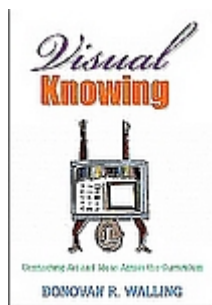


Art Connections

A review of



Visual Knowing: Connecting Art and Ideas Across the Curriculum

by Donovan R. Walling

Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2005. 90 pp. ISBN 1-4129-1448-5 (hardcover); 1-4129-1449-3 (paperback). \$69.95, hardcover; \$22.95, paperback

Reviewed by

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Throughout history, art has served as a visual record of cultural, social, and political issues. On a personal level, art conveys the emotions, thoughts, feelings, and conflicts of the artist. Because of the increasing isolation, dehumanization, and overintellectualization of our culture, there is an increasing focus on affect and getting in touch with the inner self (Brooke, 1997). Art also has been used as a means of self-expression for centuries. People have used art materials to create images and connect them to feelings and bodily states that bring into the open thoughts that may have been only vaguely sensed.

In his book, *Visual Knowing: Connecting Art and Ideas Across the Curriculum*, Walling takes a unique approach to viewing the application of art to a variety of disciplines such as science, industry, math, and technology. This is an unusual marriage between the left and right brain approaches to education. Walling attempts to bring these two opposite spheres together to show how art can be used across the curriculum. Not only does Walling compare art with the typically left-brained activities of the educational curriculum but he also moves to the personal level by discussing art and the family, religion, conflict, and

performance. Essentially, this is a comprehensive view of how art can be used across the board in education.

Visual thinking is not a new concept. Arnheim (1969) stressed the following:

In fact, educators and administrators cannot justify giving the arts an important position in the curriculum unless they understand that the arts are the most powerful means of strengthening the perceptual component without which productive thinking is impossible in any field of endeavor. (p. 3)

Later, Arnheim (1986) commented that this unity and diversity between art and other disciplines can be bridged by stating that the arts give importance to those fields that go beyond differences in style, media, and culture. In fact, visual images carry messages across time and space, a point that Walling drives home with his examples in each of these diverse disciplines.

Walling's book is only 90 pages long, sometimes leaving the reader yearning for more information. If these chapters could be expanded, it would be helpful for educators. As it is written now, it can only be used as a supplemental text for instructors in diverse fields.

On the positive side, Walling's chapters are well written and end with some critical thinking questions that can stimulate a Socratic dialogue in classes. For instance, in his chapter on art and mathematics, one of his visual thinking questions is as follows:

Although most people think about airline or car seats when ergonomics is mentioned, ergonomics actually is concerned with all manner of intersections between humans and their surroundings. What are some other applications of ergonomics and how do they relate to art and design in today's world? (p. 46)

One of my favorite questions in the text that fosters critical thinking and an interesting debate is as follows:

Artistic beauty can be found in everyday objects, whether they date from ages past or are part of daily life today. They embody culture, place, and history. Other common things serve similar functions in other fields of study. For example, a diary, such as one written by Samuel Pepys or Anne Frank, can attain the status of literature. What are other ordinary things that can take on added meaning when studied with an eye to history, literature, art or culture? (p. 14)

Another positive aspect of the text is that Walling includes online images and resources at the end of each chapter. These online sites further demonstrate the connection between the discipline and art.

Not only does Walling make historical connections between art and various disciplines, he makes connections to recent events, such as the tragedy of 9/11. He discusses the competition among architects to create a World Trade Center monument. The design that was chosen “combines trees, structures, water, and open spaces that speak to the feelings of loss created by the destruction of the monumental World Trade Center building complex” (p. 18).

In his discussion of art and family, Walling notes that in Egypt, women and children were drawn smaller than men. In art therapy, smaller images of people suggest that the individuals drawn are less important, a reflection of the culture at that point in time. Although women's contributions to art, specifically depictions of the family, are underrepresented, Walling cites the National Museum of Women in the Arts located in Washington, DC (www.nmwa.org) as a museum that provides a broader view of women and the arts.

Walling does an excellent job of introducing the reader to historical pieces of art, their locations, and their significance to various fields of discipline. This book will be of interest to educators, art therapists, creative therapists, and any individual with an interest in the arts, and I highly recommend it.

References

- Arnheim, R. (1969). *Visual knowing*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.
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- Brooke, S. L. (1997). *Healing through art: Art therapy with sexual abuse survivors*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.