

Empowered ideas: Human rights issues through art as text

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Introduction

Jenny Holzer, United States, born 1950
Abuse of Power Comes as No Surprise, ca. 1984
Tee-shirt with screen printing



- Twenty-first-century children live in a world awash with visual stimulation. Touching screens and interactive boards are common aspects of young people lives. In the public space they are dressed with clothes, shoes and hats with words and quotes.

What do these words indicate? How the meaning is presented?



What would happen if I change the names ?
How does the change of the words influence
the meaning?



Changing the meaning:

- placing two contrasted elements or ideas together

- find parallels between seemingly unlike ideas



known – unknown
familiar – unfamiliar
famous – anonymous



Images + Text

- Images and text are used in many ways and suggest alternative meanings of communication.
- In this workshop we will introduce some of these strategies or/and practices (juxtaposition, mirroring) used in visual arts (including the media) as an alternative way for meaning making and communication to tackle issues related to human rights .



General group work (1)

- ▶ The participants are invited to imagine that they are on a boat containing the 30 rights of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

- ▶ The boat starts sinking and in order to keep it afloat they had to throw out the rights one by one, until they are **five rights left in the boat.**



General group work (2)

Group 1:

▶ Each participant is invited to read the UDHR and throw out those human rights by deleting them. The participants are given one marker (they can choose the colour). During the process the participants are invited to circle or underline by using a different colour the keywords of the five rights they have chosen.

Group 2

▶ Each participant is invited to make a finger print on only five rights



Making meaning

- ▶ Semiotics explore how people signify surrounded symbols, images and various signs in the broader visual culture. A sign can be a word, a sound, or a visual image. Signs can mean anything, and they can also mean different things to different people. Conventional ways of making meaning exist when **codes** create meaning systems
- ▶ What kinds of codes did you use in selecting the 5 human rights? Did you select the same rights as others?
- ▶ How can you justify your selection?



Group 1-2: Refeective mirrors

▶ Reasoning: The mirror is an item which we use everyday. What are you thinking about the mirror as a reflective surface, and hence as a reflection of yourself? A mirror is a device which presents everything including yourself and others, a gallant apparatus which may create multiple perspectives.

▶ Participants are invited **to use mirrors in conjunction with words –phrases** selected from narratives of people in different parts of the world whose rights have been violated.



Group 3-4: Objects with meanings

- ▶ What do you think about these objects? A doll with a broken leg, a flag, a vase, banknotes, an apple, iron nails...
- ▶ How we can we use them to promote messages about the **violation of human rights?**
- ▶ **Participants will be invited to get involved in an artistic process in order to communicate their messages visually.**



Final Reflection (joined groups)

- ▶ What is the first thing you remember from this workshop?
- ▶ By recalling on making –producing images and text what kind of metaphor or/and representation can you think for portraying human rights violation?
- ▶ Do you think that is possible to deal with issues of human rights by using similar learning processes with children?



Create-Recreate

- **Deconstruction and Reconstruction:** Though deconstruction as introduced by Jacques Derrida (Howells, 1999) has a more specific meaning when applied to language theory, in the arts may function through representation and metaphorical thinking (Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Starko 2005) and allow individuals to borrow concepts, recycling images, find parallels between seemingly unlike ideas and to take ideas from one context and represent the idea effectively in a new context.
- As a result the process of production includes a **composition** and **transformation**, a **subversion** and a **reframe** of existing ideas which are occurred in specific contexts and have specific functions.



Principles and strategies

Construct and Reconstruct = Create- Recreate

- ▶ **Re contextualization:** placing something (an image, object, symbol or text) in different circumstances illuminate new meanings.
- ▶ **Juxtaposition:** Placing or bringing together radically different elements/ideas from various realms and facts can create strong emotions or conflicts (old and new, familiar and unfamiliar, past and present, bad and good, local and global).



References

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. Harper Collins, New York.

Howells, Ch. (1999). *Derrida : deconstruction from phenomenology to ethics*. Laviosier.

Savva, A. , Vergest, H & Pembecioğlu, N. (in press). *Arts and Media: Citizenship and Education in Society*. CiCe. <http://www.cicea.eu/>

Starko, A. (2005). *Creativity in the Classroom: Schools of Curious Delight*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New Jersey.

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*“All human beings are born free
and equal in dignity and rights”*

Keywords: Narratives, interpretations, messages, text, image, mirroring, juxtaposition

Issues addressed: Human rights, awareness, metaphor

Materials:

General activity

Markers, prints of human rights declaration papers, simple printing materials

Group activities

Reflective Mirrors: 40 mirrors, 20 markers, foam board or frames

Objects with meanings: toys, yarn, jar, newspapers, chain, iron nails, flags, banknotes and everyday objects, labels or markers

Objectives:

- use codes to make their own interpretations about human rights
- recognize text as an art form and the way it functions through various practices (position, mirroring and juxtaposition)
- produce their own texts based on given materials and sources (UDHR)
- communicate messages to impact and make other people aware of the violation of human rights through artistic processes and products

✚ **Activities:**

✚ **Introduction (5 min):**

The purpose of the workshop

✚ **1st activity - General activities (15min):** The participants are divided in two groups.
The session begins with a story:

- i. The participants are invited to imagine that they are on a boat containing the 30 rights of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The boat starts sinking and in order to keep it afloat they had to throw out the rights one by one, until they are five rights left in the boat.

Group 1

Each participant is invited to read the UDHR and throw out those human rights by deleting them. The participants are given one marker (they can choose the colour. During the process the participants are invited to circle or underline by using a different colour the keywords of the five rights they have chosen).

Group 2

Each participant is invited to make a finger print on only five rights

ii. **Reflections:**

-If you look back at those documents what can you suggest? Did you use any codes in order to make your priorities evident (e. g. colours, prints)?


-Why did you choose those five rights?

-What kind of codes did you use to create the meaning of the text? Did you use personal codes to create meanings (e. g. black colour = less important, or excluded, black/red finger print= selected)?

-Do you notice any differences? (e.g. different priorities).

-We looked at the same text , used similar codes but we interpreted the text in different ways (reference to economic -social -cultural, civic and political rights).

-Do you feel that there is something that needs to be included (added) in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Is there any article in the declaration that you would like to add some kind of extra interpretation?

 **Group activities (17 participants)30 min: Participants will be organized**

i. **Group 1 and 2: Reflective mirrors**

-**Sources/Materials:** narratives with different stories of people in different parts of the world, mirrors, markers, frames.

-**Keywords:** reflection, mirroring, perspective, narratives

-**Reasoning:** The mirror is an item which we use everyday. What are you thinking about the mirror as a reflective surface, and hence as a reflection of yourself? A mirror is a device which presents everything including yourself and others, a gallant apparatus which may create multiple perspectives. Participants are invited to use mirrors and markers in conjunction with words –phrases selected from narratives of people in different parts of the world whose rights have been violated.

Activities:

1. The facilitator provides the participants with printed phrases placed on the mirrors (personal pronouns can be used) and asks:

-What can you see now? They are invited to see what is reflected on the mirror.

-The facilitator invites participants to read the stories and to use the narratives (words, phrases) that they find as appropriate in order to copy them on the mirrors by using the markers. What can the words indicate? Invite participants to use a second mirror and other signs as well (e.g. a scribble, a symbol, drawing part of their face).

-The participants could suggest ways that they can install their mirrors in order to challenge other participants' values

ii. **3rd activity - Group 2 and 3 and 4: Objects with meanings(20 participants)**

-**Keywords:** installation, visual messages, juxtaposition, violation of human rights

-**Description:** What do you think about these objects? A doll with a broken leg, a flag, a vase, money, an apple, iron nails... How we can we use them to promote messages about the violation of human rights? Participants will be invited to get involved in an artistic process in order to communicate their messages visually.

1. Remind participants about the rights that they have selected during the first session of the workshop.

2. Choose an object. What does the object remind you of? What would happen if we combine two different objects? For instance pour a huge amount of rice in a vase until it is overflowed and left another one empty. What does this suggest? Greed, inequality (first world/third world), the problem of obesity, starvation. Otherwise, use two different items (e. g. a pistol and banknotes)

3. Participants are invited to play with objects and produce ideas. Each participant place his/her idea inside the jar (modifications may occur)

Optional: Participants are provided with markers. They can use it to label their artwork.

4. Participants are invited to install their work in the central room

Final reflections(10 min) (Groups 1-6

1. **Reflecting mirrors:** Participants present their thinking process by asking the rest of the people to respond to their work.

Objects with Meanings: Three examples are presented through projection

2. -What is the first thing you remember from this workshop?

-By recalling the procedure of making –producing images and text what kind of metaphor did you use or you would like to use for depicting human rights violation?

-Do you think that is possible to use similar processes in teaching about human rights issues to children?

Sources

Voice our concern: Voice Our Concern is a human rights education project enabling senior cycle students, non-formal education centers and the wider community to learn about and discuss human rights in a creative, participatory and empowering way.

<http://www.amnesty.ie/voice-our-concern>

Installation 188 was presented to the United Nations in 200 while the World Mandala project was being created, The soils have been gathered, labelled, numbered 1 through 188

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and deposited in sealed and marked containers, in order to remind all viewers of the dynamism and fragility of the concept of national identification (motherland). The sample of earth are joined together in a symbolic structure indicating twin universal drives toward what Carl Jung would call individuation through separation and unification with other,

<http://www.tetkowski.com/Critical%20Writings/2004.CeramophileXV.IMG.pdf>

<http://ceramicsmuseum.alfred.edu/exhibitions/tetkowski/>

References

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