

Acquiring visual literacy skills: Interpretation of journalistic photographs as a tool for contemporary education

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Abstract

Due to the progressive visualization of everyday communication, it has become increasingly important to understand images and think and learn in terms of images. There should not be any surprise, therefore, that educators express a need to introduce visual literacy into the curriculum. However, the concrete tools to address this need are still missing. The variety of visual methods and approaches provided by visual studies' literature does not seem to be particularly useful when applied to education. Therefore, I suggest that a focus on teaching the interpretation of journalistic photographs is a crucial component of contemporary education, because it develops students' visual literacy skills while addressing current requirements in Higher Education, which expect students to be able to interpret, use and create images. Journalistic photographs are commonly perceived as a medium of communication, which informs about current events, or illustrates certain issues, while due to its connotative intertextual potential it can also support teaching. This study evaluates various visual methods and discusses their application to the interpretation of journalistic photographs with the aim of improving the education of visual literacy. To achieve this objective, I propose an approach that will examine two dimensions of photographic interpretation: denotation and connotation. Furthermore, by identifying particular elements of well-established visual methods and techniques, I develop a model tool that can be used in visual literacy classes for the interpretation of journalistic photographs.

Introduction

Due to the progressive visualization of everyday communication, understanding and creating images and thinking in terms of images are increasingly important skills. Students in higher education, for example, who are constantly exposed to visual narratives, are required to be