

# Reviews

## Working with Images

B. Goldstein

Cambridge University Press 2008, 242 pp., £22.05

ISBN 13: 978 0 521 71057 2

## Images

J. Keddie

Oxford University Press 2009, 140 pp., £19.50

ISBN 978 0 19 442579 7

We live in a world of images. This much is obvious from the vantage point of 2010, with 'visual society', 'visual generation', and 'visual culture' yielding over 87, 56, and 30 million hits, respectively, in a Google search on 4 January 2010.

In a sense it might seem equally trivial to assert that we teach in a world of images. After all, it is plain impossible to imagine a contemporary foreign language coursebook without numerous photographs and other kinds of artwork. What is more, the contemporary palette of EFL course components features some par excellence visual tools: flashcards, story cards, word cards, and so on.

In spite of the above, precious little has been written on images from the EFL/ELT perspective in recent years, with the notable exception of the 2007 volume by Arnold, Puchta, and Rinvuluceri. The few widely quoted publications on the topic are over 20 years old (cf. Maley, Duff, and Grellet 1980; Stevick 1986; Wright 1989). Images have certainly not been in the foreground of ELT reflection, in marked contrast to the amount and quality of treatment that they have received elsewhere (cf. Ewen 1988; Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; Lester 2002; McDougall 2002; Ambrose and Harris 2005; Mitchell 2005; and Wigan 2006, to name but a few).

Hence, it comes as no surprise that we as teachers and teacher trainers truly welcome the two most recent publications on using visual materials in foreign language teaching: Ben Goldstein's *Working with Images* and Jamie Keddie's *Images*.

Their nearly simultaneous appearance is notable in itself. Should one treat it as pure coincidence, or rather as a *signum temporis*, the result of the visual having gone digital, interactive, and truly global? On a more practical level, the two volumes invite immediate comparisons, including scope, coverage, potential overlap, and target audience.

The authors of the two resource books under review here strive to provide TEFL practitioners with a wide range of instantly usable, clearly explained, and in most cases, simple yet engaging activities in which various types of images are utilized. Goldstein and Keddie both highlight the importance of visual input in the modern ELT classroom.

In his reflective and insightful introduction, Goldstein draws on the theory of Gunter Kress and Theo van Leeuwen who appeal for a much more serious, in-depth treatment of image in education, as a major vehicle of meaning in contemporary culture. Goldstein rightly points out that 'a lot of classroom images are peripheral to the main activity . . . and are often treated simply as decoration—as background to the more important text' (p. 1). He even goes a step further by telling the reader/teacher that his aim is to 'rehabilitate the image and place it at the centre of our attention' (p. 2), which in our view is a fresh starting point. The author promotes teaching visual literacy, encourages experimenting with images, and analyses the powerful impact of imagery while making it all relevant to most current teachers of English or CLIL teachers.

In the introductory chapter the reader is also reminded of how different methodologies have approached the use of visuals and how technology has already enriched our teaching capabilities.

In his shorter, though equally observant, introduction Keddie depicts one of his favourite images: a snap showing the tallest man in medical history. This personalized prelude is to demonstrate how commanding and potent images can be. Keddie moves on to enumerate a variety of reasons behind using images as 'a language learning resource'. He quotes Ewen (1988) where the latter writes ' . . . if you really want to move people, don't use words, use images'.

However rudimentary the message may sound, we believe that many a classroom will benefit from the teacher putting this premise into practice. Keddie also makes mention of language voids and the fact 'an image implies the language and thus creates a void to be filled in' (p. 7) and concludes that by using stimulating pictures we, teachers, can help students communicate and produce more language. He stresses that '... the subjective process of interpretation may work best as a dialogic, collaborative effort' (p. 11).

As for the main part, the two books differ significantly, though there are parts that overlap in terms of their treatment of visual materials.

*Working with Images* is innovatively divided into two larger sections 'Activity types' and 'Image types', which are then subdivided into four and then three chapters, respectively. The first section concentrates on different ways of handling images from describing and interpreting them to creating and visualizing them. The other one presents the reader with an overwhelming choice of image types from basic signs and symbols through advertisements to art images, which we found exceptionally useful and inspiring. Both the sections include cross-references when activity types and image types overlap as well as refer the reader to the accompanying CD Rom.

The latter features hundreds of images in pdf format, organized under the seven chapter headings. They supplement and extend the collection of images printed in the book itself and have been preselected to facilitate the tasks that rely on using a particular image. Needless to add, they are a valuable resource in their own right for the teacher to dip into.

A truly outstanding feature of the CD Rom is its fantastically useful webliography, listing virtual photo archives (including photography, art, press images), manipulated image banks (including spoof advertisements and the like), image-sharing sites, and the incredible image-creating software (which allows you to create posters, calendars, mosaics, magazine covers, captions, frames, badges, etc., with your own images).

The 'Activity types' chapter offers activities that, on the whole, will suit both experienced and less experienced teachers. Each activity is supported by detailed notes and simple instructions of how to run the exercise. The inclusion of the outline of each activity is noteworthy as well since it informs the teacher straightaway whether or not the activity is appropriate given the local context.

Most activities are generously furnished with up to six variations, each of them exploiting a different angle of the visual material the students are dealing with. Some of the variations are website searches, which direct students to sites such as Flickr, Google, or Picassa where they can do some visual research on their own.

We feel that the sections on interpreting and creating images make Goldstein's contribution truly unique. The activities presented here allow the students to interact with images in a playful way and to become visual 'artists' with an opportunity to display their creativity. A lot of the activities invite students to use modern technology to conceive their works of art such as mosaics or distorted images. Needless to say, these activities function as a springboard for classroom discussions, pair or group work. Very innovative—well done!

The 'Image types' chapter explores the power as well as the social and cultural background of tens of thousands of symbols and pictures we are bombarded with on a daily basis. The author—with his wonderful array of creative activities—helps the teacher guide the students through the world of images. The learners will have the chance to 'play with' the images on coins, stamps, banknotes, street signs, smileys, flags, and insignia. They will be given the opportunity to engage in the analysis and creation of advertising as well as art images including subvertising, graffiti art, or music covers.

Undeniably, this chapter focuses on less standard visual materials but in our view this only helps the book achieve its aims: namely to teach visual literacy in an innovative, student-friendly, and interactive way.

As for *Images*, the book has a notably different structure. It is divided into three larger sections, devoted to receptive skills, productive skills, and grammar and vocabulary. Each section suggests some activities that are to make the teaching of the language and the skills more attractive by virtue of visuals. Most images are exploited not for their own sake, like in *Working with Images*, but more as a warm-up or follow-up to a certain linguistic task. With no value judgement intended, it could be argued that this design feature underscores Keddie's overall conception of the role of images as tools supporting and enhancing foreign language learning, in marked contrast with most of Goldstein's material, where, as we noted above, the image takes centre stage, with language learning happening either in the process of or as a consequence of studying the image as such.

This key difference in the underlying concept of the status and role of image in EFL makes the two volumes under review potentially appealing to very

diverse audiences, critically depending on individual sensitivity, degree of pedagogical confidence, and last but not least the extent to which one's learners are indeed willing to embark on the road to increased visual literacy.

Before we conclude, let us note two residual points. The first is a course-planning query and concerns the relative proportion of work on visuals when compared with the other potential modalities, especially aural. Neither of the two authors seem to address this issue explicitly, while our experience suggests that an average EFL professional routinely faces the need to unselect from the countless choices currently on offer.

The second point is an observation and concerns the fact that both volumes restrict their scope to still images only. This is surprising at first glance, but the variety and sheer number of activities (together with their variations) in both volumes offer more than sufficient excuse for this exclusion; let us hope that a parallel volume on dynamic, interactive images will be forthcoming before too long, given the existence of YouTube and numerous other video banks, and the wide availability of free software for processing, manipulating, and exchanging multimedia files.

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**doi:** [10.1093/elt/ccq006](https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccq006)