Introduction

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Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. (Berger, 2006, p. 681)

Berger speaks of the way human language evolves—first sight and recognition, then speaking, later reading and writing. Yet he also evokes a truth that is lost in the trample of teaching the formal literacies—that visual images play an integral part in understanding. The elements of literacy are commonly described as *reading, writing, speaking,* and *listening. Viewing* is mentioned in passing, if at all. When visuals *are* utilized, it is often in service of the other literacies. We speak of visualizing as a reading comprehension strategy, or discuss the importance of crafting strong images in writing. But notice how we indicate understanding in everyday speech: "I see what you mean."

We think of visual literacy as describing the complex act of meaning making using still or moving images. As with reading comprehension, visually literate learners are able to make connections, determine importance, synthesize information, evaluate, and critique. Further, these visual literacies are interwoven with textual ones, so that their interaction forms the basis for a more complete understanding. The twenty-first-century learner must master this intermediality of images and text in order to interpret an increasingly digital world (Lapp, Flood, & Fisher, 1999).

Ultimately, a fundamental goal of education is to teach effective communication. It is the message that lies at the heart of communication, be it verbal, written, or pictorial, and the challenge to any communicator is to create accurate messages and interpret the messages of others with equal skill. Hobbs (1997) describes a set of assumptions about the key analytic concepts of literacy in the age of information:

- All messages are constructions.
- Messages are representations of social reality.

- Individuals negotiate meaning by interacting with messages.
- Messages have economic, political, social, and aesthetic purposes.
- Each form of communication has unique characteristics. (p. 9)

Whether they are discussing a novel in a literature circle, listening to a peer describe a visit to the zoo, reading a math textbook, or writing a science lab report, their success is dependent on their ability to master the message. As well, in each case there is likely to be a visual element. The novel may have illustrations, the peer may bring a video of the trip, the math textbook may contain a diagram, the science lab report may include sketches of what was observed. Yet these elements of the message are unlikely to be addressed in any formal way.

Hobbs' key analytical concepts also describe the critical literacy stance necessary for interpretation of print and visual messages. The emphasis of critical literacy is less about acquisition of skills and more about questioning the author's purpose, searching for alternative meanings, and considering the role identity plays. A critical literacy lens assumes that all text is constructed from a particular viewpoint, and that the reader or viewer must analyze the message for who or what is left out. This may include discussions on power, marginalization, and perspective. Again, visual literacy assumes an important position. How does a fictionalized account of a historical event influence understanding? Films like *Amadeus* and *Amistad* have been criticized for playing loose with the facts. How do illustrations influence the meaning of the text? The picture book *Nappy Hair* (Herron, 1998) was at the center of a controversy in New York City because photocopied illustrations from the book were viewed by some as demeaning to African American children. Do comic books and graphic novels constitute an appropriate genre for classroom instruction? School boards, curriculum directors, parents, and teachers all over the country view these materials in very different ways. It would seem that critical literacy, as it applies to visual literacy, is a stance that educators must assume on behalf of their learners.

This book was conceived as a means for examining visual literacy in just that fashion. We invited authors and researchers from around the country to describe their view of an aspect of visual literacy. We gave them a tall order—provide background information on the subject, describe ways in which they use visual literacy tools in their instructional practices, and give the reader some ideas for how to apply it to his or her own classroom.

In Chapter 1, Lynell Burmark introduces visual literacy as a tool for learning. She discusses principles, such as the effect of color, and advises teachers on how to use visual images in the classroom. She fills her own work with images to illustrate these elements—truly a case of a picture being worth a thousand words.

In Chapter 2, Jacquelyn McTaggart, a teacher with 42 years of experience, provides an overview of graphic novels, perhaps the fastest-growing

literary form in publishing today. Students seem to know about this—we've all seen them squirreled away in backpacks. Yet relatively few teachers use graphic novels regularly in their classrooms. This may be in part because they are unfamiliar. This chapter will rapidly build your comfort and confidence with this form of visual narrative.

After this overview of graphic novels, James Bucky Carter challenges the status quo of text selection in the classroom in Chapter 3. A growing body of knowledge suggests that visual literacy is essential in the twenty-first century, yet resistance to the form persists, especially at the secondary level. Carter's provocative chapter may not elicit universal agreement, but it is certain to get the conversation started about policy and practice in what students read and don't read in our classrooms.

In Chapter 4, Kelly Chandler-Olcott extends the conversation about visual literacy with a review of anime, an animation art form originated in Japan, and manga, its print-based form. Millions of young people view and create anime, yet they are rarely seen inside classrooms. Chandler-Olcott provides a history of these forms and explains that a view of multiple literacies requires inclusion of the visual language of anime. She also describes the perspectives of consumers of anime and manga and provides examples of how they can be used in K–12 classrooms.

Rocco Versaci takes a close look at comic books in Chapter 5, beginning with their history and the role of censorship in the 1950s in undermining the integrity of this genre. The author goes on to describe the visual and literary elements to be found in high quality comics and provides readers with three of his own lessons on the use of comics to teach visual literacy.

Moving from comics to political cartoons, in Chapter 6 Thomas DeVere Wolsey analyzes this form using the perspectives central to visual literacy. Long valued by history teachers for educating learners about the political, social, and cultural climate, the author further expands political cartoons by drawing on experiential learning theory and iconography. In addition, he describes a framework called Cartoon Thinking for understanding this form.

In Chapter 7, Lawrence R. Sipe deepens our understanding of visual literacy through a close look at picturebooks. Although we are surrounded from birth by them, this literary form is rarely understood for its visual sophistication. Sipe presents a scholarly analysis of the aesthetics of picturebooks, as well as examples of the language of young children as they utilize visual literacy to make meaning.

Lawrence Baines discusses film as visual literacy in Chapter 8. The author offers examples of student work in vocabulary, grammar, and writing as it relates to moving images. This is not a version of a film appreciation class—Baines is interested in using the medium to broaden students' understanding of the language of film, and to turn it into a form of expression and creativity. Seen through the lens of film, literacy through reading, writing, and speaking takes a fresh approach.

In Chapter 9, Paula Kluth rounds out the book by describing the ways in which visual literacy tools can be used to extend the understanding of students with disabilities, and to provide them with another means of expressing what they know and think about a subject. The examples of student work included in the chapter broaden our understanding of the power of visual literacy.

You may be new to visual literacy as a classroom practice, or expert in the subject. In either case, we hope that the ideas described in this book provoke discussion and ideas. We are reminded of an item in Robert Fulghum's *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten:* "Remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned—the biggest word of all—LOOK" (p. 3). We invite you to do the same.

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