

TAKE A PICTURE, IT WILL LAST LONGER! USING AN INTERACTIVE IMAGING TOOL TO ENHANCE YOUR TEACHING

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*It's like a photograph. It's like a dream I had
Vivid and fading fast, it was never meant to last.¹*

How we perceive language and thought, and how the two are mixed together can be a complex, sometimes confusing, process. How do those small, black lines on the page make sense? They are not just letters combined to make a word, a sentence, or a paragraph. They are images, symbols of what we perceive them to be: a sound, a color, or a picture. “All people think visually, continually translating words and ideas into pictures so that concepts and thoughts surface” (Gangwer, 2009, ix). In teaching information or visual literacy skills, librarians can adapt simple imagery tools to support their curriculum, assessment, and evaluation, as well as bring into focus the theories of student-centered learning, learning styles, and the role of images and social media. The combination of text and imagery, breaking down barriers and utilizing images as instructional materials, assessment tools, and evaluation supports will be the framework for this article.

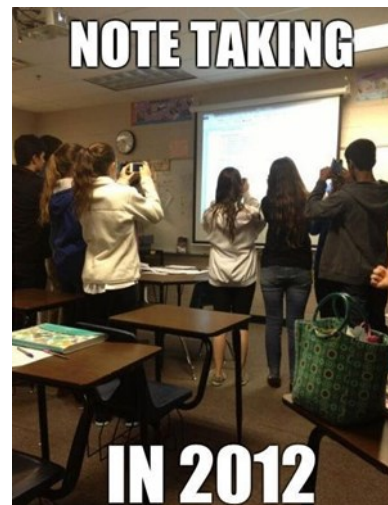
LEARNING THEORIES

Many psychologists and learning theorists, including Vgotsky, Dewey, Kolb, and Piaget, subscribed to the idea of constructivism, the premise that learning is an active experience and social interaction with peers, parents, and teachers can be a more enriching, substantial exercise than learning alone. As a member of the social community, learners (children and adults) tend to be more fully engaged in the authentic, practical acts of learning, and flourish in an environment that provides opportunities to share, create, and apply through inquiry-based applications. The basic premise of constructivist learning theory states that learners are generally self-directed, and learn best through combining many different aspects, senses, or experiences—such as text and imagery—to fully grasp concepts and practice them. Reading alone doesn't mean recognition, memory, or understanding, but training and real-

world experience brings together these ideas— through active learning.

Librarians and students need to transform their one-shot instruction session from the passive, Socratic methods of classrooms past and adapt many forms of technology, peer collaborations, and other interactive methods to fulfill their educational requirements, including note taking (see Figure 1 from Dunn, 2012).

Figure 1: How Students Take Notes



Photographs of a situation or social activity, a screen shot of a database, or even of a classroom setting, help to recreate a situation, allow for creative applications, or capture a meaningful image in order to frame the context for the learning. Modern methods of teaching and technology applications have been instrumental in shifting the classroom focus beyond the walls of the school to a global society, where sharing pictures around the world in an instant is normal practice. Taking

pictures of virtually every experience, whether deemed meaningful or not, has become daily (hourly) practice, and posting to Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, Flickr, Tumblr, or any of the other social media sharing sites is second nature to many. This makes it even easier to use an image-tagging tool like ThingLink as many students will be able to adapt to the purpose, and use skills and social interactions to change their learning experience.

VISUAL LITERACY

What is important about using pictures or images in instruction? It seems in many cases that students are bombarded with images and text, on almost continual basis. However, information literacy doesn't encompass all of the learning outcomes or standards that students would be expected to know, do, or apply. Visual literacy, as defined by the ACRL in 2011:

A set of abilities that enables an individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and visual media. Visual literacy skills equip a learner to understand and analyze the contextual, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, intellectual, and technical components involved in the production and use of visual materials.

Metros and Woolsey (2006) state this definition as their basis for insisting that students' visually literacy be an institutional imperative, and "if not confronted, the evolution of visual literacy will continue to bang along haphazardly as students carry literacies gleaned in their K-12 education and pop-culture lifestyles into their tertiary learning experiences" (p. 80). The authors discuss three main strategies that teachers and librarians at all levels can explore: multimodal fluency (e.g., basic visual design vocabulary; design context (i.e., provide places, people, and resources needed in the academic community to become visual producers); and visual judgment (i.e., developing constructive critiques of visual information). It is through these contexts that librarians can (and should) utilize the basics of information literacy strategies and skill sets to apply to a visual literacy context, asking questions like: "Does this image show reality?", "Is this representative of the context?", and "What is the source?".

Using ThingLink

ThingLink (<http://www.thinglink.com/>) is a Finnish-American company that developed an image-interaction tool that allows users to upload photos from various sites or platforms, and transforms them through interactive tagging hotlinks (embedded links within the image) that users can add links to URLs, information, videos, music, or other content to further engage the viewer. A ThingLink basic account is free with limited features (a 50-image maximum per account), but can be upgraded for business use, or you can write to ask for an educational expansion. Salil Wilson, writer for the ThingLink Blog: (<http://thinglinkblog.com/tag/teacher/>) describes the following features available in the basic account (see Table 1).

Table 1: ThingLink Features in Basic Account

On-site tag editor	ThingLink tag editor lets you define interactive hotspots inside an image — from a THING (an object, a person, or a place) to a LINK (a site with more information, a blog post, or anywhere you like). The editor works on your own enabled site as long as you are logged in to ThingLink.
Easy Sharing	ThingLink makes images shareable: anyone can share a favorite image via Twitter, Facebook and email, and embed them on websites and blogs with tags.
Image community	ThingLink provides real-time statistics on user interaction with images. We measure image and tag-specific views, hovers, and clicks. This helps you evaluate the successfulness of interacting with you participants, ie. students.

Table 2: Sample User Statistics from ThingLink Site



ThingLink In Practice

In thinking about the practical applications for ThingLink, I decided to use it to take pictures of various service and interest points around the library (Figure 2). I downloaded the pictures to my ThingLink account from my iPhone, and began to add the interactive tags (these enable a simple click or hover action anywhere on the photo), and a box pops up to allow for the addition of information and a URL. I then embedded the HTML code in my LibGuide, and within about 30 minutes, I had six images with interactive tags available as self-guided online tour of the library facility. Images are then able to be shared through the LibGuide as well as through other social media (e.g., the Library's Facebook and Twitter pages), and if enabled, students who view the pages can interact or even add tags. I have currently disabled these student features on the facility images, but plan to make several of the other pages that I have created a more robust, social environment for students to add content, links, or provide feedback on what might be valuable images for them to be able to use in their research, orientation, etc.

Other librarians have begun to use ThingLink to various features of database pages (see Figure 3). By offering a more interactive view and explanation of the features and options in databases like Ebsco, librarians can offer an alternative to covering all of these items during a short instruction session, the image is readily available for those students who need immediate information or may have missed class, and it afford the opportunity to connect to other resources that students may not recognize as valuable, such as writing guides, course resources, e-books, etc. Given these examples, it

seems that ThingLink and other imagery creating or modifying tools (e.g., Wordle) can not only begin to give librarians a creative way to do instruction, but allow them to move past the basics of information literacy to visual literacy, and ultimately, to metaliteracy (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011), and framing their educational experience in not only words, but pictures.

Notes:

1. Nova, Heather. "Photograph" (2004)

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Figure 2: Picture of University Library Reference Area with ThingLink Embedded Tags



ThingLink Image stats:
 Embeds: 2, Image Views: 508, Tag Clicks: 5, Tag Hovers: 232

Figure 3: Ebsco Screenshot with ThingLink Embedded Tags

