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## Meaning-making and interpretation through personal mandalas in the context of visual literacy

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### ABSTRACT

This research investigates the significance of creative freedom and self-expression through the visual analysis of artworks produced in a workshop under the theme 'Visual Literacy'. This multi-layered qualitative study presents the findings from a participatory arts-based research approach that elicits students' creative expression through their personal mandalas. Artworks collected from this creative process were assessed using the interpretive phenomenological analysis method whereas the Common European Framework of Reference for Visual Literacy (CEFR-VL) was used as an assessment tool. Supporting youth through arts-based interventions and motivating them to communicate their feelings and perceptions can be an integral part of students' creative development. Hence, as the focus of the study, this paper aims to illustrate the youths' perception, interpretation, and meaning-making through the artistic creative processes to stimulate their creative and critical thinking.

### KEYWORDS

Visual literacy; meaning-making; interpretation; artistic creative processes; K-12 learning; youths; phenomenology; creative and critical thinking

## Introduction

Mandalas have been known throughout history to be the symbols of self-integration; they reflect states of being and potential for becoming (Jung, 2017; Kellogg et al., 1977). This contribution reflects on one of six artistic experiments that were part of the Finland testbed of the research project *Acting on the Margins: Arts as Social Sculpture* (AMASS). The main objective of this study is twofold. First, to review how Visual Literacy (VL) affects student learning. Second, in what way students are able to discern when sharing experiences, refining perception, and interpreting meaning are effective processes for learning and creativity. Hence, this study is about how the involvement of VL stimulates students to explore avenues for responsive creative expression and facilitates them in growing their confidence as expressive, creative, and critical thinkers.

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## Thematic review of the literature

The literature review has been conducted thematically, that outlines the study as follows.

### *Defining visual literacy*

It is difficult to position our stance by highlighting the importance of VL through multiple definitions; therefore, for this article, the authors have chosen to follow the definition of Fransecky and Debes (1972). According to Avgerinou and Pettersson (2020), to better understand VL as a concept, a cohesive theoretical framework is needed. The theory of VL is grounded in five areas of study that serve as the main pillars of the theory: visual communication, visual language, visual learning, visual perception, and visual thinking. Based on the comparison of these two theories, old and new, the author's aim is to instigate this research from the components of perception and interpretation, which belong to the psychological domain.

### *Mandala making*

A 'mandala' is a geometric arrangement of symbols within a circle. Mandalas have various manifestations from different viewpoints, such as religion and psychology, but in this study the authors used this artistic method entirely from the psychological perspective. With roots in Buddhism since the fourth century (Blume, 2021), the mandalas were introduced to the Western world by Carl Jung (1916/2017). Jung identified a sophisticated system of symbolic meaning in them. He explored the unconscious by analysing his own art making through personal circular drawings, (graphic 'mandalas') which he later identified as reflecting his inner state.

I sketched every morning in a notebook a small circular drawing, a mandala, which seemed to correspond to my inner situation at the time ... Only gradually did I discover what the mandala really is ... the Self, the wholeness of the personality, which if all goes well, is harmonious. (Jung, 1989, pp. 195–196)

Mandalas were identified to be one of the basic forms in the visual language of children. Rhoda Kellogg (1969) showed the evolution of simple pictorial signs—graphemes—into circles divided by or completed with lines to represent flowers, humanoids or animals. In her theory of child art development, mandalas identified in the visual language of children around the world, proved that artmaking has biological roots and is a generic human activity. In a creative encounter with mandala making, the authors of this paper documented the artistic work (personal mandalas) created by participants with the following chosen conceptual components: perception, interpretation, and meaning-making.

### *Perception, interpretation, and meaning-making*

Through perception, we make meaning of the world through our senses (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 31). Perception is like a library of acquired knowledge where all the vocabulary has been stored. It is our intentionality that brings the possibility of

meaning into our experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Another important perspective on perception was introduced by Merleau-Ponty (c.f. Baldwin, 2004, p. 6), who explained that perception enabled a rediscovery of ‘the world in which we live’. Rediscovery enables exploration and reinterpretation as thoughts come about through sensory experiences.

Interpretation is subjective (cf. Messaris, 1987; Yenawine, 1997) and is based on personal inclination. It is the process that helps us comprehend the experiences we encounter, focussing on meaning, expressions, emotions, or stating a personal response that relates to our experience. How we receive, understand, or interpret cannot be the same as how someone else might experience it. As noted by Berger (2008, p.7), ‘the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled’.

Meaning-making paves the way for reflective thought processes. It is an expression emphasising any situation of learning, making sense of the situation, objects, relationships, cultural resources, identities, and emotions (Zittoun & Brinkmann, 2012). To summarise, it involves imagination and fictional qualities, making connections, developing links, and translating purpose, intention, feelings, or ideas into various modes of communication.

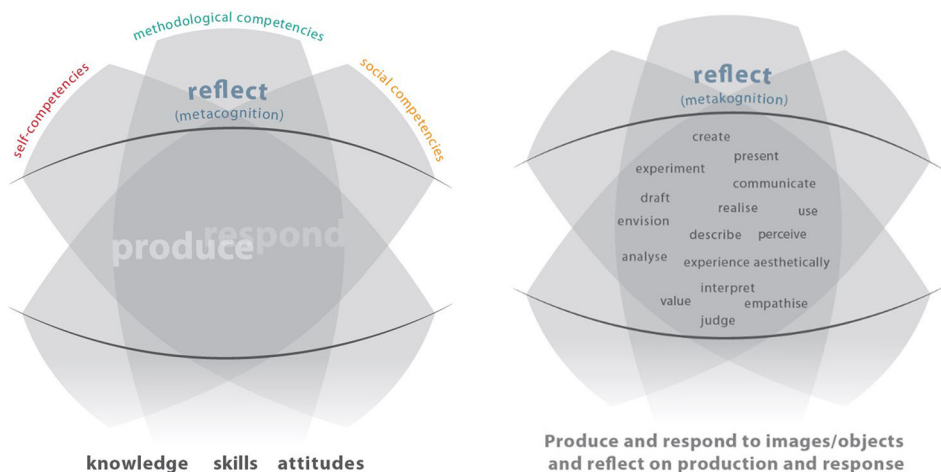
## Methodology

In light of the thematic review of the literature, the core research questions this paper addresses are as follows:

1. How can creative processes contribute to the meaning-making of youths?
2. How do youths perceive VL through creative processes?
3. How can youths over the age of 18 help foster a better understanding of the importance of VL in supporting creative learning processes for K-12 learners?

To answer the research questions and for data collection purposes, a workshop of three phases was conducted that was entitled ‘Visual Literacy Workshop’ (VLW). It focussed on students learning how to explore their creative expression and evaluate their level of VL awareness by engaging them in an artistic creative process. To avoid making assumptions about the participants’ artwork and to keep up the perspective of the study free of prejudgement, the authors chose an online qualitative questionnaire (open-ended survey), interviews, focus group discussions, and observation as data collection methods. The contribution of interpreting and meaning-making of the artworks by youths in the VL context resulted in bridging the gap between artistic and personal inquiries.

During this process, the authors of the workshop identified the need for an analytical tool to gain a deeper understanding of the process. Therefore, the revised Common European Framework of Reference for Visual Literacy (CEFR-VL) (Schönau et al., 2021) was consulted. In the prototype model (Wagner & Schönau, 2016), three sub domains—produce, response and reflection—were discussed to explain the concept of VL. Next, sixteen sub-competencies were selected that together cover the subject-specific content of learning in VL which constitute the core of the model. It was



**Figure 1.** The ENViL competency model: Basic dimensions of Visual Literacy (left), Differentiation of sub-competencies (right), (Wagner & Schönau, 2016, pp. 67, 68).

revised by a working group of European Network for Visual Literacy (ENViL) to make the model more comprehensive and gain further clarity of the VL concept. In this revised version, the cloud of competencies as presented in the original model is restructured into more generic, process-based descriptions of competencies that better reflect common understanding and practice in the domains of both production and reception (Schönau et al., 2021). Based on the CEFR-VL model, more sub-questions were added to the previous list of research questions:

4. How can the CEFR-VL developed for public education, primary and secondary, relate to tertiary education?
5. Can the results of a tertiary art education group help assess the success of the inclusion of VL in the primary and secondary art classrooms? (Figure 1)

The purpose of the mandala making workshop was to motivate and communicate participants' feelings and interpretations to stimulate their creativity, which is a key skill required to tackle the increasing complexities of daily life effectively (Treffinger et al., 2002). After the completion of the workshop, students were able to assess the effectiveness of telling stories, sharing experiences to facilitate creativity, and interpreting co-created visuals to recognise different interpretations. The workshop catalysed *knowledge*, developed *skills*, and changed *attitudes* of participants through tasks of visual perception and creation. This arts-based intervention related to the key competencies in the CEFR-VL model that constitute the fundamental dimensions of VL—produce, respond, and reflect (Schönau et al., 2021; Schönau & Kárpáti, 2019). The discussion section of the paper summarises the sub-competencies developed during the workshop.

Furthermore, in this research, authors approached the empirical data through the phenomenological paradigm to seek the connotation of subjectivity. Data collected from the workshop was analysed using the interpretive phenomenological analysis

approach (IPA), a blended approach that aimed to provide a detailed examination of the lived experience of a phenomenon through participants' subjective experiences and personal perceptions of objects and events. In contrast to other approaches, in IPA, the researcher performs an active role in the interpretive process (Tuffour, 2017). The authors selected the approach of Merleau-Ponty (1908/1962) to analyse the data from the perspective of the phenomenological approach to the body, perception, and consciousness in relation to nature.

The personal mandala making resulted in phenomenological reflection of the participants' lived experiences during the workshop. The entire process involved close-up object photography, mandala making, writing descriptive narratives about the experience, and sharing views on how this process enhanced perception, interpretation, and meaning-making. For the purpose of this paper, the authors discuss the mandala-making intervention, but the photography session—an independent process of enquiry, is discussed in another publication (Qureshi, 2021).

## Study design

Participants in the workshop were given an introductory explanation of the aim of the study and their role in this artistic experiment. They were encouraged to be as natural as possible in their creative approach. In doing so, they would be able to express their opinions as non-biased. For this purpose, the workshop was divided into three phases (see Table 1): (i) photography-based pre-task, (ii) drawing their own personal mandalas to represent their individual feelings, and (iii) describing their experience in a written piece of 1000 – 1200 words, followed by reflection and discussion. Along with the practical process of personal mandala making, the key feature of this artistic method was to identify their understanding and meaning-making of their personal artworks.

**Table 1.** Overview of the phases of the artistic experiment, Visual Literacy Workshop, 2021.

| Phase | Activities & duration                                                                              | Aim                                                                                                                                                                              | Assessment tools                                                | Instruments                                                                                    | Participants |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1     | Representation & discussion on the pre-task for each participant (photographs) 1 h per participant | To build empathy amongst the participants; To explore their creativity through digital means; To see through each other's perspectives and understand the meaning of the artwork | Interviews, group discussions                                   | Digital video recorder, Teams platform, 10 photographs by each participant, sticky notes, pens | F = 4, M = 0 |
| 2     | Drawing personal mandalas 3 working days (6 h each) Total 18 h of drawing                          | To engage participants in representing their individual feelings and finding voice to express their creativity                                                                   | Online qualitative questionnaire, interviews, group discussions | Digital video recorder, Teams platform, drawing sheets, paints, brushes, stationary            | F = 4, M = 0 |
| 3     | Descriptive writing Individual work of about 2 h                                                   | To gauge meaning-making by the participants                                                                                                                                      | Interviews, group discussions                                   | Word document                                                                                  | F = 4, M = 0 |

Keeping in mind the IPA approach, all three phases were designed specifically to assess students' critical thinking and visual learning. Participants and researchers were reminded they were experiencers of a specific phenomenon they were involved in, and that nearly everything embraced a diverse meaning in different perceivers. For instance, for some, the colour red depicted danger, while others perceived it as a colour of love and passion. [Table 1](#) provides an overview of the phases of the VLW.

### *Phase I: photography as an expression*

This phase of the process will be discussed in depth elsewhere, but as it somewhat influenced the following phases, a brief explanation is provided. In the first phase of the workshop, the participants were asked to photograph 10 unique, abstract, and close-up photographs of a common object, revealing the visual element of line. The primary role of this activity was to understand the value of visuals as a language amongst the participants. The secondary purpose was to help them to assume each other's perspectives through a focus group discussion of interpretive and reflective enquiry of the visuals.

### *Phase II: manifestation of personal mandalas*

In the second phase, the participants were prompted to draw their emotions using mandalas, preferably by using line art. The data collected through the personal mandalas (see [Table 2](#)) describes the process. Research suggests that perception is based on how we interpret various observations (Merleau-Ponty, 2004). Perception can be influenced by past experiences, motives, personalities, and attitudes based on which the person perceives a situation. Multiple responses were recorded. They comprised a participant's personal decisions in the selection of colours, signs, and symbols that described their own journey, comprehending how different cultural values and backgrounds shaped one's perception.

### *Phase III: descriptive writing*

After the mandala activity, the descriptive narratives by the participants revealed themes revolving around the significance of VL. They can be amassed into many categories, but before making any final thematic revelations, the authors explored their narratives to understand the phenomenon as a whole.

## **Results**

The results of the qualitative analysis of Phase II and III, are discussed hereafter. When questioned during the reflection session, the participants were eager to share their personal experiences about the mandala making. No one reported any discomfort during the activity; instead, all reported to have had a meaningful experience. Participants revealed interesting facts regarding their selection of certain signs, symbols, and colours.

It was interesting to play with the idea of water but also texture, and also adding this contrast of the yellow in there because the yellow stands out. You look at it, especially from afar. I thought it was good. I had a lot of fun with this. (Participant 1, 2021)

Table 2. Details of the personal mandalas, Visual Literacy Workshop, 2021.

| Mode of participation     | Personal mandala and title given by the creator                                                           | Participant visual analysis                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participant 1 (Online)    | Golden Specks<br>        | Blue colour represents water; Dots as a texture for water; Yellow as a contrasting and complementary colour of blue                            |
| Participant 2 (In person) | Memories<br>             | Each segment represents a different mood and special occasion; Vibrant colour selection; Different personality traits                          |
| Participant 3 (In person) | Strings of Happiness<br> | Bubbles as beads; Piece of jewellery (necklace); Yellow as sunshine and complementary colour of blue                                           |
| Participant 4 (In person) | Self-Empowerment<br>   | Peacock as a sign of wisdom, beauty, integrity, guidance, knowledge, and protection; Segmented spiral as spreading light; Warm-to-cool colours |

In this statement, the participant identified three elements of learning: (i) choice of colour, (ii) texture, and (iii) personal experience. Association of blue with an idea to represent water, using yellow as contrasting colour to compliment blue, texture as it represents water and the personal joy of depicting the mood and emotion in the mandala-making process. This demonstrates that VL enabled the participant to make connections between similarities and differences and manifest their knowledge of colour theory. Regarding the colour selection, a participant remarked:

It was probably around that time when the first sunshine really came and the snow was starting to melt, and it was just a really emotional response that I wanted to use the yellow. But then also, if you look at colour theory, of course they are complimentary colours. If you use them together, they would be an interesting fit. They would kind of bounce off each other, which I then realised only later. But yes, I wanted to use this yellow, sparingly, but to create interest. (Participant 3, 2021)

While further elaborating on complementary colours, the participant associated bubble-like shapes with beads and a jewellery piece. The changing mood with the weather affected the choice of bead colour, which was enhanced by an opposite colour. This indicates that the complementary colours play a significant role in colour composition (Pridmore, 2021).

On cultural backgrounds and related meaning-making, another participant stated:

If people grow up in different cultural backgrounds, they understand patterns, or they interpret patterns in different ways ... Different colours mean different things in different cultures. (Participant 2, 2021)

As argued by Hofstede (2011), many factors aid in dimensionalising culture, and those cultural differences allow us to become more individualistic as different viewers have different connotations. This results in a variety of different patterns in mandalas with diverse overall meanings. Reflections of the creators of mandalas on their working process and the resulting artwork, a conscious or unconscious awareness of visual language is detected. They expressed the significance of meaning-making based on the visual language of mandalas and realised that VL is influenced by previous experiences and various personal circumstances.

Some participants wrote reflective narratives highlighting the significance of this artistic process and the role it played in enhancing their creativity and self-expression.

The activity provided me with rest in the way that creative activity can let my mind rest, regenerate, and re-enact creativity through thoughts, expressions, and mark making in this case. It was relaxing and at times I felt swept into another reality, almost when you are in a half-dream state. It was transportive. In this sense, the activity reminded me of the power of creative rest that every person needs, and that time should be generated in our lives for our unconscious abilities to be nurtured and even expressed. (Participant 3, 2021)

Participants recognised the role of VL and described how reading and meaning-making influenced their interpretation and evoked a critical thinking process. The maturity of the insights revealed by the participants illustrates their profound interest in creative activities such as artistic practice, art education, and design.

Visual literacy, I believe, opens up the world in interpretation and discovery of others and the self. (Participant 2, 2021)

Visual literacy gives us a chance to think about what can be denoted from the visual world, but it also allows us to think about the connotations making us critical thinkers which is vital as a human being. (Participant 4, 2021)

The narratives also indicated the participants' appreciation of the practice of learning to 'read' the images. With this acceptance, the importance of VL grew even more significant within the group.

The realisation of how powerful and clear visual language can be and how much potential there is in visual literacy. And definitely that there is still a lot to learn in order to be able to express myself in a really visual literate way, but also to understand others in their visual expressions. This workshop just showed me another way to train exactly this task. (Participant 1, 2021)

The theme of visual literacy is very important, and this activity enabled me to be more mindful of the visuality of everyday life. How to observe and notice lines, shapes and

colours more consciously. Although our minds are usually too filled with information and we struggle with over-stimulation most of the times, it was a great workshop to draw attention to our abilities to read texts. I suppose life is made out of texts, symbols, signs, and they feed our perceptions, also our unconscious ones. (Participant 4, 2021)

## Discussion

The CEFR-VL model enabled the authors to understand the research process and how the methods of data collection produced new knowledge about the skills and attitude changes of the participants as identified in their reflections. Hence, implying that producing, responding and reflection are the key components of VL.

The artistic process described in the first part of the paper stemmed from several important themes, mainly derived from the transcribed data and open coding. They were (i) personal experiences while making art, (ii) perceptions, interpretations, and meaning-making, (iii) VL as a language, and (iv) personal creativity. The purpose of the themes was to elicit the essence of the participants' experiences. They experienced a progressive artistic process through which they learned to critically analyse and reflect in order to comprehend and share their lived reality, as well as their learning process. As supported by Bendito (2007) and Bowen (2017), VL students must be able to apply their new knowledge to real-world contexts and understand how visual representations may change the way they see the world and others. By doing and reflecting on a personal artistic activity, they experienced an additional phase—mindfulness.

To further investigate the research questions, the competencies that occurred in this workshop are listed from the perspective of CEFR-VL model. These are explained briefly in Table 3. Among these competencies, three noticeably occurred in the workshop as documented in the data during the working process: interpretation, perception, and meaning-making.

Nevertheless, after the completion of VLW, two more skills were identified which are not included in the CEFR-VL model. They are listed in Table 4 with explanations:

The skill of being an enquirer and an improviser are well reflected in this upcoming explanation of the online assessment. With an intention to comprehend this artistic creative process in the context of VL, the participants were asked to answer a few questions that revealed the value of visuals as one of the key arts-based methods (Leavy, 2015) employed in this research. Being visually aware makes the reader a critical thinker—an enquirer with the skills to deeply criticise, probe, and reflect. It is also a process that involves developing the set of skills needed to interpret the content of visual images and to examine the potential impact they may have. This can be noted from our online survey which revealed the participants' motivation towards VL.

### *Visual Literacy defined by the participants*

After the online qualitative assessment, the participants were asked to redefine VL through their own understanding. This is how they recollected their learning through this workshop and redefined VL.

**Table 3.** Presence of CEFR-VL model sub-competencies identified in VLW, 2021, with brief explanations.

|    | Sub-competencies | Brief explanation of the use of sub-competencies                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Aesthetics       | With art and design backgrounds, it was natural for the participants to apply the aesthetics they were familiar with in their previous art education learning, which was evident in the personal mandalas they created. The use of colours, shapes, composition, defined the presence of aesthetics in their vision. |
| 2  | Analyse          | During the VLW reflection session, participants analysed their artwork by critically examining their experiences and connecting it with the objective of the experiment which was to assess their level of VL achieved during the primary and secondary art education.                                               |
| 3  | Communicate      | This was a skill achieved as one of the participants was online and the rest were physically present at the workshop space. Despite the hybrid digital mode, the participants skilfully interacted and communicated their ideas and vision.                                                                          |
| 4  | Create           | While no prior information was given to the participants about mandalas, the participants understood the concept and created their own.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 5  | Draft            | The focus group discussions and interviews paved a way for the third phase of the VLW—descriptive writing session. This resulted from the first phase of VLW—photography as an expression when they were drafting their preliminary ideas in the form of key words on sticky notes about each other's photographs.   |
| 6  | Describe         | Simultaneously, through the use of descriptive writings, it was seen that the participants expressed their personal ideas, views and experiences gained from this artistic experiment.                                                                                                                               |
| 7  | Empathise        | The participants shared personal stories of their mandalas as they related their personal experiences that influenced their artwork. This created a sense of empathy and bonding amongst the group.                                                                                                                  |
| 8  | Envision         | Interviews and story-telling personal experiences assisted all participants to envision the future and what can be done to make meaningful life experiences.                                                                                                                                                         |
| 9  | Experience       | In both group and individual activities, participants generated new experiences. Afterwards, they had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, verbalise and write them, and reflect on them.                                                                                                                |
| 10 | Experiment       | All three phases of the VLW enabled the participants to practice the elements of open experimentation and exploration.                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 11 | Interpret        | The workshop enabled participants to observe and interpret their feelings which is a key skill for assessing their level of VL abilities.                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 12 | Judge            | Participants were given the opportunity to judge and dig deeper into all the artistic outcomes to gain insights into their own experiences, visual perceptions and meaning-making processes.                                                                                                                         |
| 13 | Perceive         | Another noticeable skill that was practiced in the VLW was to form perceptions using not only the five senses, but also cognition to recognise and understand what is perceived.                                                                                                                                     |
| 14 | Present          | The intimate group and workshop approach encouraged the participants to share and present their ideas freely without fear of being judged. The presentation of the photographs for example followed a process of image-making, selecting and judging what to present to the group.                                   |
| 15 | Use              | The artistic outcomes of the workshops delivered evidence of the participants' abilities to carefully select the use of resources available in their immediate environment, such as methods, tools, media and knowledge.                                                                                             |
| 16 | Value            | By respecting and valuing one another's' views, the participants gained in confidence and a sense of ownership of their visions for becoming valued citizens in society.                                                                                                                                             |

- The ability to emotionally and cognitively interpret or apprehend pictures or other visual images. (Participant 1, 2021)
- *The ability to read, understand, and interpret meaning from the 'visual world' around us.* (Participant 2, 2021)
- *The possibility to communicate with each other without spoken language. Based on communication with symbols, colours, movements, shapes, and other visible means.* (Participant 3, 2021)
- *The act of reading, coding, decoding, and giving a visual image a meaningful representation.* (Participant 4, 2021)

**Table 4.** Suggestions for the list of CEFR-VL model sub-competencies, with brief explanations.

|    |           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Improvise | During the first phase of the VLW, participants were asked to share their insights, emotions and ideas about their perceptions of each other's photographs. They were encouraged to describe their ideas spontaneously by drawing on their intuition and engage in dialogue without judging each other's views. According to Sarantou and Miettinen (2017) framework of improvisation, the elements of improvisatory processes share a causal relationship with each other during moments of doing. The frameworks' elements include, to name a few, experience and learning, memory, recognition and judgement, knowing and intuition, thereness and the given, risk taking and agility. |
| 2. | Enquiry   | Enquiry was evident in the VLW with the participants over the age of 19 years. It should be included in the list of sub-competencies to encourage young learners' questioning skills and how to become critical thinkers and enquirers for gaining a deeper understanding that can enhance their learning.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

All these definitions by the participants focus on the skills of interpretation, communication, reading visuals, creating, and meaning-making. VL plays an important role in tertiary education in which students are taught to become creatives, artists or designers, while creative and critical thinking are now listed as key life competencies for a future that will be digitally driven (Vasilieva, 2018). Additionally, it links back to the researcher's chosen definition by Fransecky and Debes (1972), which affirms the presence of interpretation of visible actions, objects, and symbols (whether natural or artificial), enabling visual comprehension and communication of a visual world.

Finally, towards the end of the reflection session, all participants agreed on two very interesting aspects: (i) by sharing the same space and drawing supplies, the mandalas revealed similarities in a way but were different and individualistic on their own; and (ii) participants working remotely had the same colour selection without any interaction with the participants working physically in the workshop. In addition, the discussions enabled them to consider VL as a vital creative skill to learn and practice to enhance their creativity and mindfulness. Therefore, it can be concluded that creative processes that enhance the ability to learn to appreciate images, have a lot of potential for art education.

### Limitations

Limitations due to COVID-19 involved a partial lockdown at the time of the workshop, allowing only five people in one space. To facilitate that participant's attendance, the workshop was setup online simultaneously. A few of the participants also reported compromising the aesthetics of their artwork due to lack of time, but on the whole, they were satisfied with the end results. Moreover, this article does not discuss the implementation of VL as a part of any curriculum. Another notable limitation of the study was that all participants had pre-established interests in the arts and creativity as they shared educational backgrounds in art and design field. The study may therefore produce different results if conducted with youths who do not have previous art education background and are less interested or artistically inclined.

### Ethical considerations

This research followed the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity as reviewed by the ethics committee of the University of Lapland in Finland.

Participants provided informed and written consent prior to the start of the study. Permission for the use of artistic results was provided in writing by each participant.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this study explored the impact of meaning-making through an artistic creative process in the context of VL, which promises to be an interesting area of research in the future. Through this research, it was established that VL is one of the foremost forms of literacy that should be encouraged to practice from early childhood, as it has the potential to explore the evolving conscious and unconscious artistic processes. Consequently, the authors propose avenues for future research through various artistic creative processes with the prospects of longitudinal study. The results of this research can also be used by professionals working on projects that involve young learners and youths in VL through formal or informal creative learning setups to progressively build self-confidence and attain well-being.

Finally, in this study, the use of CEFR-VL model opened new horizons towards enhancing the competencies which were guided by the definition of Franskey and Debes (1972). Based on the model, and with more additions suggested by the authors, these sub-competencies can bring about visually literate individuals who will cope in futures that continue to rapidly evolve digitally. Additionally, it offers an opportunity for policymakers to rethink how to integrate the arts into education by embedding such progressive models and frameworks to create innovative learning outcomes as a means to profoundly impact the world.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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