



VISUAL ASPECTS
EDITORIAL
By Dr. Lesley S. J. Farmer

Libraries are often thought of a haven for print, and most people associate print with text. However, a world of information is captured in print-based images: diagrams, illustration, art reproductions. Education libraries are more apt than other university library sections to include visuals because of picture books – and well as posters, maps, videos, and other visuals. Increasingly, teachers and librarians recognize the power of visuals as an educational tool. Osa and Musser's article on posters highlights the impact of posters in teaching and learning.

Visuals can be generalized to include the entire library itself. The visual message of library facilities, including furniture and signage, evokes a learning atmosphere in the best circumstance. Dickinson and Cogdell's article on transforming a materials center into a school library implies that schools need to have active learning communities rather than staid resource warehouses.

The case for visual literacy runs deeper, however. Nelson provides an overview of visual literacy and research-based evidence for visual instruction. She explores the semiology of visual artifacts, and asserts that visual instruction needs to be taught explicitly, particularly in a pluralistic society. Furthermore, library instruction should include visual aids to help students remember and apply concepts more readily.

The topic of visual aspects of education libraries exceeds these articles. Wade's collection of web sites touches on other important issues: art collections, digitizing images, access to visual images, cataloging visual resources, web page design, to name a few.

Visual information also has cultural and gender implications. Do pre-service teachers have access to images from non-Western cultures – and women artists? Does information literacy instruction include critical thinking about societal contexts of visual images?

When people come to the library, they make a decision about staying and using libraries within the first four minutes. How does your library look? Is it professional – and welcoming? Does public art or student artwork festoon the library? Do staff dress appropriately to reflect that same warm professionalism? Are library publications "branded" to give a consistent look and message? Does the library web portal carry out that theme and allow for facile visual navigation? (And does it include captions for all images so that visually-impaired users can understand the graphical aspects of the site?)

As societies reinstate visual images as a viable form of information, libraries need to embrace this approach to ideas. Particularly in diverse settings, libraries need to show the universal – and culture-contextual – nature of visuals.