

## Creative Literacy: A New Space of Pedagogical Understanding

Kelly A. Hrenko and Andrea J. Stairs, University of Southern Maine

**Abstract:** This research has begun to examine how teachers in Maine meaningfully infuse art and Native American epistemologies through visual arts and writing across curricula to enhance student learning and engagement. Teachers explored a perceived new space of pedagogical possibility within visual arts and American Indian curricula as cross-disciplinary models through a project entitled *Many Hands*. This new space was largely facilitated by the act of writing, once it was realized that writing deepens and enhances the practice of noticing and describing, both in the visual arts and in culture-based curricula. Just as visual art posits that art making can promote critical thinking in all subject areas and encourage intellectual curiosity, the inclusion of writing in art and academic classrooms similarly promotes exploration and risk-taking, as well as the appreciation of multiple perspectives.

### Context of the Study

#### The Intersections of Art, Culture and Writing

Paula<sup>[1]</sup> sat in a chair placed in the middle of a half circle of desks overflowing with 25 eighth and ninth-graders. She patiently waited until voices quieted and students seemed settled and ready to listen. Paula began by introducing herself in her Native Maliseet language, giving her Native name, place of birth, home-reservation, tribe and an offering of respect to Maliseet people who came before her. She ended with a thank you to the students for hosting her in their space. Any students who were not listening before were certainly listening now; in fact, the entire room was struck with interest in hearing a new and different language being spoken by a new and different person. Students smiled as they continued to study Paula, waiting to hear exactly why she was visiting their world languages and cultures class on this day. Paula knew this was a rare moment of quiet amongst puberty-stricken youth, so she took advantage by beginning a story about when she was a young girl living down-east,<sup>[2]</sup> as an entry into the theories behind the work the class will be soon embarking upon (Hrenko, Field notes, Oct 7, 2011).

The excerpt above shares the beginning of Paula's work as an artist, poet and Native woman working within the project *Many Hands*. This research further explores the work and interactions of Paula and Mr. Joseph, as they make connections to visual arts and creative writing in one public junior high school classroom. These various relationships are not only framed within ideas of combined knowledge and multimodal methods (Arnold, 2005) but also work to illustrate the symbiotic

---

#### *Across the Disciplines*

A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37514/ATD-J.2012.9.3.10>

wac.colostate.edu/atd

ISSN 554-8244

*Across the Disciplines* is an open-access, peer-review scholarly journal published on the WAC Clearinghouse and supported by [Colorado State University](#) and [Georgia Southern University](#). Articles are published under a [Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license](#) (Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs) ISSN 1554-8244. Copyright © 1997-2017 The WAC Clearinghouse and/or the site's authors, developers, and contributors. Some material is used with permission.

relationships that truly exist in learning. Solving many serious and important problems of the world demands interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledge, supplying the rationale for comprehensive curriculum integrations to take place in the classroom (Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996). At the core of an integrated curriculum is the idea that together, teachers and students must address the circumstances in which they find themselves, and together construct their classroom worlds (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005). An integrated curriculum, in the context of this research, consists of the merging of visual art, Wabanaki<sup>[3]</sup> cultures, and writing. Additionally, this project has worked to integrate school subjects not only within a classroom, but also with a community and artist culminating in a student-curated community art exhibit.

We have come to strongly believe that an arts-integrated approach can be a path for school change by "learning in and through the arts" (Arts for Academic Achievement, 2008). Subsequently, one of us researches ideas of art as a core classroom approach and espouses a teaching philosophy that fuses educational approaches with interactions among people and forms of representation (Bequette & Hrenko, 2010). The other is deeply committed to improving middle and high school students' literacy skills and cultural awareness through authentic literacy learning opportunities and choice, which writing across the curriculum (WAC) and creative literacy support. We believe a focus on writing across the curriculum has the potential to facilitate the exploration of art through the lens of cultural beliefs, family structure, heritage, tradition, social values, and norms of students and teacher.

### **The Intersections of Visual Art**

The President's Commission on the Arts and Humanities (1997) asserts, "Education in the arts is more important than ever. In the global economy, creativity is essential...*The best way to foster that creativity is through arts education*" (p. IV). Many educators are hopeful that arts learning can improve student performance in other subjects, and that curriculum integration is a practical idea in the crowded school day (Chapman, 2001). Arts integration is also recognized as advancing the principles of good teaching practice, through the consistent use of hands-on and project-based learning, connecting big ideas and concepts across subject areas, centralizing student understanding and experience, and developing classrooms as learning communities in every subject (Eisner, 1991). Additionally, cognitive science implicates arts processes in the fundamentals of *thinking*, not just in art, providing theoretical support for the arts integration across the spectrum of subjects (Eisner, 1991).

Academic performance, class attendance, problem-solving skills, social development, and positive behavior all increase with arts programs (President's Commission on the Arts and Humanities, 1997). When academics are framed in terms of creative activities, academic performance improves for all, including at-risk students. Research also suggests that integrated arts curricula significantly increase self-regulatory classroom behaviors as well as positive self-concept (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999). Reflective practice and formative assessment are key processes in the cycle of art making. Both are needed in schools, where students are taught to be fearful of mistakes, rather than learning from them, and where summative assessment in the form of multiple choice tests dominates. For many students, the use of both visual images with writing provides a link to engaging them more thoughtfully, critically, and creatively, and also provides multi-modal forms of comprehending, processing and understanding the various and complex ideas of art and culture (Childers, Hobson & Mullin, 1998).

## Writing Across the Curriculum

Over the last few decades literacy scholars have been more systematically theorizing and researching the connection between writing and learning that has been called "writing to learn," "writing in the content areas," or "writing across the curriculum" (Armbruster, McCarthey & Cummins, 2005, p. 71), which arose in the 1970s. Some literacy scholars claim that "students can use writing as a tool to develop concepts and generalizations, promote critical thinking and problem solving, analyze and reflect on their thinking and understanding, gain new insights, and contribute to learning and remembering content information" (Armbruster et al., 2005, p. 71). The research base supporting secondary WAC continues to develop (Brewster & Klump, 2004), as studies have more often been conducted in higher education settings than 7-12 schools, perhaps because many middle and high school content area teachers view themselves more as content area experts than as teachers of literacy and language skills and feel constrained by time to cover the content they are responsible for teaching (Manzo, Manzo, & Thomas, 2005, p. 7). Nevertheless, it has become clear that schools need to be "making writing an important tool as well as a central skill in the secondary school curriculum" (Newell, Koukis, & Boster, 2007, p. 76), not just in English language arts classes, but in all academic subjects.

Affirming Vygotsky's (1962) fundamental connection between thought and language, the National Council of Teachers of English (2004) has argued:

When writers actually write, they think of things that they did not have in mind before they began writing. The act of writing generates ideas. This is different from the way we often think of writers—as getting ideas fixed in their heads before they write them down....Regardless of the age, ability, or experience of the writer, the use of writing to generate thought is still valuable; therefore, forms of writing such as personal narrative, journals, written reflections, observations, and writing-to-learn strategies are important. (para. 13 & 14).

We, too, strongly believe in the potential for writing to generate ideas and illustrate one's thinking.

The recent adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Maine will necessitate that writing across the curriculum becomes the norm in K-12 education. The CCSS require that all students be "college and career ready in literacy" (p. 3) by high school graduation. The anchor standards for writing in grades 9-12 focus on developing proficiency in three types of writing: arguments, informative/explanatory texts, and narratives. Additionally, one aspect of college and career readiness described in the CCSS is that students will "come to understand other perspectives and cultures" (p. 7). Learning and working with people from divergent cultures and experiences has become an expectation in the 21st century, and reading and writing across the curriculum can facilitate this understanding.

As Gere (1985) has argued in her edited book featuring secondary teachers using writing-to-learn across the curriculum, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to WAC that will most effectively improve students' content knowledge and writing. However, effective approaches to writing instruction integrate process theories of writing, as well as explicit instruction in writing strategies, collaborative writing, and inquiry activities (Robb, 2010, p. 42). The recursive nature of the writing process approach supports the critical thinking and independence necessary for students' success. Atwell (1998), a literacy scholar who teaches adolescent writers through a student-centered, workshop approach where freedom of choice and expression are valued, states, "I nudge students to explore the social, political, and ethical issues that encircle personal experience. When they have avenues for

considering the shape of the world around them, ...students will take on the world in their writing" (p. 78). A project such as *Many Hands* supports the CCSS and promotes writing across the curriculum in authentic ways as students explore Native American schooling and culture through art and written expression.

## **Native "Schooling"**

This project layers the stories of Maine American Indians within art and writing, and thus, the understanding of our historical context of Native issues in schools for centuries is important to reference. The profundity of schools' destructive effects upon Native people, both individually and collectively, not only in the immediacy of their operational existence but in the aftermath as well, was and remains by any reasonable estimation incalculable (Churchill, 2008). The systematic policy of using education to remove culture from young Native people coupled with the banning of religious practices, resulted in the loss of language, the loss of art, and destructive behaviors in several generations of Indian people (Peacock & Wisuri, 2002). These remain issues in schools today, where dropout rates of Native students hover near 40 percent (Quality Education for Minorities Project, 1990). Given this schooling history and its impact, pedagogy that validates and embraces students' culture by bringing it into the classroom seems particularly appropriate and necessary. Specifically, it is with this history of cultural genocide in mind that many Maine teachers, artists, and writers work to include Native teachings in all classrooms. And, it is with renewed hope and value for Native cultures that these teachers and artists continue to learn about and include various perspectives in their classrooms. It is with this reality in mind that we embarked on our collaborative arts and writing project, *Many Hands*.

## **Methodology**

### **Arts-Based Research and Ideas of Polyvocality**

Dewey held the view that art is a particular quality of human experience that to some degree could be present in any interaction an individual had with the world. Art, Dewey (1934) had argued in his epic *Art As Experience*, is not the sole possession of a unique class of objects hung in museums, but a living process that humans experience when a certain quality of attentiveness and emotion is part of the engagement. Arts-based research is supported by this idea and positions art as offering new ways and possibilities of perceiving the world. Art-based texts have qualities that abandon the obsessive quest for certain and total knowledge that transcends a fallible, human perspective, but instead is based on an epistemology of ambiguity that seeks out and celebrates meanings that are partial, tentative, incomplete and sometimes contradictory, originating from multiple vantage points (Barone, 2001). Such an epistemological stance seems appropriate to a project of educational inquiry whose purpose is the enhancement of meaning and the embracing of many voices, rather than a reduction of uncertainty.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data collection and analysis are based on methods of social science portraiture, an arts-based process for representation of qualitative data (Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). As a research method it blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience (Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis 1997). We use methods similarly found in portraiture in order to describe Paula's interactions in each class session, such as

her subtle uses of culture; relationships between her and the school environment; life stories of Native Americans in Maine; and the relationships among students, families, and their communities.

The data collection is qualitative-based and includes field notes from each classroom visit, students' reflections, teacher feedback, and artist feedback in both written and oral formats. The data reflect the fact that the arts are persuasive in the way they provide access to forms of experience that are difficult to secure through other representational forms (Eisner, 1991). For example, the ability to experience emotionally the conditions of life in school, a classroom, a home, a process, is something that artistically rendered forms can make possible. The students have additionally been given an opportunity to reflect on their learning and experiences at the very end of the process, in conjunction with a critique of their artwork, led by their classroom teacher. The data analysis examines the connections of actions, thoughts and words by the teacher, student and artist.

Many arts-based researchers (Eisner, 1991; Eisner & Powell, 2002; Barone, 2001; Bequette & Hrenko, 2010; Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997) are cognizant of the merits seen by most when research means traditional, scientific, and objective, yet arts-based research embraces the idea that research is not objective and should be pluralistic in its approach in order to truly represent the multiple stories that exist and the many ways one could retell those stories. It is within this idea of a polyvocal (Barone, 2001) voice that arts-based research and arts-based texts offer much to this article.

### **Research Site: The State of Maine**

Like with any research site, the history of Maine has strongly informs the lens through which we have viewed this work. Arts-based research is closely aligned with notions of place and histories of place, as the context from which we have perceived and found our viewpoints. The state of Maine has a long and complicated history of art, Native relationships and Indigenous child welfare, which all greatly contribute to the meanings and understandings of this research.

The state of Maine has fostered the work of many artists and writers for centuries. Oceanside cliffs and austere fields have become landscapes on the canvases of Winslow Homer and Andrew Wyeth. Romantic woods and quaint towns have grown into essential characters in the poems and novels of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Henry David Thoreau, and E.B. White.

Since the 1800s Maine has drawn not only artists, but also wealthy patrons of the arts. Affluent collectors have come to experience first-hand the iconic landscapes of Maine made famous through the art and writing of the time. These wealthy summer people vacationed on Maine's coast and built extravagant summer cottages, many of which have been passed down through generations and still used today. Thus, Maine acquired its longstanding state slogan, "Vacationland."

### **People of the Dawn**

Over the last 600 years, the state of Maine has overseen the destruction of more than 20 Native Maine tribes state wide, to the current situation of just four remaining Native Bands; the Micmac, Maliseet, Penobscot, and the Passamaquoddy (Paul, 2011). These four bands are collectively known as the Wabanaki, or "People of the Dawn." Maine's history as Vacationland has come at the expense of Maine's Indigenous peoples and their land. For Maine to attract artists and wealthy vacationers to its coastline, it has required pristine and 'untouched' land. Consequently, Native Peoples of Maine have experienced forced relocation and massive genocide in order to acquire such pristine coastal property. According to the Maine historical society records, beginning in the mid-1700's parcels of coastline had been re-allocated to white colonizers based on the number of Native peoples they had

killed and removed from each land lot (Sockbeson, 2009). They had based real estate market on the exchange of Indigenous scalps for land on which to build.

Maine also has a more contemporary history of forced assimilation and Native relocation. Beginning in the 1950's and lasting through the 1970s, Maine and the Child Welfare League of America conducted an experiment where they took hundreds of Indian children from their families to raise them in white homes, thinking it "better for them" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2012). In Maine the rate for Indian children taken from their families and placed in white foster homes had become higher than most other states (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2012). In 1978, the federal government passed the Indian Child Welfare Act that gave Indian children more protection and recognized that children's tribal citizenship is as important as their family relationship (Paul, 2011). The Maine child welfare system has been working with tribes to have an improved relationship and to work better with all Native people. However, it has taken until 2012 for the Maine government to fully acknowledge their role and formally work towards an organized reconciliation. Maine's Governor signed the Truth and Reconciliation (TR) mandate on June 29th, 2012. The TR commission will work to uncover and document the stories of past wrongs in an effort to improve relationships between Native peoples and the Maine child welfare system.

Maine currently claims some of the smallest numbers of Native peoples in the Nation (United States Census, 2010). However, Maine's Indigenous populations remain a resilient, creative and active community of peoples today. Through the hard work of many, in 2001 Maine Native communities has passed the state law LD 291, which mandates the teaching of Maine Native cultures and histories in all K-12 classrooms. This project is part of the curricula support needed in order to teach Maine's Indigenous cultures and histories in our schools, as well as to provide additional visibility and voice to the injustices still happening in our communities.

## **Participants and Timeline**

We have partnered with one teacher and two of his eighth and ninth-grade world language classes. Each class had 18-25 students, including a diverse mix of language speakers, countries of origin and economic status. There is one self-identified Native Maine student in one class, who has a strong family connection to one of Maine's American Indian reservations. The research took place in Maine's largest and most diverse district, serving students with a wide range of abilities. The district has ten elementary schools, three middle/junior high schools and four high schools serving nearly 7,000 students in kindergarten through grade 12. Students attending these schools speak more than 60 languages, and multilingual students represent about a quarter of the district's enrollment.

The particular school site of this project serves 700 primarily low-income students, 22 percent of whom are English language learners. This school is the first project-based Expeditionary school<sup>[4]</sup> in the state and among the best in the country (Expeditionary Schools, 2012). Since its start in 1998, test scores have risen with students continually outscoring the state average (Ulichny, 2000).

Both a participant and partner, The Telling Room is a non-profit creative writing center in Portland, Maine, dedicated to the idea that children and young adults are natural storytellers. They believe that the power of creative expression can change communities and prepare our youth for future success. The mission and record of the Telling Room (TR) working with local schools and classrooms, where writing across the curriculum flourishes, is an important component of our project. The Telling Room provides three guest writers who have worked with the two classrooms over the span of five months through classroom visits and installation of the culminating exhibit. Paula and the Telling Room each spent roughly four hours a week in the classrooms over a three-month period.

## Many Hands

### Chain Reaction: Trade Blankets Cryptographs

Paula: How would you react if I came to the door of your home and told everyone who lived there they all had to move to the town of Biddeford, right now, because you all had brown hair? Don't worry about your house or land; it is mine now. So don't come back, thinking home will be waiting here for you. You can take only what you can carry, and you have to be out by tomorrow night, or I will come back with the police and arrest you. How would you feel? ... The people in the government that made the Native peoples leave tried to help a little, by giving them some things, once they saw that people were having trouble [with the forced relocation]. One thing they gave were blankets to keep warm. These blankets were important things not only for warmth, but for trade also. Native peoples could trade blankets for food, tools, and other needed things amongst each other, as well as with white colonizers. Trade has been a big part of Native life and survival. Blankets for trade or "trade blankets" are what we are going to talk more about today and we will be doing an art and writing project based on what we learn and know about trade blankets. (Hrenko, Field notes, Oct 7, 2011)

Paula's introduction to trade blankets through the story of forced relocation, albeit brief and abbreviated in historic details, served the purpose of getting students to think about what it means to be homeless, needy, and a victim of racism. Students responded thoughtfully and seemed shocked at the fact this happened in Maine, but it soon occurred to them that may be why many Native peoples continue to live on Indian Island,<sup>[5]</sup> one of the largest recognized reservation lands in Maine.

Students learned about trade in Native culture and about trading posts and objects that were traded for certain values between colonizers and Natives, such as blankets. The conversation then transitioned to specific patterns seen in blankets across the U.S. by many different tribes, and how the patterns helped identify the tribe of origin. Paula showed students examples of both traditional and contemporary patterns and motifs of Wabanaki people. Students looked at woven blanket patterns, motifs on birchbark containers and canoes, patterns on clothes and jewelry, and then worked to identify similarities in these patterned objects and the relationships to patterns seen in the natural world. Students accepted the challenge of designing a trade blanket, taking into consideration the designs and motifs that would make it highly tradable as well as accurate regional patterns that would be on a traditional New England trade blanket. However, students were to adjust some of their patterning to reflect a symbol that merged both Wabanaki motif with a motif they created, something that identified them, just as traditional Wabanaki motifs identified certain unique things about living in New England.

### The Writing Process: Integrating Art, Culture and Writing

I walked up to the cold-hearted man. As he stared at me, I felt a chill go down my spine. I handed him twenty beaver furs. In return, he handed me a blanket. I took the blanket and wrapped the fabric around my body. As I walked away, I felt the eyes of the cold-hearted man aimed at the back of my head (Ian, eighth-grade student reflection).

The guest writers from the Telling Room led the students through scaffolded writing exercises as a way to process the newly learned art and culture content, as well as to provide a way for students to respond, question, and express their understandings. Students began by simply recording

themes: *home* (what is home?), *the natural world and environment*, *blanket as warmth*, *blanket as collateral*, and *blanket as art*. An essential part of the writing process is, Britton claims, "explaining the matter to oneself" (Britton, 1970, p. 46).

The writing sessions purposefully overlapped with Paula's visual art visits. The desire not to disconnect the writing from the art was something we all agreed was crucial: we wanted the art-making and writing to happen in tandem, back and forth, as a concurrent text, visual, and verbal conversation (Childers et al., 1998). For students to work effectively within the expressive mode of writing and thinking was our goal. During these art and writing intersections, students worked to deliberately connect their art spaces to their writing. Both Paula and the writers merged the visual methods of writing and artmaking with connecting ideas of theme and story, as a way to process understanding.

These illustrated ideas based on writing to learn assume that language for learning is somewhat different from language for informing (Moffett, 1968). The goal of this method is rooted in Piaget's view of the learning process, which is to allow students to expand their image of the world; i.e., their "cognitive structure," by connecting their existing understanding to new experiences. As they encounter new materials, they must either assimilate the materials into their image or they must restructure their image to make it compatible with the new information. The key point, according to many, is that these connections must be personal, and they can occur meaningfully in no other way (Britton et al., 1975). Expressive language, both oral and written, promotes this open-ended exploration of new experiences.

Along with processing ideas through visual text and artmaking, students were also put in the position of making curatorial decisions on what writing should be displayed with their visual blanket. Paula asked them to choose what text would accompany their blankets and how they would incorporate the text into their public exhibit—which writing builds-on and/or adds meanings to the visual, or what did the visual inspire? Some groups decided to record their voices reading the writings and have that play out loud at the exhibit. Others decided to compose their text within the blanket design, as part of the motif and patterning. Others organized their text around the blanket in a non-linear, organic manner, which required the viewer to "read" the art and text in a specific order as determined by the group. One group designed their text to mirror Wabanaki motifs, such as the double curve, that they floated next to their blanket in the exhibit. These decisions represented the higher-order thinking required of integrated arts, culture, and writing curricula.

Telling stories could be an arts-based approach to further address issues of race and social justice. In this project, stories served multiple functions. Namely, we all had stories and were innately tuned to be listeners of stories. Paula's stories implicated us all in a way that clarified our connections and helped us embody our relationship to the Native arts and cultures we were learning about. Storytelling, like any aesthetic engagement, helped bring us closer to issues that were usually seen as separate from us, or that we were afraid to see as part of our lives, such as racism and genocide (Bell, 2009). Thus, stories became a positive and powerful way to bring everyone to the conversation, validating all experiences, and dialoguing about our various positions in this complex society. Students realized that they were telling a story about what they learned, understood, and wanted to share with others. Through this project they were asked to explore what it was like, how it felt, and what they would do if affected by racial bigotry. Storytelling was examined as both a vehicle of perpetuated racism as well as a tool for uncovering bigotry at various levels. We used Bells' (2009) curriculum model as a way to guide students through a process that allowed them to articulate a response, which helped create meaning for the students across curriculum. Students were invited to choose their medium and method (visual arts, writing, sound/voice) in order to present and demonstrate this new understanding to others, from their acknowledged perspective. Literacy

scholars have acknowledged that choice affords students some authority in school and is a critical aspect for motivating reading and writing (Atwell, 1998; Robb, 2010).

In this project students moved from confusion to clarity and from concrete to formal use of WAC. Poetic language and story provided a unique perspective on experience, which was valuable because it allowed students to place personal interpretation into a social and cultural context and allowed the dominant social and cultural interpretation to be subject to personal understanding. Thus, the process by which individuals and communities became interdependent was active and informed and not passive. Such was the purpose and power of the poetic function of language (Young et al., 2003) in this project.

Students personally responded, both in writing and in art, to the injustice of American Indian treatment through time, illustrating Atwell's (1998) assertion that students will "take on the world" (p. 78) when provided opportunities to use productive language arts (e.g. writing and visually representing). Many students embodied the feelings and thoughts of those who have been victim to racism or hate. Others translated pieces of their lives into parallel understandings from a current context that culminated into personal narratives. In visual art we witnessed the use of personal symbol merged with traditional Wabanaki symbol to create a new version of "trade blanket." These multiple perspectives illustrated the depth of understanding students developed as learners, writers and art-makers.

### **Theory to Practice**

This work intentionally spanned school disciplines through the integration of art, while also infusing Indigenous epistemologies and literacy practices. As in work done by Childers and Lowry (2005), the act of interpreting and experiencing text through visuals became a powerful process of cross-content, cross-cultural understandings. Further, both art and writing provided meaningful opportunities to heighten perception, engage emotions, deepen thought, and broaden one's understanding of the world. This work showed that if students were provided regular opportunities to work in the expressive mode with new and challenging subject matter, they could improve their critical abilities significantly. As Britton (1975) stated, "The process of writing situates students' responses to art in the wider world as the writing itself shapes thought at the point of utterance" (p. 7).

Multimodality, a result of such work, promotes student learning in a myriad of ways, unachieved solely by product-based curriculum. With time and depth of materials, students have become better at expressing themselves both in writing and through visual ways, yet it has also become evident that many feel more comfortable with the method of using words to give expression to ideas, while others are more apt to organize their interpretations visually (McGuire, 1968). The collaborative nature of this project has made explicit these different strengths that students contribute through their group work. Many students have reflected on the process of a shared experience: "Working in groups helped make the project stronger because more people helped with the things they are good at, and they gave [others] suggestions to help." Others recognize the various strengths their group members have contributed to the project: "...The challenge we faced was that my group had so many good ideas that we did not know which to use...but I love how all the blankets turned out and I think the writing really strengthened it all." The art, at times, also has served to motivate better writing skills, and vice versa. Ideas have become more specific and powerful when artmaking and writing are coupled, and when several sensory and expressive modalities (visual, auditory, oral, written) are combined in a lesson, the potential for perceptual understanding and expression are greatly enhanced (Arnold, 2005).

Finally, vague or complex notions become more concrete as the narrative is extended and refined (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984). The creative process can become another avenue for students to retell, reinterpret, and redefine the multiple themes of violence, turmoil, racism, and cultural genocide in a visual and verbal vocabulary that can be not only understood but constructive to the learning process (Arnold, 2005). Our observations, conversations, student and teacher feedback all tell us that art and WAC have worked as a mediator of social and community relationships not only in the classroom but outside as well through the community exhibit that has been on display to the general public. Evidence of social impact through the start of a community dialogue has been illustrated in the student comments, from both the classroom and public exhibit, expressing their desire to learn more about the Native communities of Maine: "It made me want to understand more about [Paula] and Maine tribes"; "I did not know that Wabanaki people had such a difficult past in Maine"; "I wish I knew more." Teachers attending the exhibit have been equally reflective, with many commenting on the quality and emotional impact of the work they had viewed: "I am blown away by the depth of content and the excellent [student] writing"; "...I am tearing up"; "wow! powerful stuff."

After the exhibit opening, we hosted a panel of Native artists, students and scholars who spoke on their perspectives about Native identity, art and culturally relevant curricula. This exhibit provided a place and time to acknowledge the work done by the students and gave them authentic audiences, enabling them to witness their work reaching out to others and to have a part in furthering the conversation outside their classroom. This form of assessment and reflection, through audience and exhibit, validated the student work in a way that a mere grade assigned to a paper or artwork by an audience of one (the teacher) could not accomplish. Thus, this work not only moved the students forward in their thinking, but it also assisted in moving the community forward in forming new knowledge and multiple images of culture, identity and art. This project also lent substantiation to the claim that the art-literacy connection in education is a concept whose turn had come as a timely methodology for multicultural classrooms (Moore & Caldwell, 1993). The growing popularity of multi-genre papers (Romano, 2000) may be one step toward further integrating art, culture and writing across the curriculum in 9-12 classrooms.

In the end, the incorporation of art and writing into all content can be most meaningfully achieved when those who teach are provided multiple opportunities to communicate their assumptions and expectations, as well as acknowledge their fears. Professional development for teachers not educated in art and writing practices would promote and "give permission" to those educators outside of the visual art and literacy fields whose work parallels and/or would greatly benefit from writing and art-making across the curriculum.

## References

- Armbruster, Bonnie B., McCarthy, Sarah J., & Cummins, Sunday. (2005). Writing to learn in elementary classrooms. In Roselmina Indrisano & Jeanne R. Paratore (Eds.), *Learning to write, writing to learn: Theory and research in practice* (pp. 71-96). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Arnold, Alice. (2005). Confronting violence through the arts: A thematic approach. *Art Education*, 58 (4), 20-33.
- Art for Academic Achievement, (2008). *Arts for academic achievement handbook*. Minneapolis Public School District.
- Atwell, Nancy (1998). *In the middle: New understandings about writing, reading, and learning* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook & Heinemann.
- Barone, Tom. (2001). *Touching eternity: The enduring outcomes of teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Bell, Lee Ann. (2009). The story of the storytelling project: An arts-based race and social justice curriculum. *Storytelling, Self, Society*, 5: 107-118.
- Bequette, James & Hrenko, Kelly. (2010). Culture-based arts education. In Jon Reyhner, Willard Sakiestewa Gilbert, & Louise Lockard (Eds.), *Honoring our heritage: Culturally appropriate approaches to teaching indigenous students*. Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University Press.
- Bloome, David, Carter, Stephanie, Christian, Beth, Otto, Sheila, & Shuart-Faris, Nora. (2005). *Discourse analysis and the study of classroom language and literacy events: A microethnographic perspective*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Brewster, Cori, & Klump, Jennifer. (2004). *Writing to learn, learning to write: Revisiting writing across the curriculum in northwest secondary schools*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Education Laboratory. Retrieved from [http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm\\_send/461](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/461)
- Britton, James. (1970). *Language and learning*. London, England: Penguin.
- Britton, James, Burgess, Tony, Martin, Nancy, McLeod, Alex, & Rosen, Harold. (1975). *The development of writing abilities*. London: Macmillan Education.
- Burton, Judy, Horowitz, Rob, & Abeles, Hal. (1999). Learning in and through the arts: Curriculum implications. In Edward B. Fiske (Ed.) *Champions of change: The impact of the arts on learning* (pp. 35-45). Washington, DC: Dover.
- Chapman, Laura. (2001). Can the arts win hearts and minds? *Arts Education Policy Review*, 102(5), 21-24.
- Childers, Pamela, Hobson, Eric, & Mullin, Joan. (1998). *ARTiculating: Teaching writing in a visual world*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Childers, Pamela, & Lowry, Michael. (2005) Connecting visuals to written text and written text to visuals in science. *Across the Disciplines*, 3 (1).
- Churchill, Winston. (2008). *Kill the Indian, save the man: The genocidal impact of the American Indian schools. Residential*, CO: City Lights Publishers.
- Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2010). Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, & technical subjects. Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State Officers. Retrieved from [http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI\\_ELA%20Standards.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)
- Dewey, John. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York, NY: Minton, Balch and Company.
- Efland, Arthur, Freedman, Kerry, & Stuhr, Patrica. (1996). *Postmodern art education: an approach to curriculum*. Reston, VA: NAEA.
- Eisner, Eliot. (1991). *The enlightened eye: qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Co.
- Eisner, Eliot, & Powell, Kimberly. (2002). Art in science? *The Ontario institute for studies in education*, 32(2), 131-159.
- Gere, Anne. R. (1985). *Roots in the sawdust: Writing to learn across the disciplines*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Harste, Jerome, Woodward, Virginia, & Burke, Carolyn. (1984). *Language stories and literacy lessons*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sara, & Davis, Jessica Hoffmann. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Manzo, Anthony, Manzo, Ula, & Thomas, Michael. (2005). *Content area literacy: Strategic teaching for strategic learning*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- McGuire, William. (1968). Personality and attitude change: An information processing theory. In Anthony G. Greenwald, Timothy C. Brock, & Thomas M. Ostrom (Eds.) *Psychological foundations of attitudes* (pp. 171-196). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Moffett, James. (1968). *Teaching the universe of discourse*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Moore, Blaine, & Caldwell, Helen. (1993). Drama and drawing for narrative writing in primary grades. *Journal of Educational Research*, 8(2), 100-110.

- National Council of Teachers of English. (2004). *NCTE beliefs about the teaching of writing*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/writingbeliefs/>
- Newell, George E., Koukis, Susan, & Boster, Stacy. (2007). Best practices in developing a writing across the curriculum program in the secondary school. In Graham, Steve M., MacArthur, Charles A., & Fitzgerald, Jill (Eds.) *Best practices in writing instruction*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Peacock, Thomas, & Wisuri, Marlene. (2002). *Ojibwe waasa inaabidaa: We look in all directions*. Afton, MN: Afton Historical Society Press.
- President's Commission on the Arts and the Humanities. (1997). *Creative America: A report to the President*. Washington, D.C.
- Quality Education for Minorities Project. (1990). *Education that works: An action plan for the education of minorities*. New York: Carnegie Foundation.
- Robb, Laura. (2010). *Teaching middle school writers: What every English teacher needs to know*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Romano, Thomas. (2000). *Blending genre, altering style: Writing multigenre papers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Sockbeson, Rebecca. (2009, October 9). Weaving Waponahki policy toward decolonization. *Donna M. Loring Lecture Series*. University of New England. Biddeford, Maine.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (2012). *Maine Wabanaki state child welfare truth and reconciliation mandate*. Retrieved from <http://mainetribaltrc.org/>
- Ulichny, Polly. (2000). Academic achievement in two expeditionary learning/outward bound demonstration schools. Cambridge, MA: Expeditionary learning/outward bound.
- United States Census Bureau. (2010). Population distribution and change data file. Retrieved from <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/data/>
- Vygotsky, Lev. (1962). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Young, Arthur, Connor-Greene, Patricia, Waldvogel, Jerry, & Paul, Catherine. (2003). Poetry across the curriculum: Four disciplinary perspectives. Special issue. *The Journal of Language and Learning Across the Disciplines*, 6(2), 14-31.

## Notes

- [1] The names of the teaching artist, classroom teachers, and students have been changed.
- [2] Down-east is traditionally a fisherman term used to identify the region of coastline along the northeastern shore of Maine.
- [3] The collective name for Maine's four Native tribes: Micmac, Maliseet, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy.
- [4] An expeditionary model emphasizes experiential learning through expeditions, which may involve long-term investigation of important questions and subjects that include individual and group projects, field studies, and performances and presentations of student work.
- [5] Indian Island is home to primarily members of the Penobscot tribe from Penobscot County, Maine. The population was 562 at the 2010 census (United Census Bureau, 2010).

## Contact Information

Kelly A. Hrenko  
 Department of Art  
 University of Southern Maine  
 110 Robie Andrews Hall  
 37 College Ave.  
 Gorham, ME 04038

Email: [Khrenko@usm.maine.edu](mailto:Khrenko@usm.maine.edu)

Andrea J. Stairs  
Department of Language, Literacy, and Culture  
University of Southern Maine  
218F Bailey Hall  
37 College Ave.  
Gorham, ME 04038  
Email: [Astairs@usm.maine.edu](mailto:Astairs@usm.maine.edu)

### Complete APA Citation

Hrenko, Kelly A., & Stairs, Andrea J. (2012, December 8). Creative literacy: A new space for pedagogical understanding. [Special issue on Writing Across the Secondary School Curriculum] *Across the Disciplines*, 9(3). Retrieved from [https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/k12/hrenko\\_stairs.pdf](https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/k12/hrenko_stairs.pdf)