Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship
Revue canadienne de bibliothéconomie universitaire

Unframing the Visual: Visual Literacy Pedagogy in Academic Libraries and Information Spaces

Melissa Rivosecchi 🔴ᴰ

Cite this review

Book Review: *Unframing the Visual: Visual Literacy Pedagogy in Academic Libraries and Information Spaces*

Murphy, Maggie, Stephanie Beene, Katie Greer, Sara Schumacher and Dana Statton Thompson, eds. *Unframing the Visual: Visual Literacy Pedagogy in Academic Libraries and Information Spaces*. Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2024, 452pp, $172.00

Melissa Rivosecchi

Concordia University Library

Keywords: *academic libraries* · *higher education* · *pedagogy* · *visual literacy*

Unframing the Visual: Visual Literacy Pedagogy in Academic Libraries and Information Spaces aims to provide a space for critical conversation about visual literacy (VL) pedagogy within higher education. *Unframing the Visual* acknowledges that visuals are part of one's everyday life, meaning visual information is also a part of every scholarly discipline, not only within art history and the fine arts. This book seeks to unframe the visual by supporting lifelong learning and engagement with visuals regardless of discipline.

The book mirrors the four-part structure of the *Association for Academic and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Visual Literacy in Higher Education*, a companion document to the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (VL framework). These sections include Learners participate in a changing visual information landscape, Learners perceive visuals as communicating information, Learners practice visual discernment and criticality, and Learners pursue social justice through visual practice (Association of College and Research Libraries 2022). Each part is prefaced by an introduction written by the section's editor, discussing how the chapters connect to the theme.

Although the last part has a social justice focus, the editors emphasize not siloing social justice and remind the reader that it can be found in all aspects of visual literacy practice. Of note, chapter 12, "Unforeseen Consequences of Visual Literacy: Alternative Mechanisms for Creating a More Inclusive Environment", offers a critical view of the VL framework by examining ableism in academic libraries and the

importance of interrogating the language used in creating policies and documents such as the VL framework itself.

The editors of this book include Maggie Murphy, Stephanie Beene, Katie Greer, Sara Schumacher and Dana Statton Thompson. Murphy is an Associate Professor and Art and Design Librarian at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro; Beene is an Associate Professor and the Fine Arts Librarian for Art, Architecture, and Planning at the University of New Mexico; Greer is an Associate Professor at Oakland University; Schumacher is an Architecture Image Librarian at Texas Tech University; and Thompson is a Research and Instruction Librarian at Murray State University. Each editor was a member of the task force that created the *Framework for Visual Literacy in Higher Education*: Companion Document to the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. From 2019-2021, the task force conducted empirical research by interviewing various stakeholders to determine the trends, opportunities, and challenges for visual literacy in higher education.

Published by the ACRL, the intended audience of this book are librarians, information professionals, and information educators working in academic library settings. Based on some of the case studies presented in the book, I would also suggest that educational technologists and other professionals working in higher education and GLAM sectors will find this material relevant to their work with learners.

All chapters are well-researched and offer a wide range of cited resources relevant to the topic and scope of the chapter. Each chapter references the *ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* and/or the *Framework for Visual Literacy in Higher Education*: Companion Document to the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. The chapters' bibliographies provide a great reading list; I took note of several scholarly books and articles that will help me further explore various aspects of visual literacy pedagogy.

A highlight of this book is the collaborative efforts forged among librarians, librarians and faculty members, as well as librarians and student researchers. These collaborations support the *ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* as "Visual literacy is typically a collaborative endeavor, involving faculty, librarians, curators, archivists, visual resources professionals, and learning technologists. Integrating visual literacy into the curriculum requires partnerships and shared implementation strategies across academic departments and units" (Association of College and Research Libraries 2011). The chapter authors range from associate professors to librarians and archivists supporting art history, studio arts, education, social sciences, and health sciences subject areas, to name a few. The depth and range of knowledge of each author, along with the examples from various disciplines, would allow most readers to make strong connections to the content and their own work.

Almost every chapter offers some level of Creative Commons licensing, which is particularly great to encourage readers to continue the scholarly conversation and expand knowledge in the field of visual literacy pedagogy. Many chapters feature case studies and examples of visual literacy workshops or projects carried out in academic institutions of varying sizes. Some surveys and findings are included as appendices. Many of the lesson plans shared in this book detail student learning outcomes and how they connect with the VL framework (knowledge practices and dispositions). These are especially helpful as they can allow readers to explore innovative ideas for their own teaching. Several case studies also provide discussion questions that could be beneficial to librarians looking to find new ways to facilitate and lead engaging discussion about visual literacy with their learners.

I had not read the *ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* nor the *Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education* prior to reading this book. Instead, I wanted to know if the book could stand on its own, without requiring the reader to know the background documentation. This book does a solid job of providing thorough explanations of the VL framework. For example, each chapter directly quotes the competency standards and/or provides explanations as to how their research connects, responds, and/or critiques the VL framework. Although it would not be necessary to read the documents to understand the book, I would nevertheless recommend reading the Companion Document as it provides the specific knowledge practices and dispositions for each of the four themes of the framework and how they extend to the *Framework for Information Literacy*.

Overall, this book would be beneficial to any librarian or information professional wanting to explore visual literacy pedagogy in more detail as it provides practical, thought-provoking case studies that can be used as a starting point to review and evaluate one's own methods in dealing with the complexities of visual literacy pedagogy. Readers will be able to draw inspiration from the anthology and adapt activities to their own context, which will, in turn, promote further development of the VL framework.

REFERENCES

Association of College and Research Libraries. 2022. "The Framework for Visual Literacy in Higher Education: Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education." Accessed September 14, 2024. https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/acrl/content/standards/Framework_Companion_Visual_Literacy.pdf

Association of College and Research Libraries. 2011. "ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education." Accessed September 14, 2024. https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/visualliteracy