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## **Integrovanie vizuálnej gramotnosti vo výtvarnom vzdelávaní**

### **Integrating Visual Literacy in Art Education**

Daniela Valachová

#### **Abstract**

The article deals with the topic of literacy and visual literacy in the context of theoretical anchoring and characteristics. We adhere to generally accepted definitions of literacy and further develop our theory at the level of visual literacy as a new, contemporary concept of visual arts education at the present times.

**Keywords:** Literacy. Visual literacy. Education. Art education.

#### **Introduction**

The concept of visual literacy has been emerging for the last fifty years as the answer to various developing styles of communication and as the influence of visual media, too. The mentioned terminus technicus is not newly emerged, however, in our territory it appears less commonly. Visual literacy as a scientific term was used for the first time in 1969 at the first national conference on visual literacy (Rochester, USA). The main content of the conference was to enforce the concept of visual literacy and related educational fields. It is necessary to emphasize the fact that the origin of the term visual literacy developed together with the media and modern society expansion. We might claim that visual literacy and the need to understand it is rather old. We consider the explanation of basic characteristics of visual literacy and possibilities/limits of integration into art education to be the alpha and omega, that might support art education teachers to accept the mentioned concept and to involve it in their teaching.

#### **Visual literacy as the basis for learning**

The term Visual literacy was, according to the International Visual Literacy Association, created in 1969 by John Debes, who defines it this way: Visual literacy refers to a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory

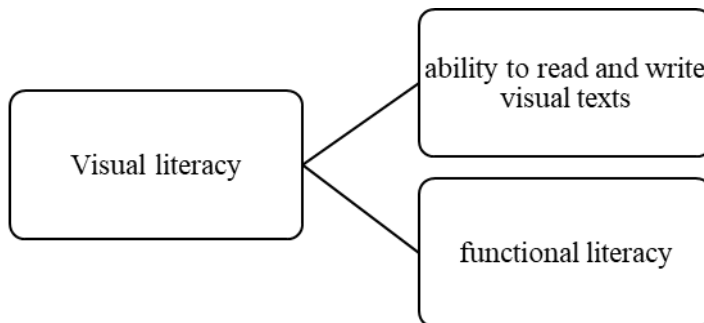
experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, symbols, natural or man-made, that he encounters in his environment. Through the creative use of these competencies, he is able to communicate and he is able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communication. Such as the term literacy, visual literacy is a dynamic and constantly changing term, too.

The influence of images increases in society. A word is not the information bearer anymore, an image has become the medium and that increases the need to develop visual literacy. With globalization and rise of the post-modern times and pluralism in various spheres the need to develop ability to decrypt visual images of different cultures and subcultures also expands. To develop visual literacy via artistic and verbal interpretations by searching for associations among visual culture, artworks of contemporary artists and social, cultural and philosophical-aesthetic questions despite the fact that such focused art tasks are more demanding. To comprehend and to bring traditional and new techniques, media and design, closer. To support creative work with images and visual signs (Minichová, 2020).

### **Visual literacy in the system for obtaining literacy**

There are various definitions which describe the characteristics of visual literacy. We might define them in two basic divided groups that we depict in the graphic elaboration.

Scheme 1: Defining visual literacy



*Source: own elaboration*

Most general definitions describe visual literacy as the ability to read, write and create visual images. These definitions appertain to a reading literacy better than the ability to conclude the meaning of visual images. These definitions are generally accepted.

However, the concept of visual literacy has a greater direction heading towards functional literacy. Visual literacy refers to a group of visual skills that one can develop using the simultaneous observation and apperception of other sensory experience and the integration of these perceptions. According to Vančát (2002), currently, visual literacy is understood to be a defense from manipulative social effects of visual communication, mainly in media and advertisement.

Development of the mentioned abilities is fundamental for standard learning processes. When the defined abilities are developed, they enable a visually literate person to distinguish and to interpret visual actions, objects, natural and artificial symbols that he meets with in his surroundings. Thanks to the creative use of these skills, one can communicate with others. They also enable one to appreciate the quality of visual communication, to comprehend and to enjoy it.

Visual literacy involves the set of abilities, from simple identification, naming what one sees, to complex interpretation on contextual, metaphoric and philosophical levels. Objective understanding is the premise of much of this literacy, but subjective and affective aspects of knowing are equally important. Visual literacy usually begins to develop as a viewer finds his own relative understanding of what he confronts, usually based on specific and circumstantial evidence. It eventually involves considering the intentions of the maker, applying systems for thinking and rethinking one's opinions, and acquiring a body of information to support conclusions and judgments (Yenawine, 1997).

### **To exist in visual culture**

Visual literacy in such domain definitely is perceived as a competence necessary for „survival“. Fulková (2013) claims that visual culture is represented as a set of mutually overlapping spaces, fluctuating in a constant movement without a specific and fixed center. The complexity of definitions of this phenomenon is related to a great field in which visual literacy is applied. The domains of **visual arts, art culture and visual culture** represent the expanding interest of art education in the area of an interest. Art education, as perceived traditionally, was primarily dealing with relations to arts, meaning art culture which also included folk art artifacts, productive art and everyday aesthetics. One of the current challenges for art education is specially the interest expansion in the area of visual culture, including the creative industry expressions, communication via media and advertisement (Vančát, 2002).

The existence of a human being in visual culture points out the possible inter-linkage with other fields, other branches. Visual literacy enables us to read meanings in their wide spectrum of visually perceived elements, from natural to artificial ones. Thus, it is complicated to define the term. From the

position of art education, which is part of the Art and culture educational area according to current curriculum documents, it seems evident that art education with its interests covers visual literacy, in arts and in visual culture as well.

The issue of visual literacy in the pedagogical context also includes, for example, mathematics, physics, IT (Kuřina, 2009), geography (Řezníčková, 2010). In the referred-to fields, visual literacy is seen as an ability to read scientific visual texts and to understand the information they contain (diagrams, maps...).

There occurs a very specific situation in the field of visual literacy when art education and technical fields overlap. In both, visual literacy is connected with the skill of mental manipulation with visual imagery and space imagination. Within the history of art education, the connection was prominent, mainly as an integral part of the subject of drawing listed in the curriculum from 1953.

Cultural significance of the subject in its development brought a great variety of strategies of expressing into which, through excursion, a student's thinking acquires greater flexibility (Čarný, 2020). Gradually, this connection in the content of the subject disappeared and was preserved only in connection with the topics of architecture and spatial artwork. To this day, however, pedagogues refer to cooperation with art education while exploring the declining abilities of modern students to mentally manipulate the visual imagery and spatial imagination ability (Molnár and Tláskal, 2012).

## **Conclusion**

Different definitions of visual literacy describe the phenomenon that the competence of a visually literate individual does not stay isolated within a specific object, field, but ought to be used in one's everyday life and be applied on the world which surrounds it (the concept of persuasive communication). Thus, the interest in visual literacy ought not to be isolated, but on the contrary, it ought to expand as a model of contemplation about facts and situations that may be applied in any kind of one's life situation.

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**Prof. PaedDr. Daniela Valachová, PhD.**

Department of Art Education

Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Education

Račianska 59, 813 34 Bratislava

*valachova1@uniba.sk*