

The HSRC/NRF Engaged Research Conference

22 - 24 October 2025, Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo
Conference Centre, Gauteng



Engaged Research Conference 24-25 October 2025

Title: Pathways of Co-creation: Exploring Photovoice and Digital Storytelling for Engaged Research

Proposed Format:

Interactive Workshop (90 minutes)

Target audience: Researchers, practitioners, community partners, and students engaged in participatory and community-based research

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Background

In the context of complex societal challenges, the value of engaged research lies in the potential to co-create knowledge and facilitate collective learning towards social change. Community-based approaches recognise community-based actors' rights in research, and values and legitimises local knowledge (Black et al, 2018; Delgado, 2015; Wang and Burris, 1997). Research participants are positioned as active co-producers of knowledge, deepening engagement, fostering empathy, and enabling the translation of research into useful and useable knowledge (Benneworth and Olmos-Peñuela, 2018).

Photovoice and **digital storytelling** are examples of community-based participatory visual methods that combine visual material with narratives. Photovoice and digital storytelling processes encourage participants to reflect on their experiences and communicate contextualised understandings of their lived realities. Designed to include artistic and therapeutic processes, these methods have been traditionally used for community development and are well-established in public health research (Black et al, 2018; de Jager et al, 2017).

These methods not only produce meaningful data but also catalyse dialogue, reflection, and policy influence.

So What?

Reviews of the literature show increasing interest in the use of photovoice and digital storytelling in social science research (Lee et al, 2025; Pain, 2012). The advantages of such visual methods for producing meaningful and enriching data, facilitating co-learning and mutually-beneficial engagement between researchers and research participants, and for advocacy are highlighted. The literature also brings attention to challenges related to the navigation of research ethics considerations specific to photovoice and digital storytelling, and to the co-production of research outputs.

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This interactive workshop provides an introduction to photovoice and digital storytelling as qualitative research methods that foster creativity, reciprocal learning and participatory engagement that centre participants' voices. By immersing participants in hands-on experience with photovoice, the workshop will:

- Build capacity for using visual methods in participatory research.
- Encourage ethical reflection on voice, representation, and co-authorship.
- Provide practical frameworks for integrating visual storytelling in community-based research, evaluation, and advocacy.
- Spark dialogue around institutional support for creative, engaged scholarship.

Workshop Structure and Activities

1. Welcome and Framing (10 minutes)

- Introduction to the facilitators and objectives
- Brief overview of participatory visual methods and their relevance to engaged research
- Setting community agreements for respectful engagement

2. Method Deep Dive: Photovoice and Digital Storytelling (30 minutes)

- Short case examples of both methods in action (from health, development, and education contexts)
- Discussion: What makes these methods powerful? What are the risks and ethical considerations?

3. Hands-On Activity: Photovoice (40 minutes)

- Prompt: Participants take or select a photo (from their phone) representing "*engaged research in action*"
- Small group reflection:
 - What do you see here?
 - What is really happening?
 - How does this relate to our lives/work?
 - Why does this problem or strength exist?
 - What can we do about it?
- Co-producing a collective story

4. Closing Reflections and Applications (10 minutes)

- Group discussion: How might you apply these methods in your own context?
- Harvest collective insights via digital/paper sticky notes

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Expected Outcomes

- Increased awareness and confidence in using participatory visual methods
- Enhanced understanding of ethical and practical considerations
- Peer learning and inspiration for integrating arts-based, visual methods into engaged research
- Tangible takeaways (photos, scripts, frameworks, tools) for future adaptation