



FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS

Art integration bridges communication gaps with “visible thinking.”

By Cheri Sterman

Teachers in culturally diverse classrooms often struggle to meet students' linguistic needs. Consider, for example, the fact that students and parents in the Los Angeles Unified School District speak 92 languages. Bilingual and trilingual teachers are already rare, and teachers typically don't speak the dozens of languages many students speak at home. With increasing pressures and an overwhelming range of resources, educators ask what route to take.

A strategy to bridge communication gaps and increase student achievement is encouraging learners to make their thinking visible through art. Art-integrated education (or art-infused education) is a cross-curricular way to engage with the arts to build knowledge and competency in reading, math, science, social studies, art, and other subjects. Sketching, designing, drawing, painting, and constructing tangible models provide students with a visual voice.

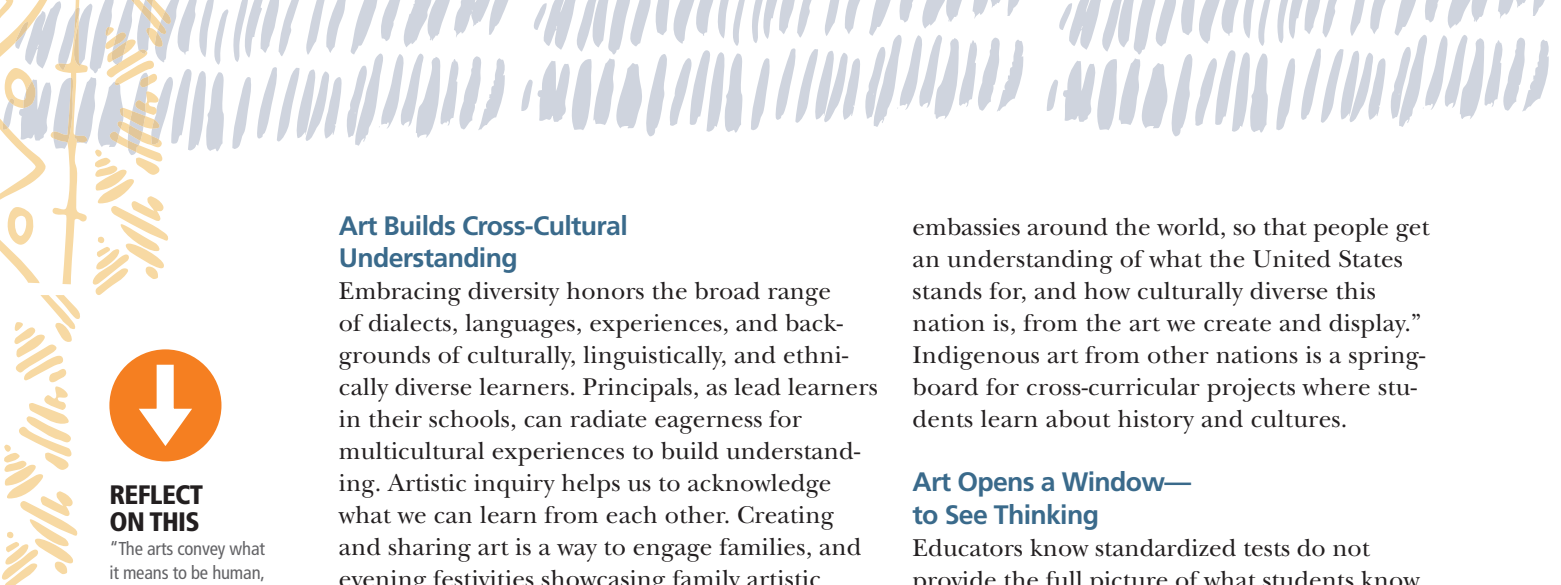
A 2010 report by the New York State Education Department Office of Bilingual Education and Foreign Languages, *Art as a Tool for Teachers of English Language Learners*, states, "By integrating the arts and art-making into English language teaching and learning, students will develop and deepen their understanding of their own and others' human experience. In combination with reading, writing, speaking and listening, the arts can open doors for high levels of analysis and also challenge students to explore themselves and their surroundings, and thus find avenues for sophisticated comprehension and communication." The report makes a specific recommendation for visual arts, which "enhance language development by offering non-verbal methods for communication and understanding, by providing a platform for students to create mental images."

Visualization Builds Reading Comprehension

In *Becoming Part of the Story! Refueling the Interest in Visualization Strategies for Reading Comprehension* (2013), Björn DeKoning and Menno van der Schoot describe the important cognitive process of forming visual representations of objects or events that are not physically present, but are described in a text. Internal visualization creates mental images, they explain, and external visualization involves drawing. They recommend visualization as a reading comprehension strategy, saying that it is consistent with "embodied cognition" and that "[h]igher order cognitive processes such as language are grounded in the same [sensory and motor systems] that control direct perception and interaction with the surrounding world." They explain that "helping students to visualize while reading gets them to activate perceptual and/or motor experiences stored in long-term memory that are relevant to the events described in the text." They emphasize that teachers should give readers reflective prompts so drawings provide context and detail and demonstrate problem-solving.

Claudia Leopold and Detlev Leutner's 2012 study published in the *Learning and Instruction Journal* found that, with scientific texts, having readers construct or draw an image was "superior to other reading comprehension strategies (i.e., main idea selection, summarizing)." What is more, the What Works Clearinghouse reports that "visualizing is a useful component of multiple-strategy instruction."

Art is a universal language.
Art conveys meaning regardless
of the "tongue" spoken.



REFLECT ON THIS

"The arts convey what it means to be human, challenge the intellect and provide rich experiences in analysis, exploration, reflection, observation, imagination, experimentation, and communication."

— New York State Education Department Office of Bilingual Education and Foreign Languages report, *Art as a Tool for Teachers of English Language Learners* (2010)

Art Builds Cross-Cultural Understanding

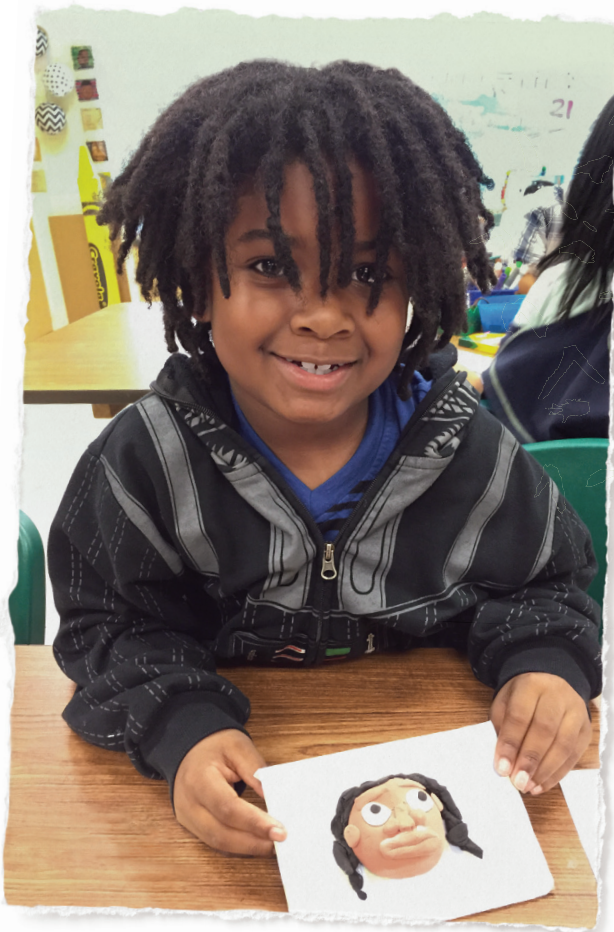
Embracing diversity honors the broad range of dialects, languages, experiences, and backgrounds of culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse learners. Principals, as lead learners in their schools, can radiate eagerness for multicultural experiences to build understanding. Artistic inquiry helps us to acknowledge what we can learn from each other. Creating and sharing art is a way to engage families, and evening festivities showcasing family artistic traditions are well-attended, joyous celebrations of diverse cultures. Schools see increased family engagement when they open their art studios as learning labs.

By setting a schoolwide goal to adopt a global perspective, teachers can tap into children's natural curiosity with art-infused projects to help students explore their personal narratives and deepen their understanding of self and others. Robert Storr, chairman of the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies (FAPE), explains that art builds cross-cultural understanding within the international community. FAPE brings "American art into U.S.

embassies around the world, so that people get an understanding of what the United States stands for, and how culturally diverse this nation is, from the art we create and display." Indigenous art from other nations is a springboard for cross-curricular projects where students learn about history and cultures.

Art Opens a Window—to See Thinking

Educators know standardized tests do not provide the full picture of what students know, understand, and can do. With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), educators have opportunities to expand how students are assessed. Portfolios and formative assessments, where student and teacher reflect on the work, can provide meaningful insights into student thinking. Additionally, the new National Core Art Standards have four strands—create, present, respond, connect—aimed at examining student work, especially interdisciplinary projects. The standards examine what and how the student created and presented the work, responded to peers' work and feedback, and connected this project to cross-curricular content and context.



Through the Champion Creatively Alive Children grant program, NAESP and Crayola award 20 schools annually with grants valued at \$3,500 to implement arts programming. The deadline for the 2017 grant awards is June 23, 2017. Visit www.naesp.org/arts-education for more information about the grant and additional resources on art integration.

Educators new to art integration often have an epiphany about the depth of thinking they see—but had missed before—when they adopt this teaching strategy.

The President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities Turnaround Arts Initiative report (2015) demonstrates that visualization in art-integrated projects helps high-risk students, but it is effective for all learners. Neuroscientists point out that how humans learn is universal and unique. John Medina’s book *Brain Rules* (2014) highlights the importance of physical motion, sensory integration, visual stimulation, and exploration as key drivers for the human brain. Art integration enriches learning by engaging students—and their brains—with hands-on visual and sensory experiences fueled by curiosity. The brain is not wired to easily memorize answers others have already figured out. Rather, humans are wired to solve problems, move, see, and explore.

Communicating Visually Spurs Teacher Development

Most adults think visually. Lake Superior State University studies report that 65 percent of people are visual learners, but only 30 percent are auditory learners. Yet 70 percent of classroom instruction and professional development is lecture. Retention and engagement are higher for adults and children when information is shared visually—particularly when learners are engaged in art-making.


Faculty can benefit, too. Sketching can help teachers share thoughts and feelings that may be difficult to talk about—until they describe what their drawings say. Consider the power of asking teachers to draw “where in the school collaboration radiates or is dim, creative bright spots shine or are muted, communication flows or gets stuck.” Sketches can lead to courageous conversations faculty need to have to improve practice. Are these conversations mostly congenial (e.g., agreeable or people-pleasing) or collegial (e.g., intentionally collaborative with colleagues even when the topic is difficult)? Only when staff members move into collegial discourse and coach each other will the needs of diverse learners—including adults—be met.

The rational evidence for including visualization and art integration in teaching

is compelling. And if the rational voice isn’t enough to persuade, visit an art-infused school to witness the energy, rigorous learning, and joy. During a staff meeting at Arnold Elementary School in Arnold, Maryland, a third-grade teacher told principal Shauna Kauffman, “Now that we are an art-integration school I can’t imagine ever going back. I feel like we have the strategies to help us meet the needs of our diverse learners.”

Get Started

Take these steps to integrate an art-infused, culturally responsive teaching strategy at your school.

1. Identify teacher leaders who can help build creative capacity schoolwide.
2. Empower this creative leadership team to share art-integration success stories and coach colleagues.
3. Visit an art-integration school and inquire about its processes and insights. Ask “why” and “how to” questions you’ll likely hear from your teachers and parents when you introduce this teaching strategy to your learning community.
4. Include a visualization exercise in staff meetings—a 10-20 minute experience where teachers respond to a prompt visually and then share how their art conveys meaning.
5. Invite a community arts organization or local museum educator to share cultural insights based on their collection, with a focus on helping teachers meet the needs of diverse learners.
6. Invite parents to share art experiences that would help students understand their heritage and traditions.
7. Ask students to share their thoughts about how art integration helps them learn.
8. Apply for a National Association of Elementary School Principals/Crayola Champion Creatively Alive Children creative leadership grant. The \$3,500 can help fund your school’s art-integration plan and build capacity in your schools. 

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