



Presented by: Danielle Byatte – Preston College, UK

Reimagining Post-16 pedagogy through Visual Literacy

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ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

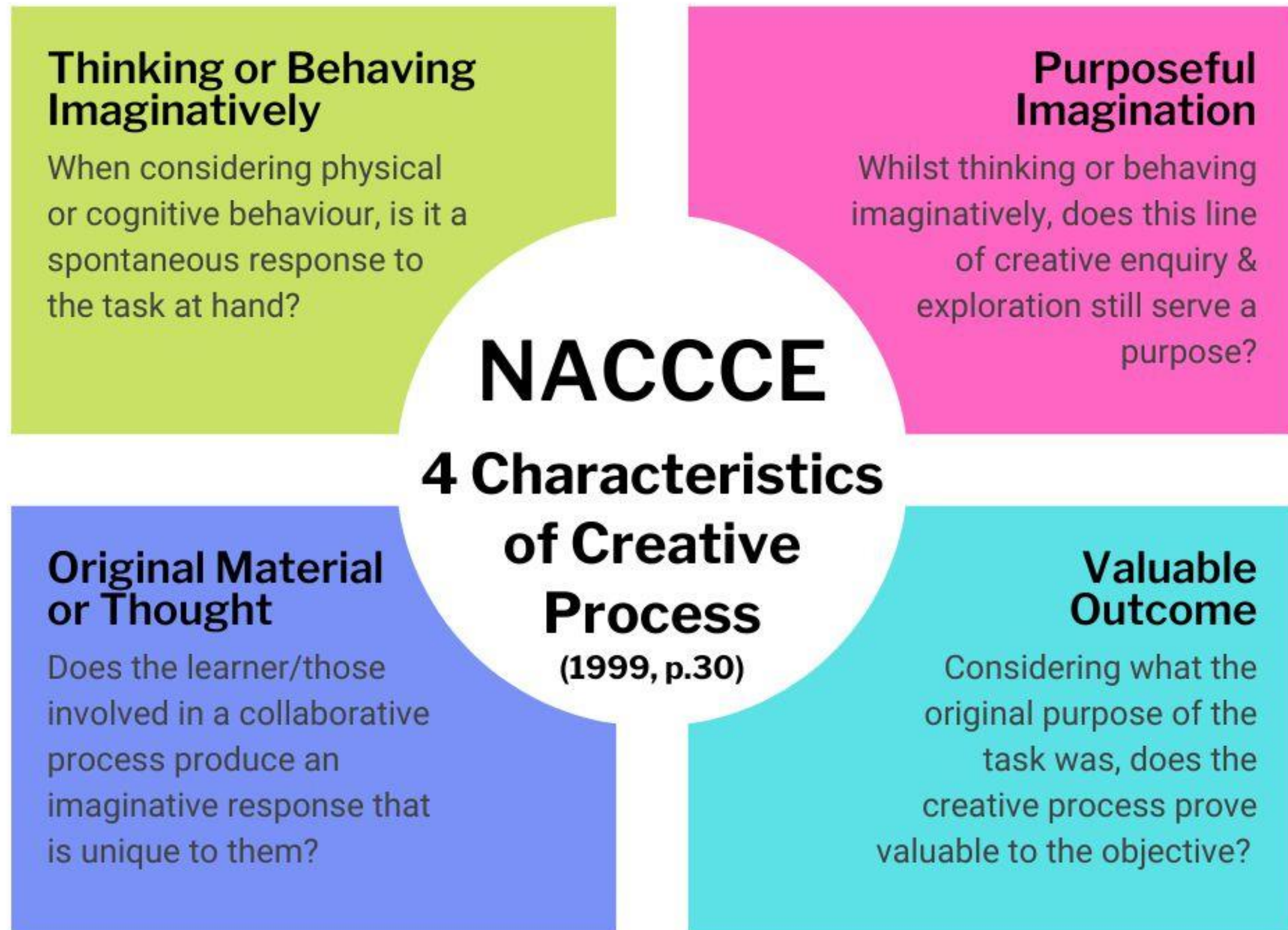
Danielle Byatte

- Learning Resources Officer, previous experience as an A-Level Photography Teacher
- Preston College, Lancashire, UK
- MA Education (Edge Hill University)
 - Research focus: Visual Literacy & Social Justice
- BA (Hons) Photography (Coventry University)
 - Research focus: Socially-engaged Photography & Participatory Practice

- With approximately 83% of information now disseminated visually (Zhu & Lim, 2024), the need for learners to become visually literate “critical consumers” (Moje 2015, in Guo et al. 2024) is arguably of utmost importance.
- As technological advances are being incorporated not just in the mass media and popular culture, but also in the workplace, it is important to consider how we as educators are preparing learners in the final phase of compulsory education (Riley 2024).
- This research plans to challenge notions of creativity and visual practices within the classroom being limited to arts-based curricula and aims to recognise ways in which visual pedagogy can be embedded across a range of subject specialisms.



CONTEXT



FRAMEWORKS

- Questioned whether developmental discourses have “stunted our perspectives” (Sakr 2022, p.436) surrounding interpretations of artwork created by children & young people, reducing the concept or content of their visuals to a time period within their own development, rather than a celebration of their own sense-making practices.
- Post-developmentalism aims to try and move away from the “common-sense” and “sense-making” polarities when creating visuals (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), and instead encourages questions of “what does this image intend to do for us?” rather than “what does this image intend to show us?” when engaging with visuals (Sakr & Osgood 2020).
- NACCCE Guidelines [see left] raises the question as to whether the notion of creativity is to solely benefit the learner and their personal and/or educational development, or whether creative approaches can only serve as a viable process in education if they have a quantifiable purpose.

EXISTING LITERATURE

Creativity & Play

Beauchamp (2006; 2012) expressed that dominating technology is reducing opportunities of Play.

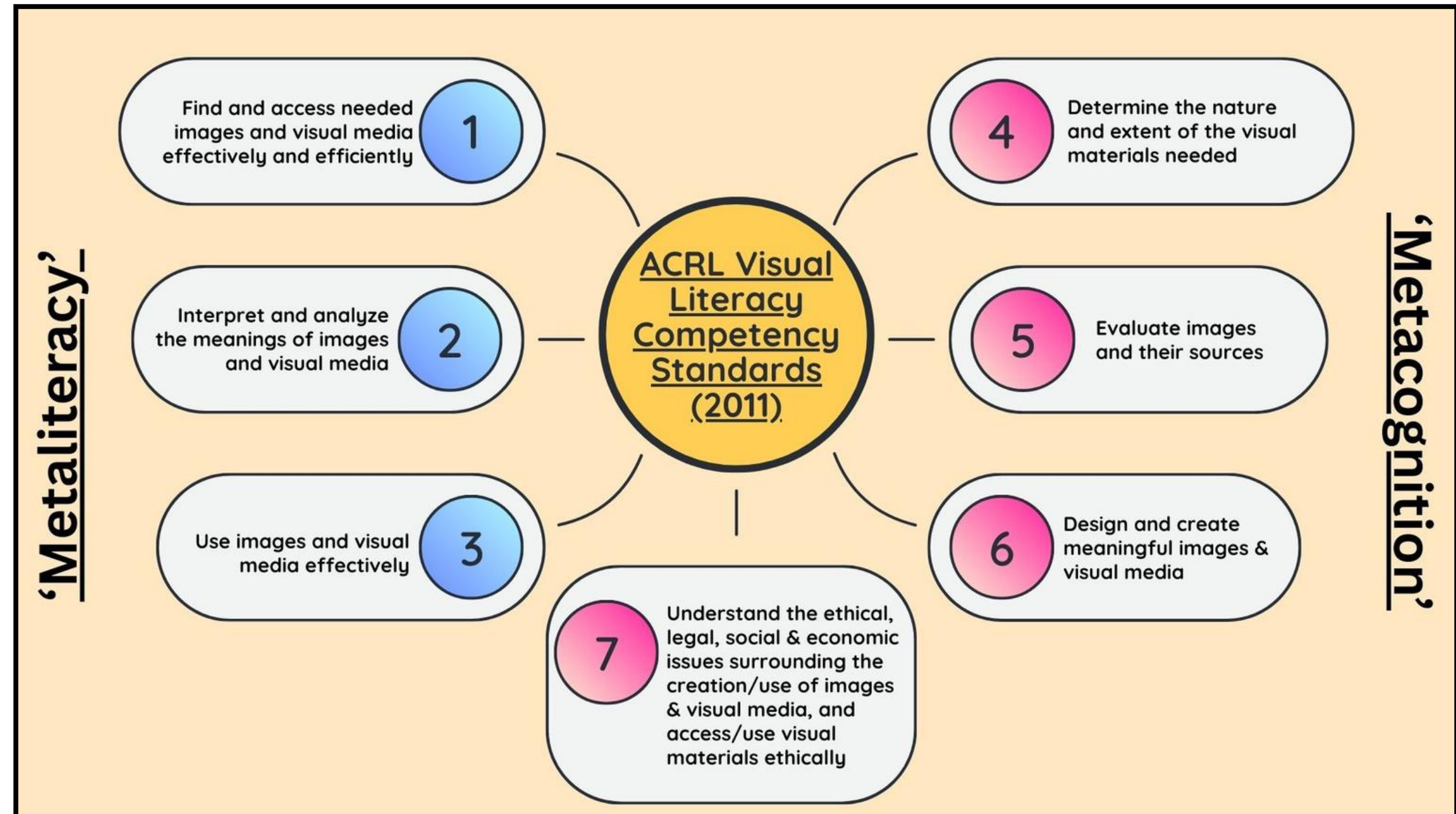
Cook (2016) states media is a “polluting” source (ibid,p.3) on the minds and behaviours of learners.

Educator Confidence

Low-value placed on visual materials by teachers (Sakr & Osgood, 2020) is in danger of being mirrored by learners and parents alike. Teachers may need further training on the power behind ongoing use of high-quality, effective visuals in relation to learning (Eilam, 2012).

Technology

Important to consider how an awareness of the need for visual literacy skills can help to support digital literacy in tandem for the “App Generation” (Gardner & Davis, 2013). This should be applied with criticality and meaning (ACRL, 2011).



Visual created by the researcher

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH GAP

Research question defines a clear focus on the Post-16 age bracket, which appears to be represented disproportionately throughout existing academic literature in relation to creative pedagogies.

Namely, this gap falls between the academic study of Early-Years 'Play', as well as creative pedagogical approaches considered in Primary & early Secondary Education or the evaluation of Visual Literacy skills within Higher Education environments.

This study identifies curriculum areas where Visual Literacy skills can be embedded through sustainable and meaningful approaches.

KEY MOMENTS SURROUNDING WORLD WAR II

A horizontal timeline from 1900 to 1950, with major events marked by colored boxes and vertical lines. The timeline is divided into five-year intervals. The events are as follows:

Year	Event
1905	Treaty of Portsmouth
1910	Japan annexes Korea
1917	Russian Civil War
1922	Mussolini becomes Prime Minister of Italy
1925	Nazi Party Founded
1930	London Naval Treaty signed
1934	Hitler takes command of German Armed Forces
1939	WWII Begins
1945	VE Day (end of WWII)

Session 1

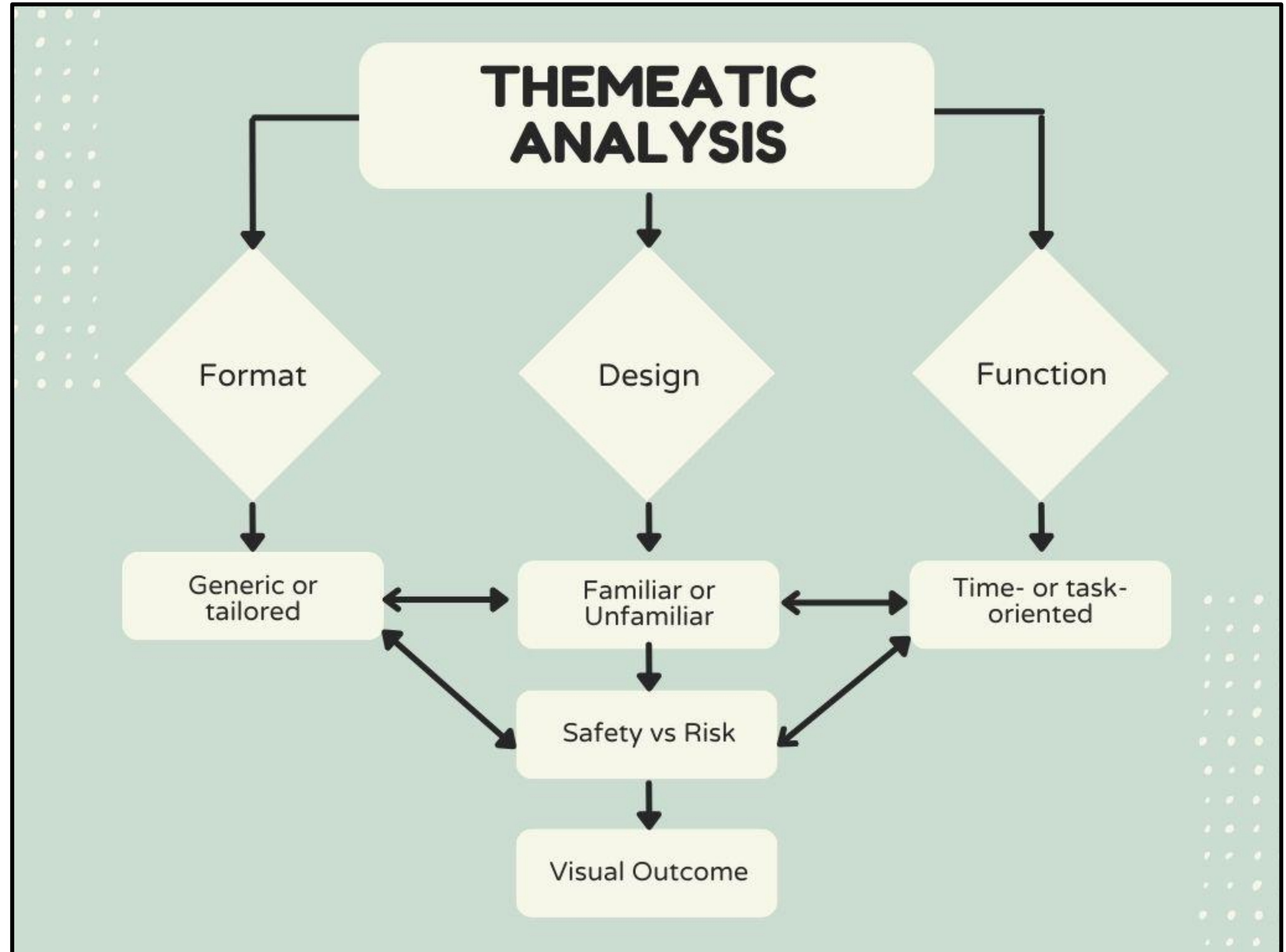
Session 2

Session 3

Exemplar visual resources created by the researcher

EMERGENT THEMES:

- FORM
- DESIGN
- FUNCTION





DATE:

GYM PROGRESS

DEADLIFT

REPS

KG

BARBELL SQUAT

REPS

KG

BARBELL ROW

REPS

KG

BENCH PRESS

REPS

KG

DUMBBELL PRESS

REPS

KG

LAT PULLDOWN

REPS

KG

OUTCOMES – FORMAT

Pettersson (1988) indicates that a two-dimensional formatted visual is passive. From the perspective of the participants, their justification for the formats behind their Visual Outcomes speak to develop Pettersson's view further; they evolve a passive, two-dimensional resource into an active piece of learning material, with the action decided upon by the learner.

"I chose to design this because it's more practical... when it comes to revising, it's easier to think about the pictures like it appears in the film rather than trying to picture the words on the page..."

"Me and my Mum are really into the gym at the minute... so I made this chart to help us both stay on track and get a bit competitive. I used to pay for this app that tracked it all [their fitness progress], but I can put this up [the poster] in the kitchen so we can both see it."

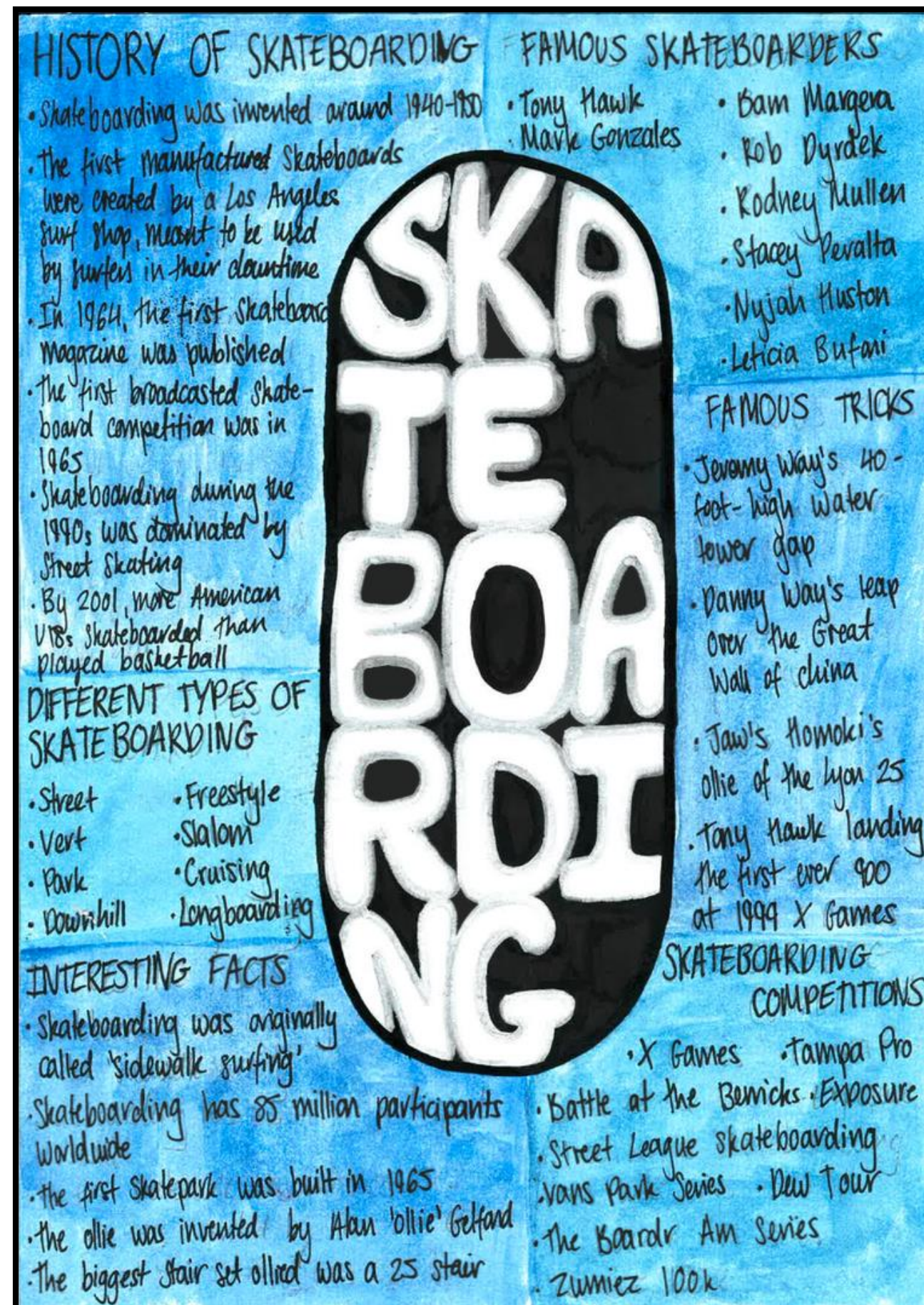
Visual Outcomes created by research participants

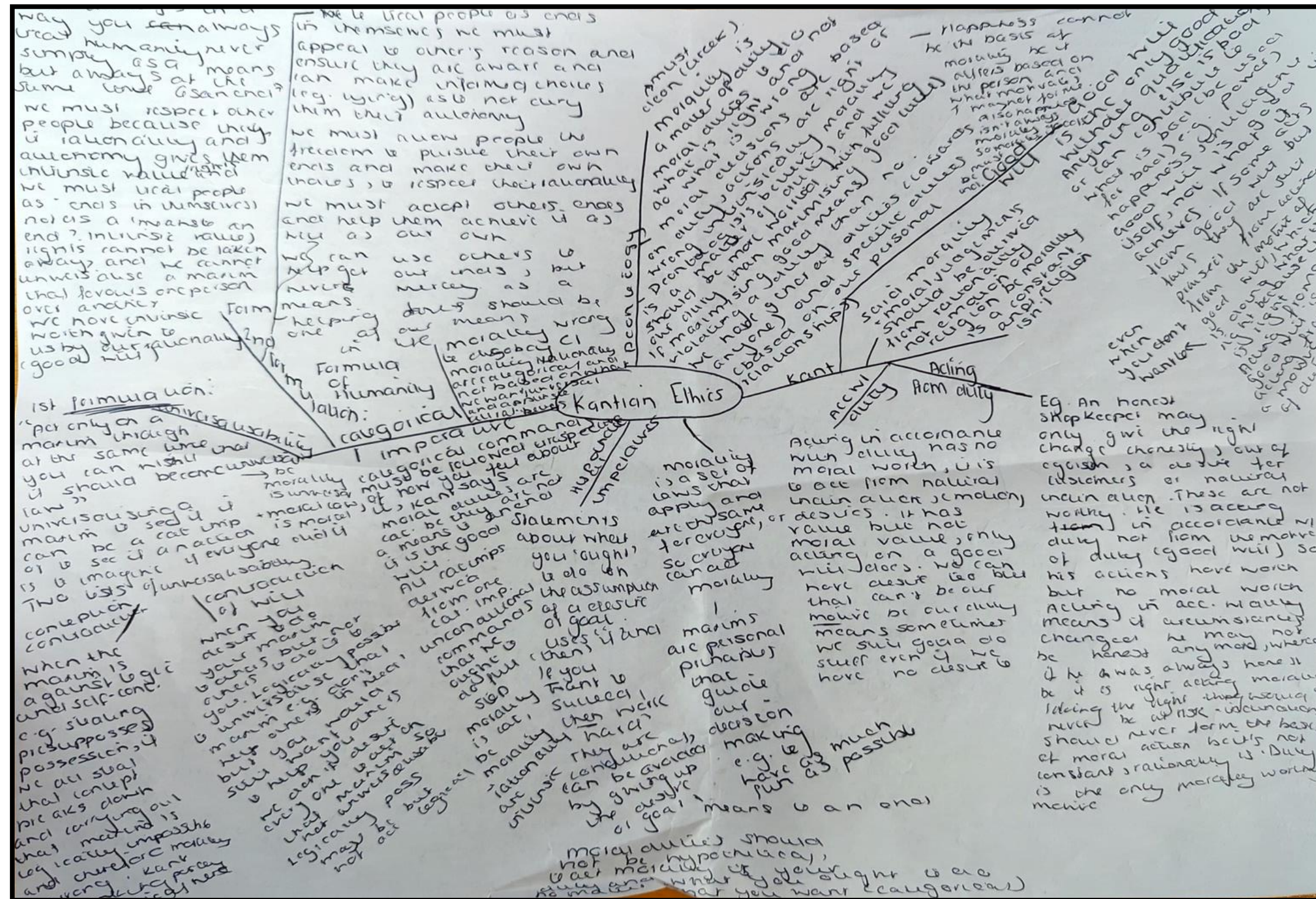
OUTCOME – DESIGN

The Design Council (2025) state that “Design is what happens when people use creativity to solve problems.”. As creativity was defined earlier within this paper as an imaginative, investigative tool that celebrates the individuality of the learner, it should be recognised that each participant’s design consideration in relation to layout, colour palettes, graphics and fonts were perhaps influenced by their chosen Visual Resource format.

“I don’t like loads of sheets of information, but I wanted to make something that people would actually want to stop and look at. History is not everybody’s thing, and neither is skateboarding, but I used a simple design to avoid it being distracting or overwhelming. You’re meant to like, move around it, like you would do with a pie chart or something.”

The participant’s synthesis of their idea showcases how design considerations can reflect the needs of a particular audience, theme/topic, and prior learning.





Visual Outcome created by research participant

OUTCOME - FUNCTION

A traditional mind-map which, seemingly removed from the concept of 'creative' at first glance, spoke to a similar interactive nature to that of other participant's Visual Outcomes. Consequently, the subthemes of 'Time- or Task-oriented' and 'Safety vs Risk' were shaped through the participant's justification:

"My mind map has all the same information on it as the bunch of different booklets that our teacher gives us, but it's all in one place instead. It looks really boring at the moment because it's just words, but because I've still got a month before my exam, I'll go back to it and highlight it when I re-read it. That's why I don't colour-code it initially."

They "used mind maps in school" for their GCSE revision, but did not elaborate as to whether they found this genuinely useful to further studies, or if this was simply a sense of safety in familiarity when it comes to the format of the resource. As such, this generated the 'Safety Vs Risk' subtheme.

CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The findings address the contemporary learner's lived experience of visual and technological change, revealing tensions between personal creative expression and perceived educational demands prior to entering the workplace (Robinson 2006).

This research calls for a balance between engaging pedagogical approaches and the need to prepare learners for employment, ultimately reframing what it means to be 'creative' in their educational context and personal development.

By embedding engaging & effective visual resources within classrooms, educators allow the process of learning to have an intuitive and flexible relationship with the modern learner, rather than relying on pre-existing, outdated resources that do not meet their needs.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Macblain, Dunn & Luke (2017) coin the term “digital child” (ibid. p168), referring to children surrounded by technology that seeks to educate, entertain, inform and communicate.

I would look to encourage an evolution to the term “digital learner” to include those in Post-16, Adult Education or Higher Education, or entering the workplace.

Need to “turn towards discomfort” (Sakr 2022, p. 435) in relation to visual practices, which may prove challenging for educators whose creative pedagogy may be incongruous with more formal perspectives of policy or workplaces.

FUTURE RESEARCH DEVELOPMENTS

Paper in progress (PRISM Journal Special Issue):

WORKING TITLE: *Navigating the Safety-Risk Continuum: Fostering Learner Agency Through Visual Literacy in Digital Culture*

Future research plans:

- Visual Literacy as Social Semiotics (with focus on Post-16 & Adult Learners)
- Visual Literacy as a tool to develop learner confidence (with focus on Post-16 & Adult Learners)
- Developing Visually-Literate Teachers: Collaborative study with Trainee Teachers in the UK

How can Visual Literacy be used to develop more inclusive and effective pedagogical practices for Post-16 learners?

ABSTRACT

With approximately 83% of information now disseminated visually (Zhu & Lim 2024), the need for learners to become visually literate "critical consumers" (Moje 2015, in Guo et al. 2024) is of utmost importance. However, existing literature on Visual Literacy has often overlooked its potential as a skillset within Further Education. This study identifies curriculum areas where Visual Literacy skills can be embedded through sustainable and meaningful approaches. A qualitative methodology was employed, involving six 16–18-year-old participants from a visual-arts A-Level course in three focus group discussions. During these sessions, participants evaluated existing visual resources before creating and sharing their own in response, explaining the creative and academic reasoning behind their design. The findings address the contemporary learner's lived experience of visual and technological change, revealing tensions between personal creative expression and perceived workplace or educational demands (Robinson 2006). This research calls for a balance between engaging pedagogical approaches and the need to prepare learners for the workplace, ultimately reframing what it means to be 'creative' in their educational context.

The secondary poster (accessed via the QR Code below) presents each participant's Visual Resources, alongside written commentary on the research findings using language that is accessible & appropriate to a Post-16 audience - similar to that of the participant's themselves. The aim of this format is to appeal & engage both academic & younger audiences, and therefore seeks to address the importance & awareness of Visual Literacy as a skillset.



OBSERVATIONS

Each of the 6 participants had an existing skillset with analysing & critiquing visuals as part of their curriculum for A-Level Photography. However, all participants communicated a lack of confidence in creating a range of visuals in a cross-curricular context, i.e. outside of this subject area. Seemingly, their visual creation skills, noted by Brumberger (2011), were not working in tandem with their ability to "interpret and analyse the meanings of images and visual media" (ACRL 2011). As such, this clash appeared to cause feelings of uncertainty and discouragement in the participants' experience of exam revision or mid-topic assessments.

Participants believed that a large proportion of teachers have embraced technologies within the classroom, particularly since the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, it was noted that teachers now rely heavily on resources such as PowerPoint slides, without any further variation in multimedia/visuals to help develop the Visual Literacy skillset of learners at the same rate as their subject knowledge. Indeed, participants noted that the further they progressed within their education, the more resources appeared to be formalised and standardised, rather than championing creativity and individualism. As stated by Robinson (2006):

"Our education systems don't enable students to develop their natural creative powers. Instead, they promote uniformity and standardisation...producing a workforce that's conditioned to prioritise conformity over creativity"

QR CODE

For a closer look at the research participant's Visual Outcomes, please scan the QR Code below:



RESEARCH AIMS & QUESTIONS

The aim of the study was to evaluate the ways in which Post-16 learners currently engage with their studies through the means of existing visual resources, along with how such resources could be utilised in spaces/subjects where there may currently be limited visual resources.

- What visual resources do students engage with routinely across their Post-16 curriculum?
- How do students understand the concept of visual literacy? What types of resources currently help them to make sense of complex information within the curriculum?
- How do such resources help to support learning/the process of learning in Post 16 study?
- How can Post-16 educators be supported to help produce these resources for the benefit of their students' achievement?

THEORETICAL LENS

The theoretical lens for this research project is grounded in both Constructivist and Post-Developmentalist approaches to pedagogy. Seminal Constructivist theorist Vygotsky discusses the concept that creative insight or intent does not exist solely within artistically gifted learners. Instead, it is his belief that the ability to engage in creative processes is available to anyone with the skillset to access and harness the power of creativity (Vygotsky 2004). This is a core frame of which to perceive the benefits of developing visual literacy skills within learners of all ages – Vygotsky does not limit his thoughts to a particular age group in this thinking, nor a particular subject area or a curriculum phase. Post-developmentalism aims to try and move away from the "common-sense" and "sense-making" polarities when creating visuals (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), and instead encourages questions of "what does this image intend to do for us?" rather than "what does this image intend to show us?" engaging with visuals (Sakr & Osgood 2020).

Key themes from the review of existing literature detail how the notion of creativity in relation to visuals has evolved over the course of contemporary educational development. Namely, concepts of 'Playful Pedagogy', technology & communication, and community & culture are explored at length to contextualise the demand for Visual Literacy skills.

METHODOLOGY

- 3x Focus-group sessions to gather discussion-led qualitative data from participants surround the topic of Visual Literacy

The first session discussed the concept of Visual Literacy and ascertained participant's prior knowledge/experience. The aim of this was to help not only shape the direction of the next research stage, but also to help analyse and contextualise the results during the data analysis phase (Zhu & Lim 2024). The second session provided the opportunity for learners to create a Visual Resource of their own choosing – both in terms of format and topic – in order to showcase their preferred visual methods of learning. These methods of co-creation were discussed by Lupton (2024); creative methods helped to unlock new meaning from learning that may not have been accessed via traditional resources, therefore inspiring new ideas and ways of engaging. In the final session, learners provided the academic and creative justification behind their visual resource, contextualised with their desire for a broader scope of creative pedagogical approaches within their education, as well as their desire to be prepared for the workforce on completion of their studies.

All participants were recruited on a voluntary basis, with parent/guardian consent acquired via consent forms. Participants provided a secondary signature of consent after being provided with Participant Information Sheets, which detailed their anonymity in the research process, alongside their right to withdraw and data storage summaries.

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PARTICIPANT VISUAL RESOURCES & DISCUSSION POINTS

After the participants had constructed their Visual Resources in the second session, the third session's discussion revealed the following formats favoured by the participants: 2x mindmaps, 1x set of flash cards, 1x poster, 1x chart, and 1x interactive flip-book. Although each student was reminded repeatedly throughout the research that they were free to select any Visual Resource format they wished to develop, a large percentage of participants seemingly defaulted to formats that were 'safe', 'traditional', or 'familiar'. This often contradicted the participant's higher academic ability - based off the written content within their Visual Resource - as they repeatedly commented on a lack of confidence in how to design/engage with visuals in a way that was beneficial to their own learning, rather than the 'blanket approach' that they experience in a classroom.

Three key themes emerged from the research: 'Format', 'Design' and 'Function'. These themes refer to the main factors considered by participants not only when creating their own visual resources. Other sub-themes that contributed to how participants both created and engaged with visual resources were identified as 'Generic or Tailored', 'Familiar or Unfamiliar', 'Time- or Task-Oriented' and 'Safety Vs Risk'.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

By acknowledging the comments of participants relating to a limited range of resource formats being favoured by educators, it could suggest that educators have limited confidence within their own Visual Literacy skillset (Bruger & Roberts 2017). By acknowledging Shulman's (1986) notion that effective instruction must transcend subject knowledge, it could be argued that a contextual approach of grounding curriculum content within visuals to increase student exposure to, and subsequent interpretation of, visuals may be transformative to both educators and learners in the long term. Furthermore, the understanding that contemporary learners are emerging from the "App Generation" (Gardner & Davis 2013) and are therefore potentially more aware of technology than educators, means that there must be an openness to exploring technologically-grounded creative pedagogies that allow learners the possibilities to create, explore and critique visuals.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Danielle Byatte is a Learning Resource Officer at Preston College, Lancashire (UK). She has recently completed an MA in Education with Edge Hill University's Faculty of Education.

Within the scope of Visual Literacy, Byatte seeks to research sustainable approaches to embed visual literacy skillsets within areas of education outside of the visual arts. As such, this paper aims to address shortfalls in engagement with post-16 education and lifelong learning, whilst fostering increased learner confidence in academia.

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FULL PAPER

Please scan for further reading

Feedback and collaboration welcomed

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Thank you for listening – questions welcomed

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