



UNESCO Chair
on Visual Anticipation
and Futures Literacy
towards Visual Literacy



BABEL

When discussing rather abstract concepts, such as freedom, democracy, success, failing, future, etc., individual memories and perceptions are of paramount importance in altering, enriching and shaping collective narratives. Different memories create different realities in the present and different expectations for the future. The use of images contributes decisively to making tangible these different realities that individual meanings and feelings generate.

The Babel tool takes its name from the tale of the tower of Babel where people could not communicate amongst each other because of the different languages they spoke. Our own memories, i.e. experiences and affect, constitute unique 'languages' and, although they might have affinities with other 'languages' (i.e. memories and narratives), remain unique, as our fingerprints are.

The tool **aims** to:

- Associate learners' experiences with concrete image/s and, thus, support them to clarify possibly blind spots, vague thoughts and feelings they have.
- Create the space for learners to share their own memories and narratives.
- Encourage learners to dig into their own perceptions and deriving assumptions, regarding any given topic, by making them tangible.
- Underscore the many different perceptions on any given topic; create space for all to co-exist; and shed light on the resulting communication gaps.
- Raise awareness on the consequences that perceptions and assumptions have on how they shape the learners' worldviews and experiences in the present.



How to apply it

Facilitators ask learners to take their smart phones or cameras and take a couple of pictures that represent for them the topic under examination. A couple of keywords, as captions, need to clarify their meaning.

Learners are encouraged not to use images from the web because a) they often carry stereotypes and b) the facilitator seeks to dig into learners' own personal memories.

Only a couple of images are enough to reveal their prevailing spontaneous mental associations.

The facilitator gathers all images and keywords, assembles them (anonymously) on a power point or in any other form, and shares with the whole group.

It is a good idea to separate the images from the captions/keywords and ask for volunteers to comment on each image. This will give the opportunity to learners to either further discuss their own image or/and listen to the (different) interpretations peers provide. Sharing and commenting the keywords at the end, will make apparent the different perceptions and realities among the group regarding the topic under examination.

By asking the appropriate questions, the facilitator supports learners to get in touch with their own memories, i.e. experiences and affect.

Guiding questions can include:

- What do you make out of this image? How does it make you feel?
- How would such an interpretation (an X point of view) affect a person and/or a society? What would be some of the consequences?
- What assumptions lay behind this interpretation?
- Can you imagine a radically different interpretation? How would this alter the prior reality?

Suggested combination with other Visual Literacy tools

The "BABEL" tool combines effectively with the "Sensing instead of Making Sense", the "Wall", the "Identity Triangle", the "Visual Stimulus", the "Alternative Futures", and the "Visuality Iceberg" tools.

