experienced it through a television screen or book. The same image interpreted by someone who has survived a catastrophic tornado might be loss, devastation, grief, or powerlessness. Despite their differences, both of these interpretations can be true, valid, valuable, and revealing. They are true, insofar as they are true for the individual reflecting upon them. In this capacity, photo-elicitation provides a unique opportunity for researchers exploring the field of arts administration. In a discipline with disparate priorities including administrative efficiency, fiscal responsibility, creative freedom, equitable access and representation, among others, interview strategies that enable participants to share individual truths are beneficial and even necessary.

Kieffer (2018) highlighted the discord between artists and administrators. In addition to that sometimes-conflicting relationship, arts administrators must confront political landscapes between public, private, and nonprofit arts and culture organizations all seeking access to limited resources. Arts administrators must also navigate a political landscape in which those limited resources are unreliable and ever-changing.

Photo-elicitation has the potential to aid in more efficient and effective communication between parties with differing and contrary priorities by inspiring collaboration and facilitating cross-cultural and cross-perspective communication. When multiple individuals reflect on the meaning of images, they are working together toward a future solution. This is ideal for research seeking practical, working solutions for multiple stakeholders with different experiences, priorities, and understandings.

Photo-elicitation also provides a valuable addition to rich data-collection for arts administration researchers who are often exploring quantitative aspects of a qualitative field. A gap can manifest between the creative and administrative aspects within researchers, participants, and organizations (Kieffer, 2018). The incorporation of the photo-elicitation method into interviews uniquely mediates between the artistic and administrative, making it an especially useful tool for researchers conducting arts administration research.

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