

Integrating AI Image Generators into Visual Arts Education

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Course: Visual Communication, First Year, Full-time and Correspondence students, BA-level teacher training (nursery and elementary pathways). Beginning in 2023, that year the course had very low entry points

Challenge: Many of the students haven't had an art class since elementary school and have no creative hobbies.

My Idea: To compensate for the lack of drawing skills and to motivate them with a sense of achievement.

AI image generator: the intention of the copyright holders: anyone can use it (free, without registration, simple user interface). Founders promise democratizing the creation of digital art and imagery, e.g. MidJourney is on discord, Stable Diffusion has a community licence.

It resonates with the narrative that new media (and social media) aids democratic participation and community building, e.g. Rheingold, H. (2000), Benkler, Y. (2006)

In practice, I tested it on a sample of this student cohort.

Research questions: what could participation mean in this case? How, in what practice do these students participate in, when they use AI image generators?

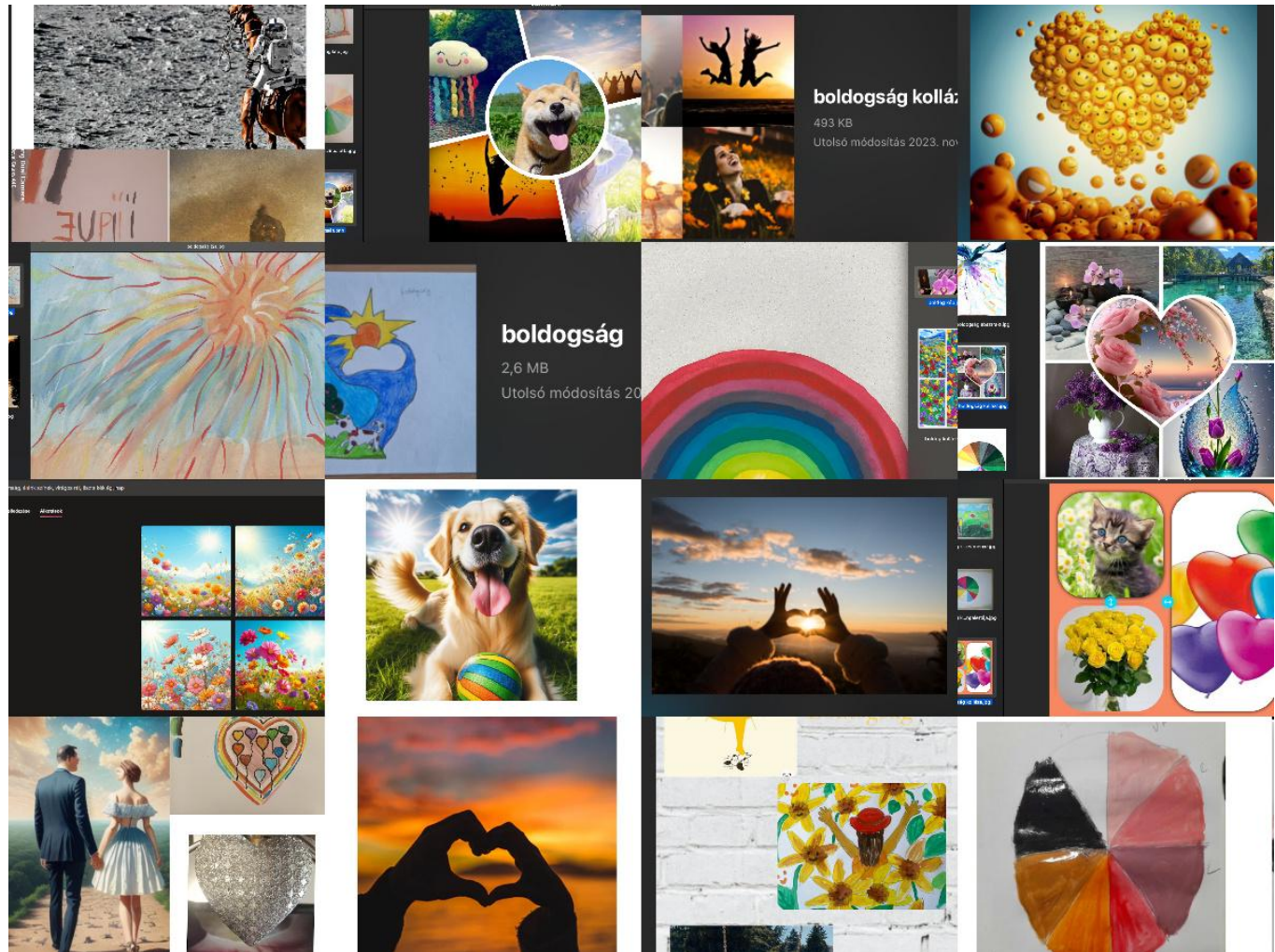
- **Exercise:**
- Create a series of images depicting a specific emotion, without showing a human face.
- Create a palette from the colors of the first image.
- Using this palette, paint the originally depicted emotion, also without a human face.

Student work:

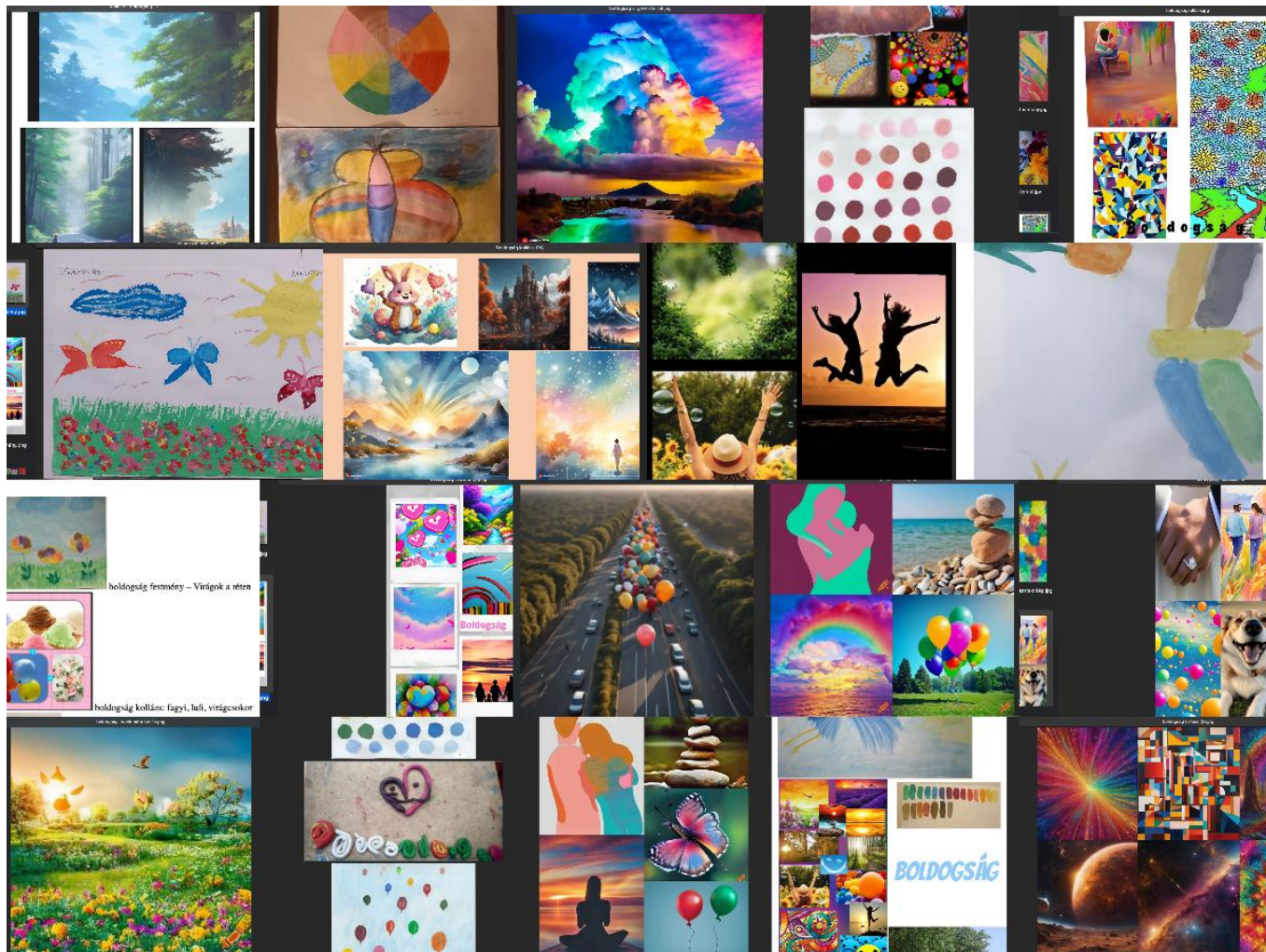




23/24
students
who choose
'happiness'



23/24
students
'happiness'
cont.



The lack of autonomy was a continuous challenge

- I was expected to come up with the prompts.
- The questions were overwhelmingly technical in nature.
- I explicitly asked them 'to experiment a bit', and I showed 'doubt' and 'patriotism' as good examples

despite this, the students preferred to use easily identifiable emotional states: joy, sadness, anger, etc.

- These were almost always depicted using commonplace visual tropes (a wilted flower in a vase for sadness, balloons for happiness).

Prevalent - images with typical AI errors:



First year, end-of-course survey: completed by 39 out of 80 students

Questions:

- Had you heard about artificial intelligence-based image generators before?
- Had you used such an image generator before?
- If you are employed, would you use such an image generator in your current job?
- After graduation, would you use such an image generator as an educator?
- If yes, for what purpose?
- Would you use such an image generator for anything else? For what?
- If you liked the image generator, what did you like about it? If you didn't like it, why not?
- In general, are you afraid of artificial intelligence and its effects?

A portion of the students could not distinguish between artificial intelligence image generators, stock photo libraries, and online photo collage makers.

They would use the image generators for the following purposes:

- Creating family albums
- Editing and improving their own photos
- Presentations, posters
- Illustrations for educational purposes (e.g., for fairy tales)

The respondents often confuse AI with collage makers, but they would widely apply these technologies in both their personal lives and in the field of education.

Survey Evaluation:

- They see the educational potential of AI (presentations, processing educational materials).
- It provides inspiration and motivation (aesthetics).
- The inability of the survey participants to distinguish between different tools shows that not only the various tools but digital media itself was a 'black box' (Latour).

Each year - essay assignment - choose your argument:

Everyone is an Artist vs Not Everyone is an Artist

- Most common reasonings:
- Everyone is an artist because everyone can create something- most common examples baking, cooking, decorating, gardening- cooks, pastry chefs, gardeners, nail artists etc are artists

Yet there are small and grand artists- many make such a distinction

- Not everyone is an artist because it takes talent and commitment

Overall Experiences:

Throughout the course, I realized that artificial intelligence does not replace visual literacy and creativity. They could compensate for fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination, which are essential skills.

Impact of AI Image Generators:

- I overestimated the usefulness of AI generators.
- They highlighted my students' deficiencies in visual skills.
- They inspired some students, understanding them as 'visual gimmicks'

Conclusion:

The development of visual literacy, attention, and critical thinking is inseparable from the teaching of visual communication; therefore, the course must be based on these principles. Through the use of AI image generators I can focus on the social saturation and omnipresence of visual media.

Conclusion: At most, AI democratizes access.

What are these students participating in? The same non-creative, mimetic processes they would without AI.

There is no democratizing something that is internal ie creativity.

How to grade These works?



Student prompt was: 'anger, rage, angry, nature' - failed the exercise - basic comprehension lacking.

However, the image is interesting - due to the AI - showing the hyperspace



Kérlek generálj egy képet, amin egy lány áll háttal egy mezőn egyetemi talárba és feldobja a kalapot. Színeiben legyen vidám.

“Please generate an image, joyful colours, where a girl stands on a meadow, her back to the viewer. She is wearing a cape and throwing a graduation hat into the air.”

Boring image, good student - concept well translated to AI image, personal and less commonplace than the rest