

“Mano a Mano”: Arts-Based Nonfiction Literacy and Content Area Learning

What happens to a child’s sense of imagination and awareness when a tree grows in the school’s main corridor (see Fig. 1), when paper birds hang from ceilings, and a canoe floats at the base of the hallway in a bubbling river? As a child, can you envision yourself walking through a longhouse on the way to your classroom (see Fig. 2)?

Every year, for the past 11 years, over 700 pre-kindergartners to eighth graders at Public School 57—the James Weldon Johnson Leadership Academy in East Harlem, New York—experienced a major visual and artistic transformation of their school. Visual art and imagery were used to create a whole new world, changing hallways, ceilings, and walls into rich, expressive, living texts. Displayed against a backdrop of symbolic representations of the world, children’s printed texts and visual images were organized as if in a museum, visually explosive, historically grounded, and culturally

contextualized. It set the tone for serious learning, motivating children and teachers to capitalize on interest-driven, collaborative, schoolwide explorations of one theme, while pursuing aesthetic and informational responses to texts (Rosenblatt, 1994; Johnson, 2007).

It really all began 14 years ago, when Raina (pseudonym), the school’s community-based artist–consultant, began working with the school as an after-school art teacher, providing instruction in art for parents in Spanish and English. The former principal noticed her talent and invited her to work alongside teachers and children, not just parents. That work evolved into a more refined and inclusive schoolwide curriculum effort, the *Mano a Mano* project, and was further developed under the school’s current leader, Mr. Soto, who allocated funds and resources for this unique project annually. *Mano a Mano*, translated from Spanish to English, means “Hand to Hand.” It reflects the values of a unified, collaborative school community that approaches education and learning from the perspective that “it takes a village to raise a child” (African proverb).

This arts-based, interdisciplinary, and thematic approach to curriculum (Jacobs, 1989; Olshansky, 2008) emphasizes visual texts, nonfiction literacy, and content area learning in pursuit of a deeper, richer understanding of a topic. The topic changes year by year, but the approach remains the same. The curriculum integrates all subjects (e.g., science, social studies, English language learning, English language arts, technology, art, music, and the performing arts), and the current unit and theme, a study of *New York: Past, Present, and Future*, to provide curricular vision for teachers and children in all grades.



Figure 1. A tree in the corridor symbolizes the natural world recreated for a study of the Lenape people in early New York.



Figure 2. Entrance to the “longhouse.” This hallway was transformed from ceiling to floor to represent a bark-covered house or dwelling used by several Lenape families. The “families” were constituted by the four classrooms that share the corridor.

Featured in this article are examples of children’s work related to *New York’s Past*: displays of Henry Hudson’s voyage to New York in 1609; Lenape people, whom Hudson encountered on his trip; and animals prevalent at that time. Children’s work samples were reviewed as a part of a larger case study (Merriam, 1998, 2009) of the school’s implementation of this unique arts-based, nonfiction inquiry, and content area curriculum. Of particular interest here is the role of the visual arts as a means for developing children’s understanding of the world and promoting literacy through nonfiction materials. Two research questions guided this inquiry: What was the role of the visual arts in the Mano a Mano curriculum? What can teachers learn about children’s understanding of the world through a closer look at the images and texts children created?

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Art and Visual Imagery during Mano a Mano at PS 57

Throughout the Mano a Mano project, the visual arts supported and extended children’s visual literacy.

Although children engaged in many art forms (e.g., music, drama, dance, and performing arts), I focus on their visual expressions of their learning. Children participated in painting, drawing, sculpting, weaving, photography, collage making, doll making, and crafts (e.g., moccasins, special headbands, medicine pouches), and their creations were showcased in large displays designed by the students for regular visual arts events. In this context, the visual arts provided additional meaning-making opportunities for children to interpret and encode meaning using images and visual representations. This fosters multimodal learning (Gardner, 2006) and “. . . meaningful continuities among a variety of ‘texts’: verbal, visual, and multimodal” (Shifrin, 2008, p. 107).

In addition, the visual arts enhanced and supported children’s informational reading and writing. Children transmediated, or translated, their learning from informational texts (written text) to another medium or mode (e.g., talking, drawing, painting, sculpting) (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996; Siegel, 1995, 2006; Williams, 2007). Through active participation in working with the visual arts, children interpreted and created mental and visual symbolic representations using “. . . man-made objects; natural objects; events; actions; iconic pictorial representations, regardless of the degree of realism; iconic symbols; non-verbal symbols; digital symbols, such as printed/written words and numbers when combined with iconic elements” (Baca, 1990, p. 67, as cited in Avgerinou & Ericson, 1997). By creating art and displaying their work, children “. . . connect[ed] with a rich array of resources within and outside the school” (Ohler, 2000, p. 17). They were offered a range of opportunities to aesthetically express meaning (Ehrenworth, 2003; Greene, 2001), grew in their “wide awakesness” (Johnson, 2007) about art and the history of New York, and became motivated learners.

But art was not solely a meaning-making exercise, nor a vehicle for learning in another subject area; art enhanced and improved children’s visual literacy. Building on Eisner (1978, 2002), Johnson (2008) defined visual literacy as “. . . the ability to create visual messages and to ‘read’ messages contained in visual communications; to perceive,

understand, interpret, and, ultimately, to evaluate one’s visual environment” (p. 74). To find and create meaning with images, be they simple or complex, with interpretations grounded in context, metaphor, and/or philosophy is a major component of visual literacy (Avgerinou & Ericson, 1997; Yenawine, 1997). Like verbal literacy, visual literacy involves readers/viewers’ decoding and comprehension of art elements to make sense of and interpret images. With time, exposure, practice, and feedback, readers/viewers then learn to critically analyze the messages images convey (Johnson, 2008; Shifrin, 2008). Readers/viewers become more skilled at analysis, synthesis, interpretation, and evaluation of visual representations and acquire specialized discourses around visual elements that comprise a range of texts (Yenawine, 1997). Awareness of visual elements informs how viewers interpret layered levels of meaning in visual texts and builds relevant background knowledge that may be used to facilitate children’s ability to encode meaning of their own through visual images.

Capitalizing on the social nature of learning and the social construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978), children’s learning experiences were enriched by individual and whole-class explorations of a specific topic of study related to the theme. This resulted in multiple contributions of artwork that transformed the entire school building to reflect scenes from New York’s past, present, and future. Each child’s contribution grew out of opportunities to explore different art media in a social context, encouraging representation of layered levels of meaning gained from a study of informational texts. But children also reflected their aesthetic responses, including thoughts, feelings, sensations, perceptions, and imagination (Johnson, 2008) related to the emerging understandings and creations of visual art in and around the school (Johnson, 2007).

The Mano a Mano project also challenged traditional views of art that separate the artist, object, and viewer of the art from the social processes of the production of meaning. Traditionally, art and art education have positioned the art object as separate from the artist who produced it, and located meaning within the object. From this perspective, the art

object was viewed as real/authentic and could be interpreted correctly if one understood the artist’s intentions and feelings. Instead, the Mano a Mano embraced a critical Foucauldian perspective (Fairclough, 1992), one that understands that meaning is socially constructed through human interaction and interpretation, which is contextual, situated, and evolving. As such, art is a social performance, and school art offers children opportunities to inquire into themselves and their worlds as well as develop a range of visual forms that support this learning (Atkinson, 2006; Millman, 2009).

While art was central to the unfolding of the Mano a Mano curriculum at PS 57, few teachers considered themselves “artists.” None were required to “teach art” (except the art teacher, of course), but all teachers engaged children in integrated learning experiences that were designed to meet the interdisciplinary goals of the curriculum.

Art and the emphasis on visual texts and images were collectively and intuitively understood by school leaders and teachers as important, expressive tools for communicating about learning and engaging in aesthetic experiences. They believed it facilitated students’ exploration of information through nonfiction reading and writing and their development of knowledge of “self” and others in socio-historical and sociocultural contexts.

In June 2009, Principal Israel Soto gathered a group of teachers to negotiate a curricular theme that would guide the entire school’s exploration of ideas for the Mano a Mano project. After weeks of discussing and debating knowledge outcomes and experiences that would be most valuable to children, a final theme emerged that would be introduced to all other teachers during professional development at the start of the new school year. In September, a larger conversation ensued about the concepts children would explore. Teachers flexibly began to envision what they wanted children to study. Some began setting goals based on the theme and planning

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trips to museums and historic sites in and around New York City. For instance, teachers who focused on New York's past were asked to arrange at least one class trip to a local museum (e.g., the Museum of the City of New York, the National Museum of the American Indian, the American Museum of Natural History) for slide presentations, exhibits, and to learn more about specific topics, such as the landscape of early New York and how it changed after the arrival of Henry Hudson and other Europeans. Teachers who focused on other topics in New York's past, present, and future (e.g., immigration) arranged to visit sites such as the Ellis Island Immigration Museum and El Museo del Barrio (the latter was located near PS 57), and emphasized Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and Latin American art. Teachers also planned to visit historic neighborhoods and popular contemporary sites, such as Yankee Stadium, Shea Stadium, and Central Park.

Jeri Turtle, the art teacher, and the school's administrators assisted teachers with finding appropriate sites for trips. Ideas for field trips were shared back and forth among teachers, in consultation with the principal and assistant principals. The purpose was to provide children with enriched learning experiences. As children explored and engaged in field-based experiences in and around New York City, they brought back what they learned to school. They integrated these experiences into the unit through drawing, painting, creating artifacts, reciting poems, singing, dancing, and performing drama. In the classroom, children read and wrote various types of nonfiction texts related to the theme and displayed in the hallways and on the bulletin boards a variety of visual texts that emerged from their learning.

Across time, the use of art and visual texts for making meaning tends to diminish as children advance from elementary to high schools (Bustle, 2004). Add to that the pressure of getting children ready to take and pass standardized tests, and teaching and learning contexts marginalizes all but what is deemed most essential; unfortunately, art and visual texts as meaning-making devices are often viewed as peripheral. Teachers at PS 57 were not exempt from this reality, but they valued art and visual texts

as powerful tools for learning. Though many had already begun preliminary planning and carried out a few learning activities for *Mano a Mano* at the start of the school year, the majority of the teachers concentrated their efforts on implementing the curriculum after children took their state exams. *Mano a Mano* provided a needed relief from stress, and they saved their efforts to work on *Mano a Mano* after the administration of the exams, when they could relax, and children could enjoy the process.

The Making of a New World

As a teacher educator and researcher, I first visited PS 57 to supervise student teachers. With an interest in literacy through nonfiction materials and content area learning, I returned several months later to research primary grade students' use of literacy strategies while reading nonfiction science textbooks (Bryce, 2011). During that time, I noticed the extraordinary unfolding of the school's enormously rich visual displays of children's work related to *Mano a Mano* (see, for example, the work along the walls in Fig. 2).

Journey with me, if you will: Early one Friday morning in January 2010, while teachers and children were hard at work in their classrooms, several women were decorating the walls of the hallways. In one corridor, I watched them apply a thick black outline to a male figure sketched in pencil on large brown butcher paper that was taped to the wall, from ceiling to floor. Several hours later, I came back, and there were two painted figures. Mesmerized by the realistic, life-sized images (see Fig. 3), I looked closely and discovered that written lightly in pencil were the names of several women. They were parent-volunteers whom Raina had selected and trained to assist her. They introduced me to Raina, and she and I later talked about the process of building the “living museum.”

In January, with administrative approval and the assistance of volunteer teachers and Raina, I began to interactively document the *Mano a Mano* school-wide curriculum project as it gained momentum. I observed in the school weekly, interviewed participants, and took photographs or made photocopies of



Figure 3. Painting of a Lenape father showing his son how to fish. Raina, the community-based artist, and parent-volunteers created this image to reflect traditional ways of finding food and the importance of learning from elders.

children’s work. I sat in several classrooms during nonfiction reading and writing lessons while teachers and children worked on learning activities related to the project, and I recorded observations with fieldnotes (Sanjek, 1990) that were later expanded into more detailed notes away from the site. I formally and informally interviewed several primary and upper-grade teachers about their curricular goals, their learning experiences integrating content area study with reading, writing, and art, and their reflections on children’s work. I interviewed Raina about her role and asked her to elaborate on her plan to carry out the vision and theme of the curriculum. I also interviewed the art teacher, Jeri Turtle, and several parents who volunteered to work with Raina, to learn more about their roles in carrying out tasks related to the project. Principal Soto and Assistant Principal Angela Camiolo talked informally with me about the purpose of the curriculum and their roles in providing administrative support.

I also made it a point to talk with children about their work and to watch them compose written texts and visual images during nonfiction reading and writing lessons. Then, I reviewed their work that had been displayed in and out of their classrooms, documenting my observations with fieldnotes and photographs. Finally, I documented, through photographs, all the work displayed in the hallways and

on bulletin boards on all three floors in the school. The resulting case study (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Stake, 2003) draws from a triangulated source of data constructed from my interactions with teachers, staff, and students (Charmaz, 2006) to describe and interpret the role of art and visual imagery in the Mano a Mano curriculum and gain insight into children’s perceived understanding of the world through the visual images they created.

Data analysis began during data collection. Emerging results of observations, a review of curriculum documents and children’s work samples, formal and informal interviews, and photographs of visual art displays in the hallway pointed me to theories on multimodal approaches to learning (Gardner, 2006), transmediation (e.g., Siegel, 2006), and aesthetic responses to texts (Greene, 2001; Johnson, 2008). Data were analyzed for evidence related to the emerging theories, and categories began to emerge related to teachers’ use of children’s art materials to construct visual images, with and without direct instruction, as communicative sources for expressing learning. Teachers also directly and indirectly provided opportunities for children to respond aesthetically to their reading and writing through discussion, dramatization, and the construction of visual images. As these understandings emerged (Merriam, 2009), teachers, children, parents, and administrators were asked to add their perspectives, which were included as additional data. Observations continued until the end of the unit in May, and documentation of hallway displays continued until June. Fieldnotes were expanded into several memos (Hallberg, 2006) as data were analyzed holistically through the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), wherein I looked for patterns and unearthed the significance of constructing and interpreting visual texts in the process of an arts-based approach to nonfiction literacy and content area learning.

Student samples from first and eighth grades were selected because they represented a wide range of visual texts related to the same aspect of the theme, *New York’s Past*, and were showcased on the first floor of the school. In this article, I explore the perceived knowledge children conveyed in print and

images to consider the value of art and visual texts in promoting visual literacy and nonfiction learning.

Community as School

PS 57, an outstanding, high-achieving school (New York City Department of Education, 2010b), provided access to performing and visual arts as vehicles to support children’s visual and verbal literacy (Avgerinou & Ericson, 1997) and content area learning. For Mano a Mano, there was a deliberate attempt to connect in-school learning activities to out-of-school community-based resources, and an explicit

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effort to bring those resources into the school (Heath, 2000, 2004). Several programs partnered with PS 57, and professional artists and musicians worked with children to arrange a chorus, perform theater arts, form a drum line, and display visual art. PS 57 served more Latino American

families than any other sociocultural group. In 2008–2009, the school’s population was 71% Latino American, 22% African American, 5% Asian or Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 2% European American, 1% Native American or Native Alaskan, and 0% Multi-racial American (New York City Department of Education, 2010a). As such, strong efforts to reach out to Spanish-speaking families were made and resulted in culturally relevant initiatives (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1995), such as arts-education workshops for parents, taught in Spanish and English.

Starting each January, Raina enlisted parent-volunteers to help create life-size images that reflected the school’s curricular theme. Her work overlapped with the work of teachers and children. Raina had attended workshops at the Museum of the City of New York on the history of New York with a focus on the Lenape. Teachers often consulted with her for advice on a range of ideas related to projects they were carrying out in class, the historical accuracy of their artistic and written representations, and content they chose to present. Over a

period of four to five months, Raina worked to display art and artifacts in the hallways. She painted “the walls” (large sheets of art paper taped to the ceiling and floor) around the entire school. Guided by the theme, Raina grabbed pieces of life—what is known about some aspect of the historic or contemporary social, cultural, and physical worlds in which we live—and reconstructed them in two- or three-dimensional form with paper, paint, glue, and string. In essence, she was “writing” a whole new world for children to “read.”

In this school, the students’ and teachers’ pedagogical experiences reflected a large institutional investment and schoolwide integration of the arts into literacy and content area learning. School administrators, teachers, parents, and children journeyed together through a process of “writing” and “reading” the world. They decided which elements to display as text, and then created the “thing to be written” (or drawn, painted, carved, molded, and sketched), to share their understandings of the phenomenon under study. Visual displays created by Raina outlined the work of the children and teachers. They were larger than life, and breathtaking. For children who created the displays and viewers who “read” them, these images were mapped against a matrix of social, historical and cultural contexts to frame meaning and establish relevance.

Snapshot 1: The Lenape of Early New York

The youngest students in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first-grade classes (monolingual English, and two-way transitional bilingual Spanish and English) studied the pre-Henry Hudson era, with a focus on the land, animals, plants, and Lenape people who inhabited New York. Their work was displayed on the first floor hallways and bulletin boards (see Fig. 4).

One focus was the story of “The Three Sisters,” a metaphor for a Native American multi-cropping technique of planting corn, beans, and squash together in the same dirt mounds. A sustainable agricultural technique, companion planting made it easier to grow each plant: the corn provided a stalk for the bean vines to climb, and the roots of the bean plant transformed nitrogen from the air into a natural



Figure 4. A display of the “Three Sisters” agricultural Lenape legend. This display is a tribute to the story that explains why Lenape used companion growing techniques for corn, beans, and squash. Children’s nonfiction writing frames the “Three Sisters.”

fertilizer; the large squash leaves covered more area of the soil, which kept moisture in, protected the roots of all three plants, and reduced the amount of unwanted plants that competed for existence. Overall, this practice slowed the depletion of nutrients in the soil and ensured the Lenape’s food supply.

Culturally, there are many versions of the story of the Three Sisters (for example, see Chief Red Arrow’s renditions at <http://www.birdclan.org/threesisters.htm>). Eastern Canadian Indians told of “three sisters” who lived together in a field, and

who varied in size and dress; each disappeared with a small boy who visited the field, but they were brought back together after he discovered how much they missed each other. The Iroquois told of a sky goddess who fell from the heavens onto earth. She gave birth to one daughter. Years later, her daughter became pregnant with twin boys, but died in childbirth. The goddess buried her daughter on earth, and on that ground grew the sacred plants—corns, beans, and squash—that would provide food for her grandsons, and later, all other people.

After children in Ms. Tsveer’s first-grade class listened to and talked about these stories related to Lenape culture and life, they wrote nonfiction texts during writing workshop. The resulting books were mounted within Raina’s vine-strewn perimeter of the bulletin board, representing the “natural world” and creating a context for interpreting and displaying children’s writing. The image of the three women holding the representative vegetables drew on Lenape folklore, and shaped some children’s texts, but primarily, children presented “facts” they learned from a collection of resources. The visual images and printed texts were closely aligned to represent the Lenape as a gender-differentiated and agricultural society. Advised and supported by their teacher through revision and editing stages of the writing process, children conveyed their understanding of Lenape life. The child who produced the example in Figure 5 emphasized the yellow of

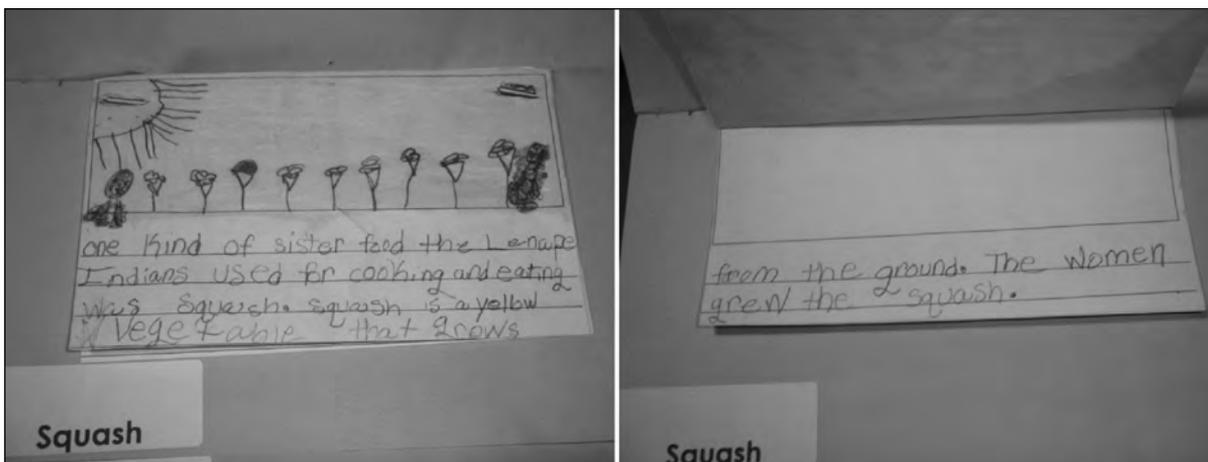


Figure 5. A section on squash, in a flip book on “Corn, Squash, and Beans.” Through the writing process, children developed short “chapter” books providing information about food commonly eaten by the Lenape.

the squash and the brown complexion of the Lenape people. He wrote,

One kind of sister food the Lenape Indians used for cooking and eating was squash. Squash is a yellow vegetable that grows from the ground. The women grew the squash.

The text’s high level of convention in meaning, structure, and spelling was directly attributed to the shared writing lesson from which it emerged. During whole-group writing instruction, Ms. Tsveer asked children for ideas, and as a group, they chose words to form each sentence, which were recorded on chart paper in front of them. She modeled and demonstrated how to apply knowledge of spelling and writing conventions, and children engaged in guided practice. After rereading and editing their work as a whole class, children were sent off to continue writing on their own, borrowing some of the language developed in the shared writing text. They discussed their ideas with each other first, then with the teacher during individual conferences. Ms. Tsveer reviewed their writing and provided feedback on content, spelling, and language conventions. Children were asked to work on their drafts for several days, and they later revised and edited their work. With teacher approval, they recopied their final drafts for publication.

More elaborate “All about the Lenape Indians” nonfiction books were created later in the year, again with teacher support and guidance through revision and editing stages. “All about . . .” books consisted of several pages that addressed, “What the Lenape Indians Looked Like,” “What the Lenape Indians Wore,” and “What the Lenape Indians Ate.” In these books, images and words were used descriptively to report on some aspects of Lenape life. Equally important were the constructions that focused on skin complexion, hair style, and dress, indicating race and gender characteristics that marked the Lenape as “Native American” and either male or female. These characteristics were part of a larger conversation about Lenape life in early New York.

Figure 6 shows Lenape men wearing feathers in their hair. They were depicted in a field of growing vegetables, and the text highlighted their agricultural lifestyles.

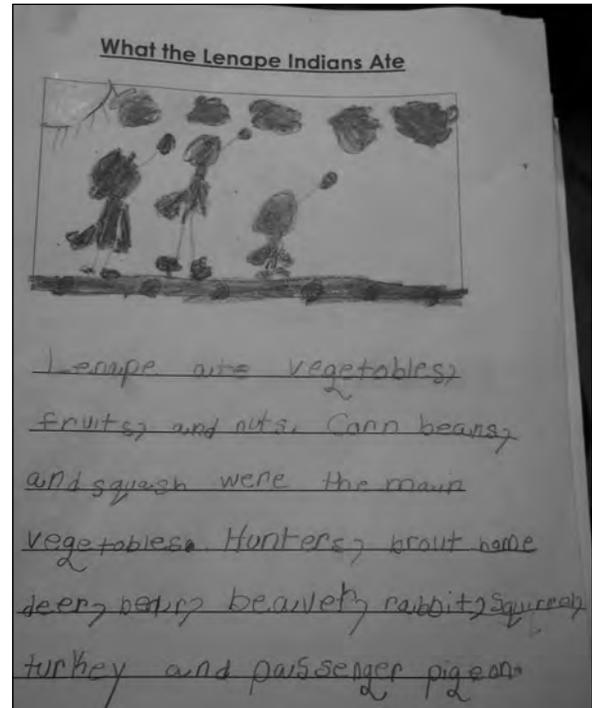


Figure 6. An “All about the Lenape Indians” book: What the Lenape Indians Ate. This nonfiction chapter book featured “facts” about physical and cultural aspects of Lenape and their lifestyles gleaned from read-alouds, discussions, and images in published books.

Lenape ate vegetables, fruits and nuts. Corns, beans, and squash were the main vegetables. Hunters brought [brought] home deer, bear, beaver, rabbit, squirrel, turkey and passenger pigeon.

Children identified physiological characteristics (e.g., black hair, tan or brown skin) that constructed the Lenape as Native Americans. They also identified gendered and cultural practices defining farming as work for women, and hunting as work for men.

Snapshot 2: A Study of Animals

While those first graders being taught in English wrote nonfiction books using images and text to describe the people, history, and culture of the Lenape, children in Ms. Parra’s transitional bilingual Spanish–English first-grade class focused on animals and concentrated on the use of art as an expressive medium. Figures 7 and 8 show student renderings of an eagle and a fox; these examples illustrate the role of art as a medium for developing

visual literacy, using form, line, color, and size to demonstrate understanding of the physical description of the animals. During writing workshop, art was valued as a means of creative expression as well as a legitimate way to show understanding of the characteristics and physical attributes of the animals under study. Ms. Parra modeled and guided children through the process of drawing and using paint to create large images of the animals. Children sometimes wrote text to accompany their pictures.



Figure 7. Watercolor painting of an eagle by a bilingual first-grade student. This image was developed by a boy who used art as a valued means of communicating what he learned from nonfiction reading.

In Figure 7, for example, a bald eagle hovered in the air with clenched claws. The text stated, “I learned bird can build nest to procked [protect] their babise [babies] from the waether.” In Figure 8, another child created an image of a fox, inspired by a nonfiction book, *Foxes and their Dens* (Rustad, 2005).

These children captured the majesty and mystery of the animals, framed by their deep study through nonfiction reading, writing, and talking in English and Spanish during integrated art and nonfiction writing lessons. They used content-rich words (e.g., “protect” in Fig. 7) to frame their thinking and broaden their expression.

Snapshot 3: Henry Hudson in Early New York

While the curriculum assigned the pre-Henry Hudson New York to the youngest students, eighth-grade students worked with Jeri Turtle, the art teacher, to depict scenes and images of individuals relevant to Henry Hudson’s time. One student drew a portrait of Henry Hudson in 17th-century costume (see Fig. 9), demonstrating awareness of portraiture as a technique utilizing pencil and watercolor.

Students co-constructed texts with Ms. Turtle to provide a historical and political context for



Figure 8. Painting of a fox created by a bilingual first-grade student. Using the image of a fox from a published book as a “mentor text,” this girl created her rendition of the animal as part of her writing process.



Figure 9. A portrait of Henry Hudson, drawn by an eighth-grade student. This image captures the popular portrayal of Hudson in clothing that reflected the culture and dress of his time.

viewing the art. The text beneath Hudson’s picture read,

Four hundred years ago, in April 1609, the English born explorer Henry Hudson set out from Amsterdam, seeking a new route to Asia. Five months later, Hudson and his crew became the first Europeans to sail up the river.

Hudson is remembered today as one of history’s greatest explorers. His name lives on in the northeastern parts of North America; Hudson River, Hudson Bay, and Hudson Strait. His voyage helped Europeans learn more about the world and led to New Settlements in North America.

Hudson’s trip was summarized and contextualized as a European quest in search of a route to Asia, with implications for trade and building a wider European market economy; in this text, there was no mention of the Lenape or other Native American groups. As a part of a larger bulletin board display, other visual images and texts were placed alongside images of Hudson, widening and adding complexity to the story. Hudson’s voyage on the river in the “New World” was illustrated by one student’s artistic rendition of the physical characteristics of the boat, which provided a historical context and visual image of travel by sea (see Fig. 10). Again, co-constructed by Ms. Turtle and students, the text beneath the picture stated,

Henry Hudson’s Half Moon (*Halve Maen*) weighed a mere eighty tons and measured 70 feet in length. A crew of 18 men accompanied Hudson on his 1609 exploration voyage. Early on the morning of September



Figure 10. Watercolor painting of the “Halve Maen,” Henry Hudson’s ship, by an eighth-grade student. After reading and learning about Hudson’s travel, this young man captured the sentiment of the lonely but brave travel along the river.

2, 1609, the Half Moon sailed into what is now New York harbor. Hudson saw the mouth of a large river and decided to explore it. Today that river bears his name—the Hudson River.

These pictures of Hudson and his boat sailing along the river were displayed alongside pictures of Native Americans engaged in village life (see Figs. 11 and 12). Children carefully studied visual images related to Hudson’s travel and European encounters



Figure 11. Drawing of Lenape men playing a game. An eighth-grade student created a visual image of Lenape men playing lacrosse.



Figure 12. Drawing of a scene from a Lenape village. An eighth-grade student illustrated the communal nature of life in the village as men prepared to fish.

with Native American people in nonfiction texts. They engaged in extended reading and talked about what they were learning, both with the teacher and each other. Some wrote nonfiction reports, which were added to the bulletin board display.

These scenes provided concrete visuals for considering the climate, culture, and social relationships of the Lenape, as well as the potential for change in the region and material for considering insider perspectives. The result was layers of meaning (Yenawine, 1997) and a fertile environment for learning.

Art as an Educational Tool

Art, Visual Images, and Writing the World

In *Mano a Mano*, art was a medium for creative, aesthetic response to nonfiction reading (Ehrenworth, 2003; Greene, 2001; Johnson, 2007; Rosenblatt, 1994), and students could show a multilayered understanding of the social, cultural, and historic realities of life in early New York through texts and visual images (Millman, 2009). The “world” was written through visual images, which inspired and motivated children to inquire and learn more, by *reading the written world and word*.

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world . . . [T]his movement from word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain *writing* it or *rewriting* it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35)

The transformative arts-based approach to nonfiction literacy and content area learning that framed the *Mano a Mano* project embodied this Freirean concept of a conscious practice of writing the world. Teachers, children, and Raina carried out massive displays of visual texts to frame and reflect children’s learning using images. The purpose was to inspire, support, and supplement nonfiction reading and writing with visual texts. When children

viewed, interpreted, and created visual texts, they communicated with a wider audience a visceral and literal understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Greene, 2001). These texts reflected a “[v]isual literacy . . . [that used] visuals for the purposes of: communication; thinking; learning; constructing meaning; creative expression; [and] expressive enjoyment” (Baca, 1990, p. 65).

Art as a Way of Seeing and Knowing

In this school, art and visual texts used to create the *Mano a Mano* project emphasized the social nature of constructing knowledge, as it enhanced learning, cultural appreciation, community awareness, and personal development (Atkinson, 2006; Ohler, 2000). The art and nonfiction writing in the hallways became conversation pieces as children walked through, observant and awestruck by the contributions of their peers.

Too often, when we think about appropriate ways to communicate what we know in schools, we think only of oral and written language. Even those children, who are fluent speakers and writers, though they will be successful within those standards, are confined by that limitation. I now know, as Bakhtin (1986) points out, “if the word ‘text’ is understood in a broad sense—as any coherent complex of signs—then even the study of art . . . deals with texts” (p. 103). For children who are new English speakers, and for the many children who are struggling to learn what the discourse of school is, a broad definition of how one communicates about learning, how one creates “texts” about the world, enables them to participate more fully in conversations about knowledge. As teachers recognize that children can communicate what they understand through pictures, dances, songs, poems, and dramas, these products of the learning process offer them a more complete picture of the children they teach. (Gallas, 1994, pp. 112–113)

Throughout *Mano a Mano*, children were encouraged to explore meaning, to interpret and construct visual images through transmediation that reflected a multimodal approach to learning (Gardner, 2006; Johnson, 2008; Siegel, 2006). As children transformed what they learned in one medium (text) to another (a drawing, paper sculpture, or painting), they came to understand and know more concretely certain elements of life at several points in the evolution of New York’s history. They were

empowered as learners to make connections across the curriculum (Jacobs, 1989), but also across the grades, as both upper- and lower-grade students noticed each other’s work and discussed the whole school’s effort in this joint social and academic pursuit. This article documented the results of efforts made by teachers, children, parents, and Raina, who I came to see as not only an artist, but a visionary, to successfully implement an integrated curriculum that married art with nonfiction reading and literature in pursuit of a richer expression of literacy and content area learning across grades.

Community Impact beyond the Classroom

This interdisciplinary, arts-based nonfiction literacy and content area curriculum, *Mano a Mano*, is phenomenal for what it did to shape the work of children, teachers, and the artist-consultant Raina, but it is also remarkable for promoting children’s

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reflection on human relations and social awareness (Atkinson, 2006), leading to an increased sense of school spirit and greater levels of parent involvement. Children walked proudly past their own displays and admired and respected the work of

others around the school. They enjoyed the learning activities that took them out into the world and excitedly brought back items that would serve as a springboard for further learning in the classroom.

Parents, too, expressed excitement as they walked the school hallways, mesmerized by the visual images and large displays. They believed their children were learning a great deal from the unit and suggested that the work in *Mano a Mano* had brought their families closer together. Parents with multiple children in the school reported that their children talked with each other about different aspects of the same curriculum topic. Parent-volunteers who were assigned “homework”—artifacts to complete at home that would be added to the visual displays at school—shared these tasks with their

children, and as they did, they talked about the significance of the symbolism, art, and the historic relevance of the topic. These opportunities expanded conversations about learning between parents and children and enhanced the quality of children’s school experiences because there was a greater level of parental involvement.

What resulted was the transformation of the school into a community-based learning environment, one that socially empowered teachers and community-based educators through a responsive, organic approach to developing curriculum. This elevated schooling to a level beyond testing and toward community-based education and culturally respectful and relevant curriculum development (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Children began to view their lives as changed by the change in the school; families felt connected and involved; local artists and community members had a venue in which to create art, engage in symbolic meaning making, and display knowledge about the world. Local artists engaged in a unique form of social gratitude, “giving back to the community” their talents, time, and support for enriched learning experiences. And teachers found something passionate to study. During *Mano a Mano*, art and visual literacy in the aesthetic realm (Johnson, 2008) provided opportunities for children, their parents, teachers, and community-based artists to refashion themselves and their school context into a broadened network of resources for learning.

While some teachers viewed the *Mano a Mano* curriculum as extra work and did not enjoy the process or freedom to create integrated art, literacy, and content area learning activities, they enjoyed the product and the parents’ recognition of their hard work. For teachers like Ms. Parra and Ms. Turtle, who pursued art professionally in other contexts, the *Mano a Mano* curriculum harmonized well with their teaching approaches. Several other teachers were nudged to emphasize art and visual texts. Ms. Tsveer did not teach art directly, but capitalized on her first graders’ passion to draw; she provided opportunities for them to use crayons, markers, and collage materials to accompany their nonfiction writing throughout the unit.

Other teachers found the artistic displays challenging. While none of the teachers who participated in the study dissented or refused to engage in art or use visual imagery to support literacy and content area learning, those who were working out of their comfort zones (Jensen, Tuten, Hu, & Eldridge, 2010) sought help from each other, Raina, and Ms. Turtle. Several teachers reported informally that while they were frustrated with the time commitment and their own lack of ability to “do art,” they resolved to work together to develop ideas for displays, oftentimes eliciting help from the children in their classes. Raina guided several teachers’ efforts to represent their knowledge accurately, offering suggestions for materials and talking with them about the historic references they were trying to replicate through art. Ms. Turtle consulted with teachers as needed, but those who were not comfortable with carrying out the Mano a Mano displays also reported informally they were not comfortable sharing this discomfort with staff and administrators. The collaborative and open-ended nature of Mano a Mano supported experimentation and group problem solving. While none of the teachers were discouraged from voicing discontent, many resolved to do what they could, because in the end, the staff and school honored every effort teachers made to get their students to integrate art into content area learning.

The Mano a Mano curriculum exemplified an educational approach that emphasized to children and families that history, their history, matters. Children can be empowered to learn about and transform their world in school as educators, artists, and families learn together and grow in knowledge and awareness.

Further, conversations about learning, when focused on the arts, enable children and teachers to speak together in new ways about content, forms of expression, communication, and excellence. Bakhtin’s notion of understanding intentionality in language can easily be extended to include all forms of expression. Just as speaker and listener work to build a common ground from which to speak to one another, so artists and audience work to establish common understandings. Those understandings require negotiations around point of view and intentionality: The artist’s intent is met with the audience’s interpretation. When teachers and children begin to speak about learning through the

arts, they initiate new kinds of conversations, some of which may not even rely on the spoken word. Regarding a work of art becomes much more than seeing it and walking away. Rather, it provides an opportunity for everyone to create new worlds, new texts, and new kinds of stories; to acknowledge that there are different ways of understanding the world and a variety of forms that expression can take. (Gallas, 1994, p. 113)

For the members of PS 57, school is a place for community development, where effective leadership is valued, and where schooling is still about education and learning, and not just measurement and testing. Mano a Mano cultivated a culture that celebrated the whole child, where children’s talents were appreciated and encouraged. It supported a broadened understanding of history and events, but most important, it provided new avenues for learning and expression.

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CEE Awards Announced

A number of awards were presented by the Conference on English Education at the NCTE Annual Convention in Chicago. The 2011 **James N. Britton Award** for Inquiry within the English Language Arts was not awarded in 2011. **The 2011 Richard A. Meade Award** for Research in English Education was presented to Mollie V. Blackburn, Caroline T. Clark, Lauren M. Kenney, and Jill M. Smith for *Acting Out! Combating Homophobia through Teacher Activism* (Teachers College Press, 2009). **The 2011 Janet Emig Award** for Exemplary Scholarship in *English Education* was presented to Glynda A. Hull, Amy Stornaiuolo, and Urvashi Sahni for their article, "Cultural Citizenship and Cosmopolitan Practice: Global Youth Communicate Online" (*English Education*, July, 2010). **The 2011 Cultural Diversity Grants** went to Delicia Tiera Greene for her proposal, "Concrete Roses: A Case Study Exploring the Reading Engagements of Black Adolescent Girls in an Urban Fiction Book Club," and Elaine L. Wang for her proposal, "Teacher Understanding and Facilitation of High-Level Thinking as Components of Instructional Quality: Reaching for High-Level Cognitive Demands in Text Discussions." **The 2011 James Moffett Award** for Teacher Research was presented to Marianne Forman and Melissa Yip, MacDonald Middle School, East Lansing, Michigan.

Mano a Mano: Mexican Culture Without Borders is a New York-based non-profit organization 501(c)(3) dedicated to celebrating Mexican culture and promoting the understanding of Mexican traditions through arts, culture, humanities, and annual celebrations of holidays (Day of the Dead/Día de Muertos; Christmas/Posadas y Pastorelas), as well as festivals, concerts, performances, processions, installations and seminars. Provide technical and professional assistance to traditional Mexican artists in five key areas: music, dance, visual arts, verbal arts and ritual, and culinary traditions. Mano a Mano Flyer. Mano a Mano - - Rated 5 based on 13 Reviews "Jã; trabalhei com as Mano a Mano para 3 serviçoes: cartões, website e flyers. Das 3 ocasiões o re..." Porto Design Factory is an experimental learning platform of co-creation for interdisciplinary education, innovation and acceleration of new ideas, products and business. It is also the catalyst for an experimental educational culture based on "passion-based learning", aiming to promote better results in learning, enhance employability and improve the interface with companies. While Porto Design Factory communications are made up of several elements, the Logo is still the focal point. Mano a Mano": Arts-based nonfiction literacy and content area learning. Jan 2012. 179-193. N Bryce. Bryce, N. (2012). "Mano a Mano": Arts-based nonfiction literacy and content area learning. *Language Arts*, 89(3), 179-193. The interplay of text, talk, and visual representation in expanding literary interpretation. This exploration of an increasingly vital area of language and communication studies will be of interest to advanced undergraduate and postgraduate students in the fields of English language and applied linguistics, media and communication studies and education. View. Show abstract.