

# Student as visual researchers

Emotional and Cognitive Dimensions of Visual and Media  
Literacy Integration



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Once the threshold between the real world and the iconic world has been crossed, we must expect the flow to move in both directions: we enter the world of images, but images, in turn, overflow into our world.

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Andrea Pinotti, *Alla soglia dell'immagine*, 2021, p. 344

# Why Visual Literacy?

- Literacy is structurally linked to culture and its artefacts.
- Traditional education prioritizes printed text and written language.
- Today, we integrate print literacy with visual and digital paradigms (Hobbs, 2016).



**Hobbs, R.** (2016). Literacy. In K. B. Jensen, R. T. Craig, J. D. Pooley, & E. W. Rothenbuhler (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of communication theory and philosophy*. Wiley-Blackwell.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118766804>

# Observation as Inquiry

- Inspired by Tishman (2018), 'slow looking' is an intentional practice to foster deeper understanding.
- Shared observation enhances individual insight and fosters collaborative learning.
- **Emphasis on videomaking as learning and inquiry methodology**



**Tishman, S.** (2018). *Slow looking: The art and practice of learning through observation*.  
Routledge.

# Pedagogical value

- Active learning grounded in slow looking and collaborative observation
- Visual inquiry-based learning through visual research: students use video as a tool for inquiry and knowledge construction
- Students develop critical analysis of visual content through audiovisual production, which fosters visual inquiry
- Integrating visual and media literacy



# Theoretical framework

- Based on the *Media and Intercultural Education Framework (MIEF)* Ranieri & Fabbro, 2018
- Visual literacy (Elkins, 2008)
- Participatory visual research (Pauwels & Mannay, 2020)



Ranieri, M., & Fabbro, F. (2018, March 5–7). **Designing media literacy education for intercultural contexts: The MIEF framework and guidelines**. In *Proceedings of the INTED2018 Conference* (pp. 6002–6008). IATED Academy.  
<https://doi.org/10.21125/inted.2018.1422>

# Research Context

Part of the European *Inclusive and Creative Media Education (ICME) Project*

- **Develops scalable models** for innovative, inclusive, and creative media literacy education across diverse cultural, national, and linguistic contexts
- **Three innovative operational models**, originally developed in three different countries, were later **scaled and contextually adapted** in two additional countries and educational settings within the consortium, resulting in **a total of nine pilot implementations**
- **Co-funded by the EU Creative Europe Programme (2023–2024)** and implemented by a pan-European consortium.



# Educational Setting

- IIS Paolo Dagomari School – Prato, Italy
- 18 students (14–15 years), Health and Social Care Section
- March–May 2024 | 18 hours across 7 biweekly sessions

## Curricular framing of the research activity

The object of the participatory visual research was defined in coherence with the students' educational path. Specifically, the investigation focused on **individual and collective needs**, in alignment with **Maslow's hierarchy of needs**, a foundational psychological theory that outlines five progressive levels of human motivation—from physiological necessities to self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).



**Maslow, A. H.** (1943). *A theory of human motivation*. Psychological Review, 50(4), 370–396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>

# Learning Design (1/2)

- *Module 1:* Audiovisual Language Basics (videoselfies, interviews, B-roll)
- *Module 2:* Designing a participatory research on needs
- *Module 3:* Producing, analyzing, and peer-reviewing video portraits



# Learning Design (2/2)

*Module 1* - This first module introduces students to the fundamentals of audiovisual language through hands-on activities such as video-selfies and basic interview techniques.

By exploring **personal symbolic objects**, students begin reflecting on their **own needs and motivations**, laying the groundwork for understanding others.

The activity marks the **transition from the self to the other**, moving from the expression of **individual needs**—as framed by Maslow's hierarchy (1943)—towards the ability to **recognize and represent the needs of peers and the broader community** through audiovisual storytelling.



# Case Study: Video-Selfies

- Video selfie is the first hands on activity of Module 1
- Students reflects on their own identity and needs using symbolic objects and visual metaphors.
- They express identity, memory, aspirations, and social experiences through video-selfie
- The activity combined self-reflection with creative storytelling.



# Assignment 1: Video-Selfie (1/3)

“We ask you to create a video selfie in which you introduce yourself by showing us meaningful objects/items capable of **distilling the essence of your ideas in a non-verbal way.** Please follow the suggested outline below.”

**Video duration: 1 minute**



# Assignment 1: Video-Selfie (2/3)

**What is your name?**

**How old are you?**

**Where do you live?**

**[PAST] What is one object that could symbolize your childhood or past?**

- Why did you choose it?
- What story does it carry with it?

**[PRESENT] What is one object that represents who you are now?**

- Can you briefly explain how it represents your current self?
- Why?



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# Assignment 1: Video-Selfie (3/3)

**[BELONGING]** Do you feel you belong to a group?

*(This can be broadly interpreted: a city, a neighborhood, a team, a music genre, a group of friends, etc.)*

- Can you show us a symbolic object of that group?
- Why did you choose that specific object?
- Can you explain how it represents your group?

**[SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS]** Do you think others have expectations of you?

*(This could be friends, parents, society—your choice.)*

- Do you feel they expect something from you?
- For example, do they want you to become someone or act a certain way?
- Who do you feel you are supposed to become, according to them?
- Can you choose a symbolic object that sums up these external expectations?
- Why this particular object?

**[FUTURE]** What is an object you would choose to represent your future aspirations or desires?

- Can you briefly explain how and why this object relates to your future?



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I want to tell you briefly about my

**Video-selfie**

# Reflection activity on the Video-Selfie (1/6)

- Use of the thinking routine “I used to think... Now I think...”
- <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qwuMfMzxYB6TUpr5WZYkHuww8V449Y6K/edit?usp=sharing&oid=102016882800951358903&rtpof=true&sd=true>



# Reflection activity on the Video-Selfie (2/6)

## Overcoming emotional and cognitive obstacles

Many students initially expressed **anxiety, fear of failure, or discomfort** about exposing themselves publicly. However, their reflections show a clear **positive shift in perception**:

- *“I thought I wouldn’t be able to do it... now I feel more free and I’m glad I did it.”*
- *“I was afraid of being judged... but nothing bad happened.”*

This suggests a **process of personal empowerment** and increased **self-confidence**, facilitated by the audiovisual activity.



# Reflection activity on the Video-Selfie (3/6)

## Awareness of the narrative and symbolic power of objects

Students acknowledged that objects can **tell meaningful stories** and serve as powerful tools for **expressing identity**:

- *“Objects tell a lot about people.”*
- *“In the end, it wasn’t that hard to represent myself with objects.”*

The activity fostered a form of **visual metacognition**, aligning with the principles of visual inquiry.



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# Reflection activity on the Video-Selfie (4/6)

## Development of reflective and relational skills

Reflections showed growth in **self-awareness** and highlighted the **social value of listening to others**:

- *“I liked hearing others talk about themselves too.”*
- *“Now I think I’m more open.”*

These insights point to a **transformative learning process** engaging emotional, identity-related, and interpersonal dimensions.



# Reflection activity on the Video-Selfie (5/6)

## Recognition of the educational value of the activity

Several students described an initial lack of interest or motivation, which later transformed into **positive evaluations of the activity's usefulness**:

- *“I thought it was pointless... now I see it helped me understand myself better.”*
- *“I thought it was trivial... but it actually required courage.”*

The experience activated **authentic engagement** and **intrinsic motivation**.



# Reflection activity on the Video-Selfie (6/6)

## Validation of the video-selfie as a methodological tool

The document supports the idea that the video-selfie can:

- promote introspection
- enable students to visualize and communicate abstract concepts (e.g., needs)
- strengthen the sense of classroom community through shared storytelling

This confirms the didactic potential of participatory audiovisual practices within a reflective and inclusive learning design.



# Key findings

## 1. Empowerment through emotional resilience

Students overcame initial anxiety, fear of failure, and discomfort. The experience fostered self-confidence and emotional growth.

## 2. Symbolic literacy and identity expression

The use of meaningful objects enabled students to explore and express personal identity in non-verbal, narrative-rich ways.

## 3. Reflective and relational learning

The activity enhanced self-awareness and interpersonal understanding, encouraging students to listen, share, and relate to peers.

## 4. Reframing motivation through experience

What many initially perceived as irrelevant or trivial became meaningful, stimulating intrinsic motivation and engagement.

## 5. Validation of the video-selfie as pedagogical practice

The video-selfie proved to be a powerful educational tool—supporting visual inquiry, inclusive expression, and identity exploration.



# Final reflection

The video-selfie activity emerged as a **powerful pedagogical tool** that enabled students to:

- **Explore and narrate their own identity** through symbolic objects
- **Share personal experiences** in a creative and meaningful way
- **Overcome discomfort and self-doubt**, building emotional resilience
- **Engage in processes of self-reflection and awareness**, both individually and as a group

By combining audiovisual language with reflective thinking, the activity fostered **deeper learning, personal growth, and social connection**, confirming the value of **participatory visual practices** in inclusive and student-centered education.

A meaningful step toward **student-centered, transformative learning**.



# Thank You

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