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Visual Literacy: An Annotated Bibliography

Visual literacy is essential to anyone regardless of their demographics, however it is, sadly, not given as much attention and importance as it should be. Many times, the literacy rate (i.e. reading, writing and comprehension) of a nation is parallel with its classification as first or third world, etc. Literacy in general is given high priority in education and otherwise, however the visual aspect of it is almost entirely overlooked. The following peer-reviewed articles demonstrate the countless reasons why visual literacy is so vital to anyone, especially to younger learners. The reason that this is so, is because visuals can often times provide an easier way of assessing a situation, solving a problem or simply just getting through everyday life.

Imagine what the world would be like without images. Now imagine what it is like if one cannot comprehend those images. Well, essentially, and unfortunately, most people fit in with the latter description. Simply because a person, especially grammar school children, can *see* an image, it does not mean that they *comprehend* it. Visual literacy is just as, if not more important than traditional literacy that is inherent in schools across the globe. The two go hand in hand and as some researchers have pointed out, there are seemingly no limits to what or how visuals can be used. Educating children, and adults, with visuals plays an important role in their future as critical and analytical thinkers. Visual literacy is the central process to achieve the “think outside of the box” ideal.

Moriarty, Sandra E. and Keith Kenney. “Visual Communication: A Taxonomy and Bibliography.” IVLA. 13 April 2008. <<http://www.ivla.org/bibliography/intro.htm>>

Sandra Moriarty and Keith Kenney claim that there is currently no central theory or methodology associated with the multifaceted field of visual communications. This constitutes a problem because of the extreme diversity and inherent multi-disciplinarity of visual studies; furthermore, they state that although a central theory is not necessarily required, a concise study of the most important theories is vital for the accurate development of academic curricula. They begin by outlining the most prominent pieces of work in the field of visual literacy and, in essence, their report itself is an extended bibliography. The audience target ranges from students to scholars.

Alberto, Paul A., et al. "Components of Visual Literacy: Teaching Logos." Focus on Autism & Other Developmental Disabilities 22.4 (Winter 2007): 234-243. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ. 13 Apr. 2008 <<http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=28407474&site=ehost-live>>.

Paul Alberto et al. conducted a study in which they aim to explain the importance of teaching logos as part of visual literacy, but they also argue the significance of visual literacy for the disabled in order for them to function normally in the world. The study consisted of six children

from elementary and middle school that were considered to possess a moderate to severe disability and the researchers focused on the deciphering of logos instead of simply teaching the children with words. Since the world is inundated with symbols, the study was conducted in order to demonstrate the importance of teaching logos to those who are disabled as a means of facilitating every day life. The audience includes those interested in the field of visual studies and developmental disorders.

Long, Trisha Wies. "The full circling process: Leaping into the ethics of history using critical visual literacy and arts-based activism." Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy 51.6 (Mar. 2008): 498-508. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ. 13 Apr. 2008

<<http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=31204564&site=ehost-live>>.

The author, Trisha Wies Long, explains an interesting technique in which to engage adolescents in what she refers to as "arts-based activism" via a pragmatic process called "full circling." This process is meant to not only engage teenagers, intellectually and emotionally, to historically significant events, but also to set in motion their sense of activism. In other words, she intends to use visual literacy as a means of teaching her students about historical events, but also inspiring the students to take action regarding the issues being portrayed in the photographs. The intended audience is primarily middle and high school students, but her methodology extends to instructors in both undergraduate and graduate levels as well.

McVicker, Claudia J. "Comic Strips as a Text Structure for Learning to Read." Reading Teacher 61.1 (Sep. 2007): 85-88. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ. 13 Apr. 2008

<<http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=26406169&site=ehost-live>>.

Claudia J. McVicker argues for the efficacy of comics in teaching young children to read and she presents numerous positive qualities about employing cartoons in the classroom. One of most important points that she stresses is the incredible ability to teach children by entertaining them at the same time; this concept is accompanied with the relative ease of accessing comics which are free and in abundance on the internet. The sole purpose of the authors work was to demonstrate how vital comics and cartoons are as a teaching tool for visual literacy. The author appeals to school administrations and teachers because they have the ability to effectively elevate visual literacy from primary school students to those on the verge of their high school education.

Lesy, Michael. "Visual Literacy." Journal of American History 94.1 (June 2007): 143-153. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ. 13 Apr. 2008
<<http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=25498520&site=ehost-live>>.

Michael Lesy argues the value of visual literacy amongst scholars and how this literacy is best achieved through photography, or the act of creating the image itself, instead of simply analyzing it. He commences the essay by describing the "truth" behind photographs and their uniqueness

to transcend time by allowing the viewer to metaphorically “see” what artists see, but in a way that static written works simply cannot do. He stresses the importance of photography and uses one particular artist as an example in order to demonstrate the significance of photography as a means of achieving visual literacy. Photography allows a viewer to see what the artist saw and feel what the artist felt; but it allows researchers and scholars, digging through thousands of photographs, to have a more analytical eye in terms of what they are searching for and the article was essentially written for the intended benefit of anyone and everyone.

Williams, T. Lee. "Reading" the painting: Exploring visual literacy in the primary grades. Reading Teacher 60.7 (Apr. 2007): 636-642. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ. 13 Apr. 2008

<<http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=24656591&site=ehost-live>>.

T. Lee Williams has a background in elementary teaching and she stresses the importance of visual literacy amongst primary level students and acknowledges the current deficiency in visual learning in elementary schools with much of the focus being given to middle and high school students instead. She conducted observations of her own students in terms of them being able to interpret works of art beyond their descriptive aspects and found that nearly all students struggled with telling the story of a painting without any textual cues. In other words, students would simply describe a picture in terms of its aesthetic and objective properties versus the subjective meaning that could be derived from individual emotional ideals. She conducted her project in a blind way, by not searching for any background stories on the paintings or artists, to allow for her own unbiased interpretations and that of her students. She mainly speaks to those in the teaching profession in hopes of demonstrating the importance of visual literacy that extends beyond text based reading and interpretation.

Thomas, Elizabeth, Nancy Place, and Cinnamon Hillyard. "Students and Teachers Learning to See: Part 1: Using Visual Images in the College Classroom to Promote Students' Capacities and Skills." College Teaching 56.1 (Winter 2008): 23-27. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ. 13 Apr. 2008

<<http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=31161343&site=ehost-live>>.

In this article, Thomas, Place and Hillyard present their unique perspectives regarding visual literacy and comprehension in the subjects of psychology, literature and mathematics. Each professor shares her own disappointing personal experience regarding students' lack of ability to interpret certain data because of the students' almost inherent visual illiteracy. All three professors presented detailed experiences in order to illustrate the deficiency of deep interpretation of visual images aside from its supposed textual meanings and to speak of the importance of addressing these deficiencies in order to promote “student capacities and skills”. The authors are mainly speaking to professors of higher education in hopes of stressing the value of visual literacy, by not simply bombarding students with images, but rather by helping the students with “instructional strategies” to truly see an image for more than just its superficiality.

Assaf, Lori, and Rubén Garza. "Making magazine covers that visually count: Learning to summarize with technology." Reading Teacher 60.7 (Apr. 2007): 678-680. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ. 13 Apr. 2008
<<http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=24656579&site=ehost-live>>.

The authors demonstrate magazine cover design as a unique methodology for summarization and promotion of visual literacy amongst upper elementary school students. They stress the importance of not only textually summarizing a written work for the expansion of comprehension, but summarizing its main points by designing a magazine cover in which they incorporate the appropriate principles of design, including color, fonts and layouts. Assaf and Garza used magazine design as a mode to promote visual literacy in order to illustrate the complexities of comprehension and how comprehension of written text can be easily facilitated with the use of “multiple strategies” similar to those employed by professional graphic designers. This article was written for the expressed purpose of informing other educators about this particular methodology.