

# **Visual Meaning Making: Children's texts from an intercultural Israeli neighbourhood**

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## **Abstract of Thesis**

This study examines a corpus of work made by children from diverse cultural backgrounds living in the same intercultural urban neighbourhood in Israel. The context represents a social environment within which the children interact with each other in one way or another. Their works, visual texts all made from the same set of materials, depict different ideas about 'neighbourhood', and are regarded as artefacts that convey socio-cultural information about the children who made them.

The visual texts were collected before and after the children participated in a short course entitled 'The Visual Language of Photographs' which encouraged interaction with the semiotic language embedded in ready-made photographic images. The children attended this course in small friendship groups, mostly with members from the same cultural background. This provided the opportunity to compare the 'sets' of visual texts made by each group pre- and post-course, and also to compare the works of same-culture groups.

The children's works are studied from a socio-cultural constructionist perspective, with a descriptive framework developed from visual social semiotic theory, combined with interpretative analysis used in iconology. Together, this methodology 'unpicks' the different ways drawn, linguistic and/or photographic modes are structured, ordered and manipulated. The corpus of work discussed in this study is regarded as a collection of things/objects, examples of materiality and viewed as productions, sequences of actions, and as designs of meaning.

It is suggested that the particular 'visual styles' traced in the children's visual texts, represent different approaches to, and processes of, visual meaning making. These 'visual styles' are seen as products of the socio-cultural communities existing in this particular intercultural neighbourhood. New 'hybrid' visual styles appeared in some of the children's post-course visual texts.

The making of texts with whatever resources, material or electronic, is linked to wider cultural practices and beliefs. This study has shown that there are many ways to make visual meaning; however, in society there exist specific social practices and conventions that guide the modes of communication. The findings imply that more must be done to ensure that *all* children acquire literacies for manipulating and transforming visual imagery and photographs, in order for them to become active participants, makers and presenters of both low and high tech communication, both of which are becoming more image, less text based. Those who do not may start life with a disadvantage.