Learning to Put Everyday Creativity, Semiotics and Critical Visual Literacy Using Inquiry Graphics (IG) Visual Analysis to Work in Social Care

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Abstract

This article argues that despite CORU's recognition of Creative Arts as integral to Social Care Practice, there are 'pedagogical, theoretical and practice gaps', which might be addressed through a 'process orientated novel creative pedagogy' (PONCP) introduced in this paper. The PONCP is built on two tenets, firstly that creative expression is not just for professional artists – everyone is capable of creative expression, though cultural messages make us believe otherwise, and secondly engaging in creative practice is therapeutic in varying degrees from passing time productively to psychoanalytic engagement. A curriculum is proposed comprising: edusemiotics (the interpretation and creation of meaning), multimodality (the use of different modes / tools of/for expression) and Inquiry Graphics (a tool for critical analysis of photographs) (Lacković, 2010, 2020).

Through this PONCP the author hopes to establish a terrain for future research and elaboration, and to develop creative, reflective and analytic capabilities for effective, high-quality practice with service users. The PONCP aims to support social care creative work by promoting everyday creativity and imagination as an affirming expressive and adaptive ability through understanding how 'signs' construct meaning and therefore learning. By critically reading and analysing the visual world through 'signs', socially constructed ideologies and accepted visual meaning can be challenged revealing hidden truths. Overall this may serve to enhance professional practice as well as professional critical appraisal in keeping with the CORU Standards of Proficiency.

Keywords: Social care, creativity, semiotics, multimodality, inquiry graphics, critical visual literacies.

Introduction

Proficiency in creative and recreational intervention skills are now required for registered Social Care Workers (SCWRB, 2017). While anecdotally, the creative arts are frequently used in many Irish social care settings, empirical research has been slow to emerge. Whereas art and drama are included in Share's (2003) overview of social care education, the literature to date has focused mainly on practice areas, with no pedagogical research in the creative arts. Although the textbooks *Creative Studies for the Caring Professions* (Lyons, 2010) and *Art in Social Work Practice* (Huss & Bos, 2019a) make a welcome contribution, pedagogical, theoretical and practice gaps remain.

This article attempts to fill the knowledge gap by setting out a proposed process-orientated novel creative pedagogy (PONCP) and theoretical landscape to prompt further research and discussion. The creative pedagogy (PONCP) outlined, in the following sections, brings together theories in the areas of creativity, therapeutic art, meaning-making and learning through signs (semiotics), multi-modal communication, and critical visual literacy, to meet the

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CORU social care proficiencies requirements (SCWRB, 2017). The approach values ordinary creativity as a process to support self-actualisation and change and calls for a critical visual literacy approach to reading the visual world.

The process-orientated novel creative pedagogy (PONCP) seeks to address several SCWRB (2017) proficiencies with the 'creative and recreational interventions', under the domain, professional knowledge and skills (SoP 5.16) being the main focus: understand the role of, and be able to demonstrate skills in the use of creative and recreational interventions in social care work to meet the needs of the service users in a variety of contexts (SCWRB, 2017, p.10). The creative pedagogy (PONCP) seeks to teach these proficiencies by demystifying creativity and encouraging learners to believe in their creative abilities.

One of the main aims is to normalise creativity by challenging fixed thinking, build confidence and encourage learners to value imaginative thinking and find their creative passion. Learners then encourage service users to do the same. The creative skills, rather than prescriptive instruction, emerges though materials exploration, experimental processes and peer engagement. The PONCP also challenges learners to develop 'creative work' as integral to their social care practice by linking to proficiency skills, including safe practice (SoP 1.1, 1.9, 3.7, 3.14, 5.12), teamwork (SoP 2.13, 2.14,) relationship (SoP 2.12, 2.13, 2.15, 5.8, 5.9) problem-solving (SoP 3.5), decision making (SoP 1.17, 1.19, 3.10), identify needs (SoP 3.15), facilitation (SoP 2.16), critical reflection (SoP 1.22, 4.3), self-awareness (SoP 5.13, 5.19, 3.9), risk assessment (SoP 3.10), evaluation (SoP 3.8) and communication skills (SoP 2.2, 5.13) (SCWRB, 2017). The values underlying this approach, in the author's opinion, align with the rights-based approach that respects the dignity and autonomy of service users in an ethical, non-judgmental and empathic manner.

Creativity and the Caring Professions

From the perspective of social care practice, several authors have identified creativity's role in the care of others and its benefits to various groups. Contributions point to the value of children's creativity (Horgan & Douglas, 1998), creative and emotional growth in therapeutic settings (Sharpe, 2008), using a creative approach in project work to support refugees and asylum seekers (Butler, Conceicao, & Finch, 2006) using objects creatively to tell stories of transformative interactions with youth workers (Taylor, 2017). In a similar vein, the value of using reminiscence, recreational, social and creative activities with older people (Gallagher, 2013, 2016; Gallagher et al., 2003; Galvin & de Róiste, 2005) and engaging in creative therapeutic social care practice are proposed (Byrne, 2013). From a professional self-care perspective, creative techniques such as music and writing, are suggested (Fabianowska & Hanlon, 2014). In addition, creative thinking within residential and foster care has been valued for supporting professional development and finding innovative solutions for system, societal and individual issues (Hogan & Hogan, 2002; McHugh & Meenan, 2013). Artist-led work in health care also has general therapeutic outcomes, such as enhancing social relations, improving participation, reducing isolation, encouraging expression, removing barriers and improving environments (Kaye & Blee,1997; White, 2009). Within international development and social work, participatory arts and arts- based interventions can empower and effect change as well as increasing positive emotions and resilience (Bos, 2019; Cooke & Soria-Donlan, 2019; Huss & Bos, 2019b).

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In social care and social work, health education creative methods, such as art and posters (Lordan, Sullivan, & Connor, 2003) and creative problem-based learning (PBL) (Riley & Matheson, 2010) are also used as learning tools. As demonstrated here, creative work makes a valued contribution, yet few studies specifically address the creative pedagogies within social care education. With social care workers expected by CORU to demonstrate skills in the use of creative and recreational interventions, it is time to focus on how best to teach this. Therefore, the following pedagogical proposal introduces theoretical frameworks, combined with the standards of proficiency, to produce a comprehensive applied learning experience for the benefit of service users.

Introducing Process-Orientated Novel Creative Pedagogy

The PONCP emerged from the author's experience of teaching and learning in creative approaches in social care. The objective of the proposed PONCP is to develop creative, reflective, exploratory and collaborative learning, through the provision of various resources, such as suitable space and art materials, within a non-judgmental community of adult inquirers (Hull, 2008). It aims to achieve this by promoting experimentation, freedom of choice, and autonomy and fostering a tolerance for ambiguity by reducing the fear of failure that can stifle creativity (Runco, Acar, & Cayirdag, 2017).

Creative pedagogy tends to be divided along the lines of adult and child learners (McGregor, 2012; Owen, 2011), with product and arts-based outcomes rather than the process itself or other outcomes. For example, arts-based education and production as tools for social justice and transformation (McGregor, 2012). The PONCP departs from mainstream arts pedagogy, as many social care students have no previous arts training and do not identify as 'artists' or producers of cultural artefacts of this nature. A new process-oriented approach was required and the PONCP includes the SCWRB (2017) Standards of Proficiency, creativity theories, therapeutic art and art therapy, informed by semiotics, edusemiotics, inquiry graphics (IG), multimodality and critical visual literacy. These theories are expanded on as the article progresses.

General Theories of Creativity and PONCP

Within psychology, creativity defies a precise and agreed definition (Piirto, 2004). It broadly attempts to make known the consistencies and variances of the extraordinary and ordinary human creativity and optimize it for individual, economic and societal good (Runco, 2004; Runco & Richards, 1998). Runco (2007) helpfully divided it into four domains of focus; the person, product, process or place. In the past, creativity was categorised by either big 'C' or little 'c' (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). The big 'C' describing creative advancements with high-level impact usually associated with fame and eminence and little 'c' describing mundane everyday creative activities (Carlile & Jordan, 2012a). This dichotomy, now challenged, suggests many high-level achievements arise from the individual engaging in ordinary every day creative processes, followed on with persistence and at times, luck (Runco, 2014a). Boden (2009, p.24) in agreement, defined creativity as part of normal human intelligence "to generate novel, and valuable, ideas". For the PONCP, the value of creativity lies in its acceptance as a normal human ability incorporated into our everyday lives, as opposed to it being a superior quality of experts (Reilly, 2008).

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Yet somehow within our culture, art and creativity have become entwined, perhaps with art education, leading to confusion (Glăveanu, 2014). Ordinary creativity as a normal thinking ability seems then to be downgraded and unacknowledged, while art is elevated by exceptional talent and skill linked to the product. This due in part by how creative artefacts are received and valued by others and how those, using their creativity, are deemed somehow exceptional, achieved apparently with little effort. This article argues for *creativity & art* as interrelated processes within the PONCP, dispensing with external judgments, to advance human growth and learning.

Creativity in adult and children's education (Craft, 2002, 2003; Cropley, 2001; Piirto, 2004) has received a lot of attention due to its' benefits, such as fostering potential (Oliver, Shah, McGoldrick, & Edwards, 2006), productivity (Runco, 2014b), problem-solving (Livingston, 2010), altering perspectives, critical thinking and synthesis (Jackson & Sinclair, 2006), personal growth, and innovation (Carlile & Jordan, 2012b). Developing creative attributes is now a common goal in many educational settings (Bertolin, 2018; Zemits, 2017).

Normalising Creativity: Rogers, Maslow and Vygotsky

Three major theorists, Rogers, Maslow and Vygotsky, inform the PONCP pedagogy. Carl Rogers' psychotherapeutic theory focuses on individualised internal locus of evaluation, rejection of conformity, openness to experience and playing with many combinations of elements (Piirto, 2004; Rogers, 1954). Maslow's theory of self-actualisation and the recognition of the broad scope of everyday creativity (Maslow, 2012a. 2012b), and lastly Vygotsky's developmental and social view of creativity, and 'signs as communication' in children's lives (Vygotsky, Cole, & Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986).

Rogers (1954) defines creativity as the continuous *process* of exercising human potential within an environment without the social values of either good or bad. This view rejects creative products as defined as acceptable to external groups. From the time we were small children, cultural expectations invite others to view and legitimatise our creative works. Whether it was images posted proudly on the fridge or displayed along school hallways, the external audience was always present. For many, as time passes, confidence diminishes, and creative productions are abandoned, declaring 'I'm no good at art!' (Jones, 2013). From this point of view, creative products usually serve or are valued by an external audience usually signposting productivity (Sternberg, Grigorenko, & Singer, 2004), and that is problematic.

The danger of the external audience then lies in its 'judgement' in terms of external value either monetary, by comparison, by elevated status, or recognition (Hennessey & Amabile, 1988). Based on this, the PONCP sets aside culturally imposed standards (Harrington, Block, & Block, 1987), as no external standards can exist when creative expression is profoundly personal and indeed, so often fleeting. The artwork is therefore never judged, and this stance, within outcomes-based educational culture, can feel counter-intuitive.

Novelty, as a defining feature of creativity, doesn't necessarily mean *new to others* but can be 'satisfactorily diverse', as adjudicated by the individual (Boden, 2009). Hence, the real novelty and value of personal creativity within social care is satisfying one's internal 'audience', by one's agency, using 'personal symbol systems' (Gardner, 2011, p.27). However, an absolute divorce from our embodied visuality, arising from our culture, is never entirely possible, as it forms the basis of our internal visual sign world (discussed further on).

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Creativity used to communicate one's inner desires, beliefs, thoughts and values, without external judgement but within a process of critical reflective meaning-making described here, seeks to make available continuous growth, possibilities and renewal. Therefore, the PONCP focuses less on the product, place or the person, and more on the process (Bleakley, 2004; Mooney, 1963; Taylor, 1988).

What is suggested here by the *creative process* is, by turning creativity inwards, letting go of the external audience, the real creative self can thrive. Within a safe non-judgmental environment, the internal affective state links to a vast array of signs for *meaning* and *exploration* (Jones, 2013). The creative work is enabled as a reflective tool. As per Sop 5.16 'to demonstrate skills in the use of creative and recreational interventions', the social care worker needs to be open to exploring, sometimes challenging, affective meaning through creative methods. This is achieved by creating a supportive and accepting environment for personal and creative risk-taking, without falling into the trap of judgement maker.

In agreement with Rogers (1954), a safe space is required to support creative development, both psychologically and physically, while still permitting empathic acceptance, flexibility and an unfolding of dynamics. Believing in and trusting the person's resourcefulness through playful experiences, leads to a *re-discovery* and *belief* in their creative capacities, which let's go of adult inhibitions and certainty. This freedom ignites deep reflective awareness through openness to experience, intentional or unintended personal selectivity (Rogers, 1954), self-actualising behaviour (Maslow, 2012b) and personal motivation, unlocking endless possibilities to engage and communicate creatively. Vygotsky (2004) viewed any human act, either "physical object, mental or emotional construct" that results in "something new" as creative (Vygotsky, 2004, p.7). This definition is broader than the product or outcome alone as it recognises the nucleus of creative thinking as a 'plasticity' emerging from within as 'habits or reproductions from the past' (ibid, p.7).

Creativity, according to Vygotsky (2004) is an adaptive ability, using the imagination to combine elements to advance humanity. Imagination is not merely a frivolous activity of the mind detached from reality, but an "essential function to life" (Vygotsky, 2004, p.13). Also, images formed in the imagination provide a core "language for emotion" (ibid., p.18) illuminating how the creative imagination includes affective elements.

We combine elements from our 'internal emotionality' within our 'culturally soaked' sensory existence, to create images in our minds. Recognising this, the pedagogy highlights the possibilities opened up through everyday creativity. Barriers include the letting go of certainty and external judgments that undermine confidence in being creative. In summary, viewing creativity as an ordinary human ability fosters hidden potential, growth and actualisation. The pedagogy, therefore, encourages playful and imaginative engagement with processes and critical reflection within a safe space so new ideas and practices can emerge.

Creative Therapeutic Continuum: Creativity, Therapeutic Art and Art Therapy

Rogers (1954), Maslow (2012b), and Vygotsky's (2004) theories, as discussed above are relevant to how creative therapeutic approaches are utilised within the PONCP and social care work. Given the broad scope of therapeutic practices, a therapeutic continuum can be surmised, upon which self-directed creativity moves *into* a clinical intervention.

At one end, people have a natural desire to satisfy their creative drive, their everyday creativity. People usually seek out leisure experiences such as story-telling, cooking, adult colouring

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books, knitting, beer making, decorating, tattoos, car decoration and gardening. These activities are perhaps influenced by cultural practice expressions, relaxation and self- reflection.

Towards the middle of the continuum, the creative work becomes more therapeutic, rooted in attempts to *divert* thoughts and emotions, resolve issues and address personal conflicts. Reasons include; de-stressing, cathartic effects, entering into a reflective state to enable self-dialogue and find meaning for personal change. Examples include private artwork, reflective journals, creating a music or dance piece expressing personal experiences, fashion statements, creative writing of songs or poetry and crafting of many sorts.

For both ordinary and therapeutic creativity, the social care worker can support the process by supporting creative imagination for affective expression (Vygotsky, 2004), recognising and valuing creativity as a normal adaptive process to enable self-actualisation (Manheim, 1998; Maslow, 2012b).

At the furthest end of the continuum, therapeutic creative work includes art therapy and other expressive modalities like dance, drama and music. Art therapy utilises art and the therapeutic relationship, usually within a clinical setting to express emotions and thoughts (Malchiodi, 2003; Nadeau, 2008) for personal insight (Malchiodi, 2003), self- awareness, understanding and growth (Malchiodi, 2003), healing (Furth, 1988; McNiff, 2004), and transformative change (Case & Dally, 2014). It employs theories from creativity (Brandoff, 2017), artistic practice (McNiff, 1998, 2004), psychology (Gray, 2019), counselling, psychotherapy and psychoanalysis (Rubin, 2016).

Depending on the theoretical orientation, emphasis is placed either on the healing dynamic of the artwork, on the therapeutic relationship or a combination of both. Clinical art therapy espouses non-judgmental therapeutic relationships that witness and engage with predominately visual modes of communication, arising from the unconscious for healing, insight and growth.

A therapeutic approach to creative work within social care, acknowledges the benefits of creative expression as discussed above, while cognisant of the boundaries guiding any creative intervention. Care needs to be taken to align 'appropriate intentions with actions' to take account of social, emotional, psychological or physical risks, without tipping into clinical treatment. Social care workers are well placed to identify creative interests, plan, organise, facilitate, support and provide safe creative activities as interventions and refer to qualified therapists should the need arise (which relates to SoP 1.2: Be able to identify the limits of their practice and know when to seek advice and additional expertise or refer to another professional).

In social care, the creative therapeutic process can then be for fun, building relationships, as a hobby, for personal development, or as an intervention for reflection, cathartic relief, insight and learning.

Semiotics. Learning as Signs

The PCNOP recognises that learners have unique perspectives constructed from experience, to form signs. Therefore, new learning is understood as a formation of a sign within their mind to represent a new thought, concept or practice. For us to learn, we must *make meaning* from our experiences, but how does this happen?

When we encounter something entirely new, we check it against what we know and see if we recognise elements and connect them to our established 'sign' system. Our encounters with

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reality connect us with our past, present and future via a vast web of signs, offering endless possibilities for learning.

The PONCP recognises reality as *constructed,* and the theories of semiotics and edusemiotics help us understand this process. Modern semiotics involves the study of linguistic and multimodal signs (Deely, 1982; Nöth, 1990), with a 'sign' being, according to Peirce's (1974, CP 2.228). definition, "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity". For example, the Twitter™ logo can be a sign for a bird, for a social media company and birds in the garden. In other words, it has a meaning depending on its context and associations. Meaning then is not 'fixed' and can be created and recreated in our minds and as part of a collective cultural comprehension. Semiosis is the process of constructing meaning from signs, and the discipline area of edusemiotics argues, that this is, in fact, learning (Olteanu & Campbell, 2018).

Edusemiotics, according to Deely et al. (2017) is a recent development in the area of educational theory. Education uses signs for meaning-making and recognises 'things' that function as possible signs (Stables & Semetsky, 2015).

Living and learning are then viewed, according to Stables et al. (2006) as an ongoing process of "semiotic engagement", as we are all born into sign-use, creation and interpretation (ibid 2006, p.271). From this perspective, we are in a constant state of learning, a continuous flow, channelled through our senses and mediated by our minds.

By viewing established 'signs' as habits of mind, encountering new things or concepts can be challenging (Short, 2007). New experiences like playful engagement with art materials or representing concepts visually, can offer opportunities to bring one's internal sign structure into consciousness for de-construction and re-construction resulting in new "general conduct" (Pesce, 2013, p.759) or habit. Therefore, being open to new experiences and reflecting upon them, offers opportunities for critical observation, questioning and analysis.

This is significant for social care practice, in that 'meaning' is individually constructed through the senses from the sign world; and everyone's perspective is unique. So, disrupting habits of mind with exposure to concepts as 'signs' (pertinent to social care) may open up and challenge narrow or rigid views.

Creative work taps into our multiple sign vocabularies for broader modes of expression, such as visualisation, touch, movement, and sound. Finally, knowing how people construct their reality from signs, offers opportunities for therapeutic engagement, multisensory communication, insight and learning. Signs as 'units of meaning' are embedded within our world, yet these new creative literacies, the visual in particular, require a new critical response often absent in education. We need to learn how to critically evaluate the signs (visual and through other senses) in our world and how we interpret them i.e. the meanings we make from them. How do we read them? Where do these meaning come from? What are the shared cultural references? How can they help us to understand the world more fully? To what extent do they trap us or enlighten us?

These questions form the basis of how the PONCP uses a creative approach to teach critical visual literacy using an analytical approach called Inquiry Graphics (IG) as discussed in the next section.

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Our Visual World and Multimodality

We live in a complex ever-changing world that relies on our ability to 'read' our world through various 'modes' such as text, sound, music, movement, and visual (Rowsell, 2013). Multi 'modes' or modalities are defined by Serafini (2013), as a "system of visual and verbal entities created with or across various cultures to represent and express meanings" (Serafini, 2013, pp.12). Every mode has "material, physiological, technological, and sociocultural aspects" (Serafini, 2013, p.14). For example, photographs as a mode can be virtual, or paper- based, and have sociocultural dimensions like intimate family photos or images of war. Each mode has affordances, limitations and does diverse semiotic or sign work directed towards an audience (Kress, 2005). The media or the 'medium' is the technology used to produce and distribute "representations-as-meanings" (ibid, p.7) or messages. For example, camera phones, books, the internet and newspapers.

The accessibility to various media technologies has opened up new visual teaching and pedagogical opportunities (Bezemer & Kress, 2015) as well as opportunities for creative practices (Kress, 2010) within social care. Multimodal teaching recognises and legitimises the use of different media "mode" systems (Serafini, 2013, p.12) for creative engagement

such as images, sounds, dance, action, animation, video, simulations, complex diagrams and infographics to name a few, to convey and integrate meaning. This shift towards multimodal incorporation, supported by access to technological advancements, now promotes students and indeed service users, as active meaning-makers, rather than passive receivers of knowledge. The shift of significance of the image over text (Kress, 2005), heralds a new openness to the vast possibilities these new multimodal 'literacies' present (Serafini, 2013).

This is particularly relevant when we think about how social care workers engage with service users to bring forth their natural creative communication or 'literacy', be it visual, music, film making, sport, dance or poetry for example. The multimodal literacy approach, therefore, values unique expression, through varied communicative modes, beyond reading and writing. This approach links to interventions, building relationships, facilitation and communication proficiencies (SCWRB, 2017).

Critical Visual Skills. Merging Visual Literacy with Critical Thinking

Access to the internet has brought the vast visual world into our lives, yet this openness brings the danger of the 'spectacle'. The 'spectacle', according to Debord (1983), is where *what we see* is packaged in sensationalist wrapping and can also be quickly equated with knowledge and truth. Various modes like TV, the internet, paper media, movies, and posters convey a plethora of messages, often absorbed without question. As Mitchell (1994) points out, the power of images intertwined with words has an extraordinary capacity to influence and carry ideologies such as subliminal advertising (Lazard, Bock, & Mackert, 2020) and political propaganda (Mirzoeff, 2002).

The critical skills required to deconstruct this visual barrage are often absent in higher education. Unfortunately, merely *occupying* a naturally rich visual habitat, according to Felten (2008), does not in itself develop analytic and critical skills, and therefore many of us remain critically unaware (Avgerinou, 2009). The broad notion of literacy tends to focus on reading and writing text (Kress, 2003), with visual literacy a concern of the arts, film studies and such like and not for mainstream education. While educators may critically analyse the written and

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spoken word, the visual, arguably the most influential, remains on the periphery. Visual literacies, therefore, need a *critical* learning focus (Felten, 2008).

Visual literacy can be said to be multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and multidimensional, influenced by an eclectic mix of contributors like aesthetics, philosophy, and art (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2016). It lacks a widely accepted definition, although most agree it can be learned (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2016).

According to Heinich et al. (1982, p.62), it is an "earned ability to interpret visual messages accurately and to create such messages. Interpretation and creation in visual literacy can be said to parallel reading and writing in print literacy ".

For this paper, aspects of this definition are unsatisfactory. It assumes interpretative passivity, focuses on 'accurate' transmission and the singularity of meaning or 'messages' and fails to take account of multiple interpretations that arise from different media, the context, historical practices and people's experiences and culture (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000). Multimodal literacy is a broader term, acknowledges images are complex, fluid and can have a diversity of meaning (Barton & James, 2017). Modern definitions also recognise how multimodal communication can challenge "authorship" in production and alterations in response (Brumberger, 2011; Kress, 2003, p.6). From another perspective, visual literacy is a social practice, constructed and carried among groups of people as what people *do* with images based on their values, feeling and social relationships (Barton et al., 2000).

Introducing Critical Visual Literacy in PONCP

Although various definitions exist for critical thinking (Moore, Carter, Hunt, & Sheikh, 2013), it is linked to reflectivity (Kolb, 1984) and held up as a core objective (Kurfiss, 1989) within higher education (Davies & Barnett, 2015) to improve professional practice through analytical judgment (Smith, 2011). The ability to critically reflect (SoP 1.22, 4.3) and evaluate one's practice (SoP 2.2, 5.13, 3.8), are core proficiencies within social care education (SCWRB, 2017) as this enables social care workers to navigate multifaceted professional and ethical dilemmas successfully.

How the visual world influences practices is not often considered, particularly for the vulnerable and marginalised. Critical visual literacy, as proposed here combines critical thinking and literacy, inspired by Freire (1970) assuming a more oppositional, resistant and questioning position of interpretation and intention within the political and social context (Newfield, 2011). It offers opportunities for emancipatory social care practice based on social justice (Mullkeen, 2013; Yoon & Sharif, 2015), by addressing how images can produce and reproduce stereotypes, disempower, and dehumanise (Braye, 1995; Thompson, 2011). Unless we know *how* to slow down our meaning-making, identify *what* the units of meaning or what the signs are telling us and why, we uncritically accept and are influenced by our visual world (Lacković, 2020a.)

Education rarely draws students' attention to how knowledge is constructed from our visual world. As educators, certainty is found in the written text, although in truth, all texts are interpreted according to their reader's unique perspective. Images are no different, although how to identify the specific elements or signs leading to meaning is rarely taught.

According to Avgerinou et al. (2016), critically reading images is a skill that can be taught. Combined with creative approaches, critically reading images can expand reasoning by challenging dogmatic beliefs such as closedmindedness, myopic and hypocrisy arising from

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egocentric (self), and sociocentric (group) tendencies (Berliner, 2011). As the pedagogical tools to 'unpack' these are often absent in the classroom, the PONCP proposes the Inquiry Graphics (IG) method based on semiotics to address this gap (Lacković, 2010).

Inquiry Graphics Visual Analysis Tool

The Inquiry Graphics (IG) tool is introduced for teaching and learning critical visual literacy within the PONCP. The IG, uses an interpretative procedure to de-code images, to cultivate creative engagement, awareness of the sign world, and develop critical analysis abilities (Arney, 2012; Lacković, 2018b, 2020b). An in-depth explanation of how Peirce's semiotic theory informs the IG is beyond the scope of this article (see Lacković, 2020b;) however the IG will be explored using practical examples within the classroom.

The IG aims to decode visuals for 'sign' meanings leading to logical questioning and conclusions by inferences based on feelings, associations, assumptions and presumptions concerning self, culture and society. The questioning process reveals the semiotic elements at work for critical insight.

The images become visual metaphors (Elliot, Reid, & Baumfield, 2017), revealing cultural assumptions that often lie beneath awareness arising from dominant ideologies. Being critically aware involves reflecting on one's practices and close observation of others and the visual environment. By developing a sensitivity to one's intrapersonal, interpersonal, environmental and visual culture based on signs one's "associative or attentional horizon" (Runco, 2007, p.5) is broadened. This broadening results in noticing details perhaps missed, developing proficiency skills in awareness, problem-solving and assessment (SCWRB, 2017). These proficiencies are developed through critical visual literacy using either student-produced photographs or internet sourced visual images.

The following outlines three examples of how visual images can be 'unpacked' for critical learning using the IG framework in the classroom.

In the first example, learners either take a photograph on their phone or select a photograph from the internet guided by a conceptual theme such as 'power' or 'inequality'.

The image of the fish structure (Fig:1 below) illustrates the process. Although learners would have chosen or taken a photograph with a particular meaning in mind, they are asked to suspend this, to enter a state of detached observation.

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Figure 1: Fish Sculpture in Athlone Institute of Technology [author's photograph]

The first stage of analysis asks learners to carefully list and number everything they see in the photograph, down to the tiniest details: for example, two red trees, one metal blue and black striped fish, one window, one building, one solar panel, one plinth with plaque, and so on.

This naming process is a vital step, as it brings all the elements or 'signs' into consciousness. The next stage asks learners to create a summary title, based on the description for the entire image, again withholding the urge to create meaning, such as 'blue and black striped fish sculpture on a plinth surrounded by trees and shrubs'. The next stage focuses on the contextual meaning of elements asking what meanings and presumptions can be attributed to the image based on the given description.

Learners, at this stage, assign meaning to the elements identified and ask how the sign elements relate to one another and what 'work' each are doing to assist with meaning. At this stage the learner can introduce the reason they choose or photographed the scene, linking to the sign elements.

The final stage focuses on reflecting upon the theme, leading to, critical insight and feeling responses, prompting reflective discussion upon origins of assumptions and conclusions.

From the image example, the fish sculpture represented the salmon of knowledge from Irish mythology, with discussion leading to how education can be a source of power.

In the second example, images are chosen by the educator to prompt critical reflective discussion related to the subject matter such as arts and disabilities, arts activism and participation.

Images are distributed to small groups and the IG procedure is followed, with small and large group feedback and discussion based on the analysis. Conversation leads to insights based on the variation of perspectives from what the learner already knows, therefore, revealing gaps. In the third example, photographs are sourced from recent newspapers, magazines, postcards and such like, and placed on a table. Learners choose two images; one they like and the other they don't.

The IG process is used in small groups, and discussion can bring students attention to how signs within images can be emotive, have cultural and political intentions, have multiple meanings, and are imaginative constructs based on experiences. Engaging with photographs

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using a semiotic framework in the classroom opens up many possibilities for critical learning by making known the signs that influence us.

Conclusion

In summary, the proposed process-oriented novel creative pedagogy outlined above attempts to address the knowledge gap by introducing theories to support a coherent approach in the development of proficiencies including creative intervention skills. The article draws attention to the value of creative work in social care, now recognised by CORU, yet points to a lack of focus on creative pedagogy until now. The proposed PONCP sets out how creative, semiotic and multimodal theories can be used to encourage personal risk-raking to counter external judgement, and open up reflective, relational and therapeutic practice opportunities through many communicative modes. Also, teaching critical visual literacy skills, using the IG framework, can assist the teaching of concepts and challenge the cycle of alienation, discrimination, and stereotypes, held together by the status quo. In conclusion, this article hopes to advance social care creative work by encouraging future research and elaboration and begin a discussion on how best to teach creative work for the betterment of those who avail of the services.

About the Author

Denise Mac Giolla Ri teaches creative approaches on the social care programmes in AIT since 2002. Prior to this, she worked as an art therapist, play therapy supervisor and project coordinator in a school completion programme, as well as in areas such as drug misuse, psychiatry, disability, lone parents, family support and foster care. Her PhD research is underway in the area of visual representations of threshold concepts using a semiotic methodology in social care education.

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