The Use of Graphic Media in Teaching Animal Law

Animal Law Teaching Workshop | Monash University | Aaron Timoshanko

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Growth of Animal Law

- Since 2005 there has been a steady increase in the number of universities offering Animal Law.

- Many academics teaching Animal Law for the first time

- This was me earlier this year - I’m a newbie!
One of the key questions for me was whether to use graphic media.

‘Graphic media’ is film or still images that most students will find confronting and/or distressing.

- Very broad: from the extreme (gory) to the routine
- Subjective phenomena
- e.g. lawful confinement of sows or layer hens

The key question: **does graphic media promote student learning and engagement?**

Not a lot out there offering guidance.

- Probably due to the ethical dimension

Although I advocate for the use of graphic media I am not suggesting that all academics should use graphic media or that courses without graphic media are somehow deficient.
Methodology

- Relying upon research and literature on:
  - The teaching of sensitive topics (e.g. rape law, international criminal law); and
  - Non-graphic media (audio-visual tools for learning)

- There are some obvious points of distinction but there is also sufficient overlap for valuable comparisons to be made.
Student Engagement

- Student engagement is ‘a crucial cornerstone of quality teaching and learning’.
  - Perform better academically
  - More likely to complete their studies
- 4 types of engagement: cognitive, affective, conative and relational
  - Focus here is on affective engagement: based on students’ reporting
    - Positive vs negative affective engagement
    - Some negative affective engagement may promote agency but others may hinder or detract from students learning experience.
Does graphic media promote student engagement?

- As an ‘affective strategy’ graphic media can promote student engagement
- Links abstract concepts to reality (e.g. animal welfare) by providing context
- Provides an authentic learning experience
- Film and images can stimulate interest
- Promotes empathy and compassion
Other Benefits

- Produces mature and emotionally-balanced graduates who are able to productively handle their emotions - especially valuable for future lawyers
Arguments Against Graphic Media

- Emotionally taxing - especially in prep phase (cutting out the gore)
- Even employing self-care strategies, harm is a risk (PTSD) due to repeated exposure (9/11 footage)
- Students (and academic) may experience ‘content fatigue’ or apathy
- Time consuming - high degree of ‘commitment and critical intelligence’
- Final section provides some guidance ‘critical intelligence’
Arguments Against Graphic Media

- Students will disengage/ withdraw from the topic due to negative emotional states. Risk is more apparent when one of the following considerations are out of balance:

  1. Ethics of care learning environment
  2. Content of the media

- Direct relationship between these factors

- **There is a limit to this equation.** Excessively graphic (lurid) media should *never* be shown, even if pedagogically justifiable:

  - Social pressure to remain during screening - risk of negative emotional state too high.
  - Exposure to criticism that the educator is attempting to convert students to veganism or animals rights activists!!

- But see: Francione
Selecting Graphic Media for Positive Affective Engagement

- 1st consideration: student and academic wellbeing. 2nd: pedagogical value of the media.

- Keep it as short as possible - lengthy videos not required to improve student engagement.

1. Does this scene/image provide real-world context for the law/regulation?
2. Is this directly relevant/applicable to [jurisdiction]?
3. Does this accurately depict the use or treatment of animals in [jurisdiction]?
4. Does it convey something ‘extra’ that is lost in verbal or text-based descriptions?
Hypothetical 3: Emergency Euthanasia

- Blunt force trauma to the head (hammer) permissible under the MCoP for Pigs (r 7 & app 5)
- Satisfies questions 1, 2, 3
- However, extremely graphic (risk of disengaging) & if necessary, can be conveyed via text/speech

- 4 evaluative criteria:
  1. Real-world context?
  2. Directly relevant to jurisdiction?
  3. Accurate depiction?
  4. Convey something ‘extra’
Hypothetical 4: Sow-Stalls

- Aussiepigs.org
- Complies with law and regs
- Satisfies the 4 merit-based questions
- Especially question 4

- 4 evaluative criteria:
  1. Real-world context?
  2. Directly relevant to jurisdiction?
  3. Accurate depiction?
  4. Convey something ‘extra’
Conclusion

✧ Not prescriptive → start the conversation

✧ Graphic media **can** have a positive effect on student engagement providing it does not evoke a negative affective response → disengagement

✧ To avoid the risks of disengagement:
  
  ✧ Keep it short

  ✧ Apply ‘critical intelligence’ to every scene or image → what is its pedagogical value?

✧ Consider the four evaluative criteria:

  1. Real-world context?
  2. Directly relevant to jurisdiction?
  3. Accurate depiction?
  4. Convey something ‘extra’