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Visual Conceptual Exploration Using Inquiry Graphics

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Summary of Teaching & Learning Context

Year 1 undergraduate Social care programme, Module name: Creative Approaches (art) to Social Care

Rationale for this learning approach

Visuals are powerful devices for active knowledge construction and deep authentic learning. Presented here is an active learning task that teaches threshold concepts and brings critical awareness of how the visual world can influence, persuade and transmit ideas and messages often unbeknownst to us (MacGiollaRí, 2020). This novel approach brings together threshold concept (TC) theory and inquiry graphics theory as 'threshold graphics' (TG) (Lacković, 2020a) utilising the abundance of visual materials, often an untapped resource. Threshold graphics, as a teaching method, offers a critical approach for connecting often abstract and language-centric conceptual knowledge to everyday embodied, material and visual experience, using static or moving images as key vehicles of conceptual inquiry.

Learning threshold concepts may then be mediated by exploring semiotic or 'sign' relations in between an abstract concept or theory and their embodied manifestations via diverse visual media, chosen or created by students and/or teachers to represent their subjective experiences. Also by representing concepts visually, troublesome knowledge 'gaps' can be identified, shared and worked thereby with an effective gateway to significant knowledge exploration, acquisition, critical engagement and conceptual knowledge integration

Assessment process

This activity is linked with a lecture on semiotics and is assessed in a task-based portfolio in Moodle.

Implementing the Strategy

Students are first introduced to the concept of 'signs' as anything that means something to someone (See Peirce's semiotic philosophy Atkin, 2010)) and how 'sign' meanings can be individual and shared for communication purposes in culture and globally (Lacković, 2020b; Lacković & Olteanu, 2020).

Students then search and select an online image representing concepts such as creativity, disability, homelessness, inequality or power. They then deconstruct the image online or in a class by using the inquiry graphics (Lacković, 2020a) step by step process.

The first step involves slowly detailing what they see by listing and numbering all the things in the image without meaning followed by an overall description, again without meaning. The final step involves meaning making and asking questions such as; how do the signs identified in the image give you meaning? What do you associate with these? How do these relate to the concept under consideration? How do you as a person/novice professional respond to these meanings?

The images can then be reflected upon and discussed with each student describing how they approached the task and anything they noticed in their search.

Advice for organising the learning strategy

- It is helpful, although not essential, for the educator to understand basic semiotic theory, in this case, visual signs.
- Adaptions can include educator sourced images shared and analysed in a large group setting or students selected images printed out and discussed in small groups. See the example (Figure 1.) of an image used in class to explore the concept of 'abuse'. Also asking students to take photographs of objects representing a concept or idea.

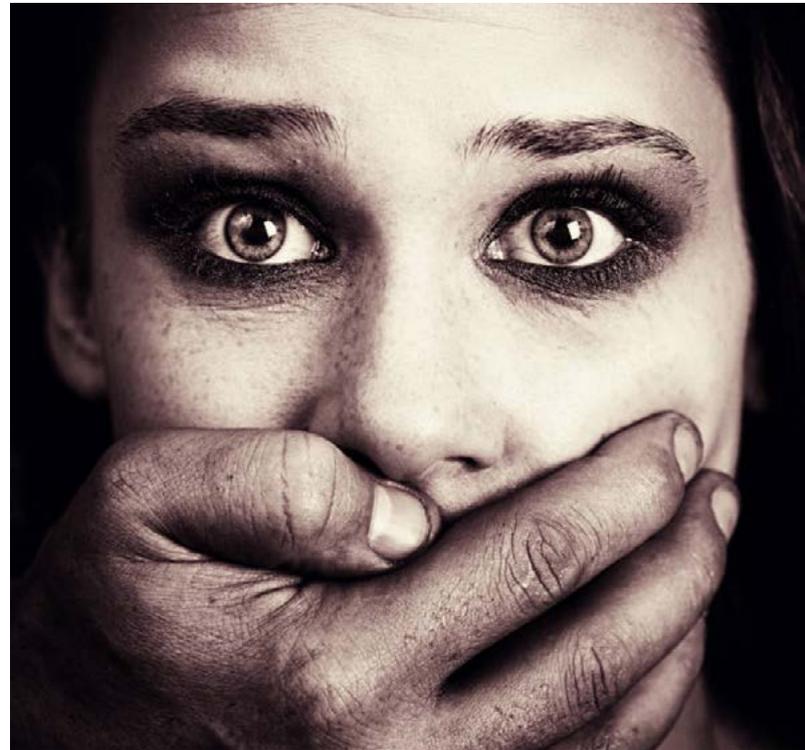


Figure 1: Image A. Scared woman victim of domestic torture and violence: Source: dundanim (Photographer). (2019) www.istockphoto.com.

- Images should only be shared within the classroom setting and on Moodle.

Observations/Reflections

Generally, students are enthusiastic about online visual searches however in order avoid to choosing the first image students should search for 5-10min minimum. This also improves students' observations thus informing critical discussion. Suggested questions here can be around representations of people (gender, ethnicity, and age), style and type of image (stock imagery, historic, journalistic etc.), and text accompaniment. Also similarity and differences, collective messaging and how particular concepts are represented.

Recommended Resources

Atkin, A. (2010). *Peirce's Theory of Signs* (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Retrieved March 20, 2022, from Online website:
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce-semiotics/>

Lacković, N. (2020a). *Inquiry Graphics in Higher Education. New Approaches to Knowledge, Learning and Methods with Images*. London: Palgrave & Macmillian.

Lacković, N. (2020b). *Thinking with digital Images in the Post-Truth Era: A method in Critical Media Literacy. Postdigital Science and Education*, 442–462. Retrieved from
<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs42438-019-00099-y.pdf>

Lacković, N., & Olteanu, A. (2020). *Rethinking educational theory and practice in times of visual media: Learning as image-concept integration. Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 0(0), 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1799783>

MacGiollaRí, D. (2020). *Learning to Put Everyday Creativity, Semiotics and Critical Visual Literacy Using Inquiry Graphics (IG) Visual Analysis to Work in Social Care. Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*, 20(2).