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Understanding the “L” in CSLP Within the Literacy Conundrum

by Julia Lynch & Andrea Perrone

As we continuously examine our literacy practices to align with state standards, high-stakes testing, and research-based practices, educators and the global society should also expand their understanding of culturally sustaining literacy practices (CSLP). Culturally sustaining pedagogy stems from the traditional culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy that frames educational teaching practices from an equity-oriented lens (e.g., Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017). Within the same equity-oriented diaspora, we view CSLP as a literacy-specific and interdisciplinary application that emphasizes the importance of critical thinking. More importantly, this calls for (*l*) literacy instruction to include the arts to draw upon the cultural assets of students, thus stimulating their cognitive process. The ability to comprehend and communicate solely through written language has taken a hierarchical approach in (*L*) literacy instruction, impacting student success by producing learning gaps through inequitable opportunities to engage in literacy skills that transcend beyond the bounds of “text” as English-language print-based writing. We seek an arts-based CSLP where the (*l*) in CSLP is the foundation upon which individuals can effectively engage with complex concepts, ideas, and information, facilitating not only cognitive development but also fostering a deeper understanding of the world. This shift is essential for academic success and promotes equity in education by minimizing barriers and supporting the success of all students.

This article advocates for a CSLP that 1) offers flexible methods of literacy instruction, assessment, and engagement through art; 2) connects classroom literacy practices with students’ lives outside of school; and 3) sustains and preserves the cultural plurality of Communities of Color (COC). Andrea, a former music educator and current elementary education lecturer, and Julia, an arts-based literacy researcher, both align with



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the culturally sustaining literacy practices highlighted in this manuscript. Our collective experience offers teachers the expertise and skills needed when thinking about redefining, operationalizing, and advocating for CSLP.

Context

The state of literacy instruction exists now, entangled in a web of state and federal mandates, high-quality teaching, and funding. Districts caught in the middle are having to make tough choices on the best research-based practices that reflect the Science of Reading (SOR), having to determine what counts as “science” in deciding which books can be included in teachers’ libraries. Entrenched in these legislative and district entanglements lie significant disparities in reading achievement between youth of color and their peers. More specifically, national cross-country research highlights the significant reading gap between Black youth and their peers in the U.S. (Harper & Woods, 2016; Tatum et al., 2021). In Washington State, Black boys were found to perform three grade levels below their peers in reading and math (Furfaro, 2019). Similarly, in North Carolina, Black boys scored on average 55% below reading proficiency (“NC State Level

Proficiency,” 2022). Additionally, Trauma-informed scholars suggest that the national educational crisis is closely tied to childhood traumas affecting the academic health of COC. Research indicates that the academic performance of Black boys in rural areas is linked to childhood trauma, socioeconomic status (SES), and educational inequities (Crumb et al., 2019). Children from low-income families, who are disproportionately youth of color, often face challenges that include limited access to books and educational resources, fewer opportunities for enriching activities, and a higher likelihood of attending under-resourced schools where educational inequities perpetuate reading disparities.

Despite early literacy interventions, historically, youth of color across the nation continue to fall significantly below grade level compared to their white peers (Roberts et al., 2021; Son & Morrison, 2010). However, most recent research highlights similar disparities, indicating that children from high-SES families are exposed to broader vocabulary and more reading opportunities from an early age. This exposure fosters stronger foundational reading skills, leading to better reading performance, while children from low-SES backgrounds (disproportionately youth of color) may start school with a vocabulary gap that can impact their reading proficiency (Schneider et al., 2023). Given this synthesis of research related to the academic health within COC—we have concluded that the current psychometrics for accessing and assessing the reading skills of Black youth and youth of color are inadequate, and/or these reading disparities are influenced by a complex interplay of socioeconomic factors, educational inequities, and systemic biases that contribute to the persistent gap.

Along with a contextual understanding of the educational literacy landscape within COC, we also acknowledge a limiting hierarchy and reign of traditional, singular (*L*)iteracy discourses in the forms of reading, writing, speaking, and listening present in literary forms and canons, and English-language-only text (Caraballo, 2018; Cervetti et al., 2006; Hagood, 2000; Kalantzis & Cope, 2023; The New London Group,

1996). This restrictive set of materials and pedagogies limits both *what* students learn, and also who is invited to and reflected in the learning (Caraballo, 2018; Eisner, 1990; Kalantzis & Cope, 2023). Kalantzis and Cope (2023) assert that this type of didactic literacy pedagogy advances exclusionary or assimilating approaches and that such “narrow conceptions of what it means to be “literate” leads to restrictive learning environments for minoritized students, namely those whose (*l*)iteracy practices are not typically reflected in or valued by the academic curriculum” (Caraballo, 2018, p.158). The interdisciplinary arts-based inquiry (iABI) framework that we are presenting broadens the concept of both what counts as (*L/l*)iteracy and whose literacies are present and valued in school spaces. While we acknowledge the complexities and multilayered structures that may contribute to the significant literacy gap, iABI reimagines the ways we are defining literacy to be multilinguistic and inclusive of the arts—going beyond text and leveraging the (*l*)iteracy assets that exist within COC.

Unpacking Interdisciplinary Arts-Based Inquiry (iABI)

Interdisciplinary Arts-Based Inquiry (iABI) is a teaching method that promotes literacy competencies through various methods such as Culturally Sustaining Practices, Cognitive Processing, Art, and Content Integration. In this context, literacy goes beyond technical competencies to encompass a wide range of tools where students “read” art to analyze and question power dynamics inherent in all written works and embedded in society. In view of this context, a more interdisciplinary CSLP instructional method is highly relevant for educators and students in grades PK-12, given its connection to traditional models of literacy-focused teaching and the evolving nature of learning in diverse environments.

Defining Art + Inquiry

Offering art not only as the output of the learning process but as part of the initial learning experience reinforces the natural and scientific parts of inquiry because of the ways art provokes creative thinking in the

learning process (Corazza & Agnoli, 2018; Lazonder, 2023; Oktaviah et al., 2021; Willemsen et al., 2023).

Inquiry-based learning (IBL) can enhance 1) engagement and motivation by allowing students to explore topics; 2) critical thinking and problem-solving as students develop higher-order thinking skills by investigating and solving real-world problems; 3) deep understanding and research skills through active learning and reflection; and 4) research skills as students improve their ability to gather, assess, and utilize information (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Nollmeyer & Baldwin, 2022). This increase in popularity has resulted in the creation of several frameworks for teachers and curriculum developers to plan for IBL. Art as inquiry can be a very thought-provoking facilitator of inquiry, providing new lenses of seeing and thinking that guide students toward becoming active participants in their learning and discoveries. This invites our students to investigate and ask questions, consider all of the possibilities, and think through all the outcomes to discover a solution(s).

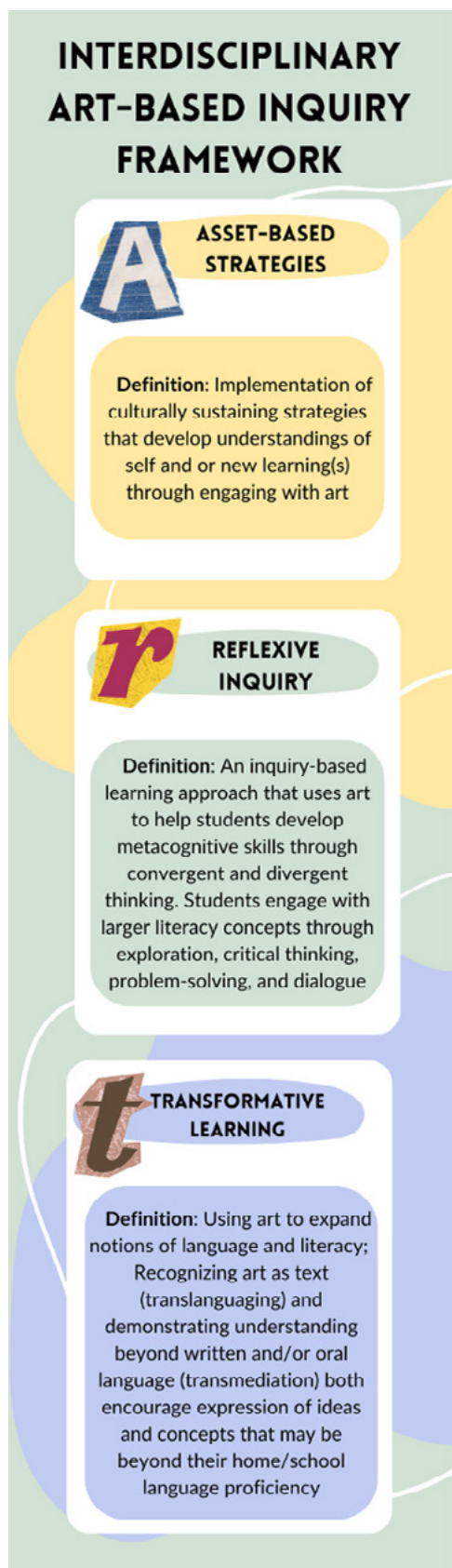
Art becomes personally and culturally relevant as students draw on their existing world views and engage in self-making and critique about art, art forms, and artists they share identity(/ies) with (Kuttner, 2016; Nagle & Stooke, 2016; Overby et al., 2022). Through arts-based learning, students apply their literacy skills of predicting, inferring, providing evidence, comprehending, and questioning in ways that feel relevant and meaningful. Rather than a specific set of literacy-related skills that aim to be discreetly taught and measured by standardized tests, literacy practice through the arts cultivates a repertoire of knowledge processes and skills at the *intersection* of languages and experiences—verbal, graphic, bodily, iconic, and acoustic (Chabanne, 2015; Kalantzis & Cope, 2023). The arts provide both points of entry and outlets of expression for students to engage with literacy practices; students synthesize, communicate, and transmit ideas, feelings, and experiences through the sound, symbol, or embodied tools of the art form. These diverse literacy practices have the potential to transform the way that students encounter the world through the

juxtaposition of different languages—spoken, written, seen, moved, and heard. These coexisting communicative modes promote both positive learning experiences and positive learning outcomes for students.

Interdisciplinary Arts-Based Inquiry (iABI) Framework for Literacy

The foundation of this conceptual framework can be traced back to a thorough, analytical, and liberating understanding of literacy. This framework is built upon a multifaceted approach that delves deep into the various dimensions of literacy, encompassing not only the basic ability to read and write but also critical thinking, interpretation, and empowerment. Our understanding of literacy instruction combines elements of culturally sustaining literacy pedagogies (Cantrell et al., 2022; Paris & Alim, 2017) and arts-based inquiry (Leavy, 2017; Wehbi, 2015; Willemsen et al., 2023), which are both firmly grounded in the beliefs that literacy is not merely a mechanical skill, but a tool used to provoke critical thought for personal and social transformation. This framework (see Figure 1) is designed to draw on the cultural wealth that students bring with them into the classroom. With this understanding, we center the language and literacy skills within COC to draw learners into inquiry using art as the teacher throughout the learning process, particularly at the point of knowledge acquisition. This perspective framework has three very important components that are necessary for effective literacy instruction.

1. *Asset-Based Strategies*: A proven set of culturally responsive strategies designed to develop deep literacy understandings through art that will work with any curriculum.
2. *Reflexive Inquiry*: An inquiry-based learning approach that cultivates students mastering larger literacy concepts through problem-solving, dialogue, and critical thinking, providing them with the tools they need to succeed.
3. *Transformative Learning*: Iterative transmediation through art involves utilizing linguistic and semiotic resources in a dynamic and integrated manner to create space for knowledge construction and meaning making.

Figure 1*Interdisciplinary Arts-based Inquiry (iABI) Framework***Asset-Based Strategies**

Within the iABI framework, working with an asset-based mindset is defined by the implementation of culturally sustaining strategies that develop understandings of self and or new learning(s) by engaging with art. The consideration of students' culture should be from multiple levels and perspectives that include elements of culture that are both observable (food, clothes, music) and less observable (shared values or how learning occurs within certain groups) (Hammond, 2014). Vélez-Ibañez and Greenberg's 1992 work, "Formation and Transformation of Funds of Knowledge among U.S.-Mexican Households," crafted the language of "funds of knowledge" (FOK) to refer to the recognized abilities, assets, cultural interactions, and bodies of knowledge of particular households or communities. Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) further developed and complemented this concept with "funds of identity" (FOI), focusing more on the tangible elements of an individual's identity (people, sport, art, etc.) and how these resources and entry points are often overlooked and untapped in school settings. Funds of identity act as the "lens through which we absorb new information" and can help teachers select materials and strategies that connect the curriculum to students' lived experiences (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 47). Illuminating students' FOI aims to eliminate deficit thinking and to enhance education equity. By building on the knowledge and skills from out-of-school experiences that contribute to students' identities, teachers help establish a recursive process of affirming and authoring identity within the school space.

While teachers should consider how to recognize and honor students' assets in all aspects of their teaching, teachers can successfully use art stimuli as an on-ramp into lessons through the iABI framework. By introducing the art as the "hook" of the lesson (see Figure 2), teachers provide students opportunities to observe, connect with, and wonder about the art by tapping into their own lived experiences. It is through these observations, connections, and wonderings that the teacher can begin to guide students through the vacillating process of reflexive inquiry and the integration of new academic content.

Figure 2

Asset-Based Strategies

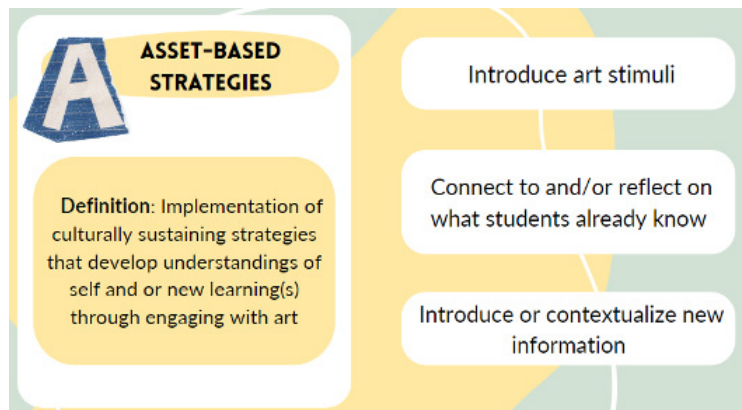


Figure 3

Reflexive Inquiry

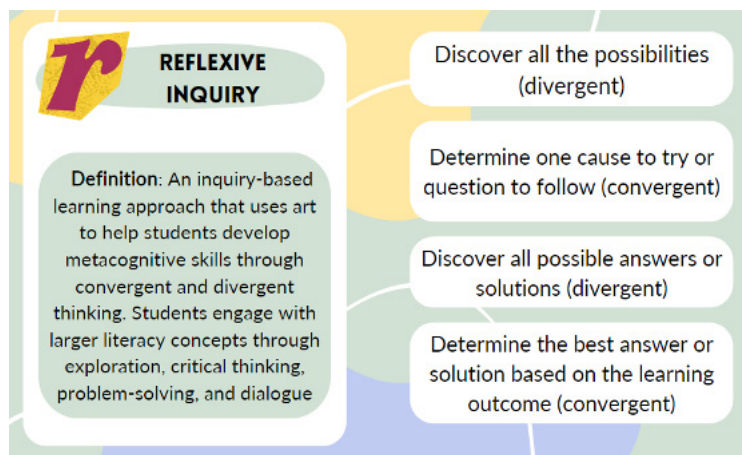
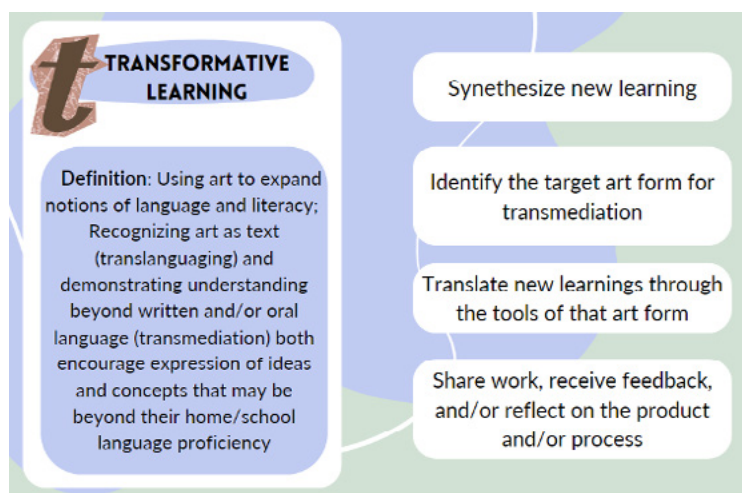


Figure 4

Transformative Learning



Reflexive Inquiry

The iABI framework focuses on an inquiry-based learning approach that cultivates student mastery of larger literacy concepts through investigative problem-solving, dialogue, and critical thinking. Metacognition, a concept central to cognitive psychology, refers to the ability of individuals to regulate and monitor their learning processes effectively and is how we learn to control how we learn or our mental processes for learning (Pintrich, 2002). We are taking this a step further to say that reflexive thinking is an example of metacognition. In an iterative process, learners ask and answer questions, use their experiences to research and fact-find, reflect on their new knowledge, and then plan for a solution. Reflexive Inquiry is a cycle of metacognitive thinking (see Figure 3) that engages with an investigative and horizontal thinking process that uses a divergent (creative) and convergent (analytical) approach to questioning in student-guided learning (Kuhlthau et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2021). Teachers should use the art to catalyze this process of questioning in a way that is connected to the target learning for the lesson.

Students learn to ask questions based on:

1. Their frame of reference
2. What is most important
3. What will guide the reading/writing/experience
4. Questions that generate open-ended responses

Transformative Learning

Additionally, the iABI framework promotes transformative learning (See Figure 4) through opportunities to translate understanding between languages, reshaping verbal or written understandings into the choices made through the elements of various art forms. Transmediation is a dynamic

process of transferring content between communication systems by using the tools in each language to effectively communicate feelings or ideas. As students create meaning in one communication system, such as writing, and then transfer it to another system, such as dance, they re-examine the concepts and adjust their understandings and interpretations (Leonard et al., 2016; McCormick, 2011). Leonard et al. (2016) further assert the deep thinking that students engage in during the process of transmediation:

“[T]he relationship between the words and their meaning, literally and figuratively, was negotiated through speech, movement, memory, lived experiences, sociocultural knowledge and imagination. As a result of taking on this new role as poetry dancers, so to speak, the students developed and communicated new perspectives on their knowledge” (p. 342).

Theory to Practice

The lessons in Table 1 illustrate how the iABI framework can look in practice across three different grades

and three different subject areas. While the sample lessons reflect experiences in the elementary grade band, this approach is easily adaptable for the secondary level. By selecting relevant and meaningful art, engaging in the process of convergent and divergent thinking, and transforming learning through a wider variety of more advanced communicative modes, teachers can find entry points into topics across grade bands and subject areas. The sample lessons also highlight the inherent interdisciplinary nature of applying literacy skills (speaking, listening, inferring, providing evidence, etc.) across content areas. Teachers should consider the ways Housen’s (2002) exploration of critical thinking through the Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) program uses similar lines of questioning as students engage with visual art. Cappello and Walker (2016) further explore the application of VTS with multimodal or non-print texts and different forms of media. CSLP aligns with their work and uses critical viewing and chewing on our perceptions as springboards for further discourse and transformation of new learning.

iABI Sample Lessons

Table 1

Sample iABI Lessons

<i>All lessons connect literacy skills and concepts to other curriculum standards through the arts</i>		
Example 1: Science		
Text	Content/Standard	Mini Lesson: Climate Change
<p>Video: “What’s the deal with climate change?”</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-JHr-M7io14</p>	<p>Common Core (CC) English Language Arts: Grade 3</p> <p>L.3.4 Determine and/or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 3 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies: context clues, word parts, word relationships, and reference material</p> <p>RL.3.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.</p>	<p>Asset-Based:</p> <p>The class watches a video about climate change and ways to adjust individual choices to impact the climate. The teacher elicits connections by using the video as a point of inquiry: <i>What does this remind you of?</i> Add what students say to the anchor chart using their exact words.</p> <p>The teacher asks, <i>What wonderings do you have? (how, who, what, when)</i> Add new learnings that students say to the anchor chart using their exact words.</p>

Example 1: Science (continued)		
Text	Content/Standard	Mini Lesson: Climate Change
	<p>Science topics: interdependent relationships in ecosystems, weather and climate</p>	<p>The class discusses how human decisions impact the climate using inquiry-based prompts students create. The teacher only prompts students using inquiry prompts. Teacher records inquiry questions.</p> <p>Reflexive Inquiry: The class discusses personal actions that impact the climate, such as how we eat, buy, travel, and live in our homes in small groups or with a partner. Students work to answer their inquiry questions through dialogue with peers revisiting the video/art as needed. The teacher offers questions to guide both convergent and divergent thinking.</p> <p>Transformative Learning: Students share learnings from their discussions with the whole group. The teacher guides students toward a personal commitment, encouraging the use of evidence from the video (text).</p> <p>Students engage with and analyze an arts-based model (Michael Jackson’s “Earth Song”) and start considering ways that art can function as activism. <i>What other ways can artists communicate ideas about the environment?</i> Students choose an art form through which they will think and present their learning.</p> <p>Students record their commitment, learnings, reflections about the process, and sustained wonderings using new words and/or images in their journals.</p>
Example 2: Social Studies		
Text	Content/Standard	Mini Lesson: The Joy and Genius of Indigenous Peoples
<p>Picture Art: Project 562</p> <p>https://www.project562.com/#1</p>	<p>Common Core (CC) English Language Arts: Grade 2 RL.2.2 Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.</p>	<p>Asset-Based: Provide students a bit of context as the lesson is introduced: <i>Let’s learn about Indigenous people today. We will view images of Native Americans that live in our country. Matika Wilbur curated this</i></p>

Example 2: Social Studies (continued)		
Text	Content/Standard	Mini Lesson: The Joy and Genius of Indigenous Peoples
	<p>RL.2.7 Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate an understanding of its characters or setting.</p> <p>SL.2.1a Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).</p> <p>Social Studies Topics: Living and working together, places and regions, environment and society</p>	<p><i>art photography project for years, photographing 562 Native tribes. Matika is from the Swinomish and Tulalip Tribes. We will view all the images and then discuss them.</i> As you view the images, encourage students to record their noticings and wonderings in their Reflection Journals.</p> <p>Choose 3 to 5 images to show from Project 562. Remain for two minutes on each image. (6 to 10 minutes total time). Encourage students to remain silent and just view and jot notes as they see fit. You may have them number the photos, so they remember which is which.</p> <p>Reflexive Inquiry: The class engages in the inquiry question prompts and begins to discuss personal questions as the teacher jots down questions students may be asking themselves or others: <i>In what ways are you connected to this picture? Where did Indigenous Americans live? Where and how do they live today? What questions do you have about these images, the people in them, or the photographer? What do these images reveal? What story or picture of the subjects, their identity, and culture emerge from these images?</i></p> <p>Note: during this process, it may be helpful if the teacher also creates a space to take anecdotal notes to clarify any misinformation heard during the complex dialogue stage.</p> <p>Students work to answer their inquiry questions through dialogue with peers and provided materials (additional books, videos, primary sources, etc.), while revisiting the art as needed.</p> <p>As students are exploring materials relevant to their inquiries, pose the following question:</p>

Example 2: Social Studies (continued)		
Text	Content/Standard	Mini Lesson: The Joy and Genius of Indigenous Peoples
		<p><i>What information can we gain from the images?</i> Students will support their response with evidence found in the additional provided materials.</p> <p>Transformative Learning: Students share learnings from their discussions with the whole group.</p> <p>Students engage with and analyze an arts-based model (Faith Ringgold’s “Street Story Quilt”), recognizing the way that quilting, as an art, can tell a story.</p> <p>Students design a quilt to share their learning that includes imagery from one of the photographs they analyzed, adding narration and sequence (as found in Ringgold’s piece)</p> <p>Students record their commitment, learnings, reflections about the process, and sustained wonderings using new words and/or images in their journals.</p>
Example 3: Math		
Text	Content/Standard	Mini Lesson: Crafting Ancient Shabtis
<p>Sculpture Art: Head of a Shabti from Akhenaten</p> <p>https://ncartmuseum.org/object/head-from-a-shabti-of-akhenaten/</p>	<p>CC Standards for Mathematical Practice:</p> <p>Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.</p> <p>Reason abstractly and quantitatively.</p> <p>Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.</p> <p>Attend to precision.</p> <p>Look for and make use of structure.</p> <p>CC Math Standards: Grade 4</p> <p>4.NF.3 Understand and justify decompositions of fractions with denominators of 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 100.</p>	<p>Asset-Based:</p> <p>Hook students through inquiry question prompt that connect their own knowledge/experiences with the head of the Shabti of Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten through a “chalk talk”. Post each following prompts, each with a photocopy of the image of the shabti head:</p> <p><i>In what ways are you connected to this picture?</i></p> <p><i>What do you know about Ancient Egypt or Egyptian culture? What do you notice about the sculpture?</i></p> <p><i>What are you wondering about what you see?</i></p>

Example 3: Math (continued)		
Text	Content/Standard	Mini Lesson: Crafting Ancient Shabtis
	<p>4.OA.3 Solve two-step word problems involving the four operations with whole numbers.</p> <p>CC English Language Arts Standards: Grade 4</p> <p>RI.4.1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.</p> <p>SL.4.1.C- Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.</p>	<p>During the “chalk talk”, students are encouraged to respond to each question (as well as each other) through writing, drawing or “annotating” the photocopy. Encourage students to interact with the prompts/tasks either independently or with a partner (their choice).</p> <p>After connecting to/inquiring about the object, the teacher provides an additional piece of information about shabti head to begin guided reflexive inquiry: What if I told you that the shabti head of Akhenaten is only 2 ¼ inches tall.</p> <p>Reflexive Inquiry: (Discussion whole group/in small groups) <i>What are reasons that the shabti head of Akhenaten might only be 2 ¼ inches tall?</i></p> <p>Teacher provides a bit more context: <i>According to Egyptian belief, the conservation of the body was essential, as without a functioning body the deceased could not survive in the afterlife. The shabti therefore acted as a surrogate in case the body was damaged, guaranteeing eternal life. Because of this intimate relationship, the deceased was only buried with one or two of these figurines.</i></p> <p>Teacher establishes a problem: <i>Since the figure was supposed to be buried with the person it represented, how do we figure out how tall the entire shabti (head, torso, legs) of Akhenaten was?</i></p> <p>Teacher observes small group conversations and culls a process for using the height of the head to determine the size of the rest of the shabti (head, torso, legs) using fractions (parts of the whole) in a multi-step word problem.</p> <p>Transformative Learning: Students apply the process of determining the size of different parts of the shabti to create their own shabti (through 2-D or 3-D art). Students accompany their</p>

Example 3: Math (continued)		
Text	Content/Standard	Mini Lesson: Crafting Ancient Shabtis
		<p>artwork with the measurements of each part of their shabti, as well as what fraction each part (head, torso, legs) of the whole represents.</p> <p>Conversely, students could apply this process to creating a personal shabti. As shabtis are meant as symbols of the person they represent, the teacher might encourage students to consider material and design choices that best reflect their identities.</p>

Reflections for Practice

Challenges

Admittedly, without the help of teacher preparation programs or quality professional development, teachers may not have the capacity for such a non-linear, student-centered approach to teaching and learning. In our experience, teachers have problems with relinquishing control over to their students within the active learning process, and therefore students are still “fed” content instead of learning to ask questions that deepen the learning process.

Both research and experience find arts-based pedagogies in and beyond literacy at odds with standardized assessments that are monolingual, print-based measures of students’ literacy skills. The arts-based CSLPs described in this article push back on what the system deems as most important, challenging the “enforcement of Whiteness” and the “staunch insistence that all students comply and bend their affiliations to a culture not their own” (Lesus, 2019, p. 33). Teachers, therefore, may feel as though they are slyly navigating colleagues, administration, and district personnel to be able to reach and teach their students in innovative, meaningful ways. The pressure of high-stakes testing and assessments has been attributed to the challenge teachers face with “getting it all in” in hopes of demonstrating proficiency on state tests.

Tensions around employing equitable teaching practices that challenge the heteropatriarchal, heteronormative beliefs also exist within the teaching community on a broader scale. As teachers adjust their literacy strategies to a CSLP, they encounter fear-induced tactics in the form of legislative policies that either whitewash the practices or eliminate them altogether.

Lastly, we acknowledge that teachers may struggle to understand art as teaching practice because their teacher identity doesn’t include that of “artist.” There is a level of vulnerability that exists with implementing CSLPs that are multi-layered, interdisciplinary, and student led. Therefore, teachers must re-align their teaching identity to “see” themselves as artist-practitioners who “create” learning opportunities for students. Chappell and Cahnmann-Taylor (2013) suggest prohibiting “statements such as ‘I don’t sing’ and ‘I don’t dance,’ just as we disallow any K-12 teacher to state ‘I don’t read’ and ‘I don’t do math’” (p. 259). We invite educators to examine their own experiences and assumptions and align that reflection with a dedication to sustaining the diverse assets, lived experiences, and genius of all students.

A Way Forward-Art Led

Freire’s (1985) perception of literacy as a “permanent back and forth between ‘reading’ reality and reading

words” (p. 18) articulates the overarching idea of the power of the arts in (L)iteracy. The criticality that the arts lend to (L)iteracy can greatly impact students’ identity development (Redmond, 2015; Rhoades, 2020). Leavy (2017) asserts that arts-based practices are useful in identity and social justice work; various communicative modes “jar people into seeing and/or thinking differently” - a critical component to challenging the stereotypes people hold about themselves and others (p. 10).

We have seen a transformation within teachers who

have sat with these ideas and leaned into this teaching practice. We have also seen the ways it transforms the learning experience for students when they get to explore, investigate, and problem-solve through complex dialogue. The art-inquiry guiding questions (see Table 2) are an additional guide to implementation that can be easily manipulated to fit your teaching context. As teachers whose work is to create art as a teaching practice, we acknowledge the very real challenges of implementing such a reimagining. However, we sit with the hope of literacy instruction for a liberated future.

Table 2
Art-Inquiry Guiding Questions

Framework Element	Steps for Implementation	Questions for Planning and Reflection
Asset-Based Strategies Reflexive Inquiry Transformative Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce art stimuli • Connect to and/or reflect on what students already know • Introduce or contextualize new information • Investigate using convergent and divergent questioning (see Figure 3) • Experiment and test ideas/options • Representation of knowledge through transmediation • Discussion and/or reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What cultural and linguistic strengths do my students have? • How do my students acquire language and vocabulary? • Have I established a safe literacy environment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Home culture & language is not threatened ◦ Reading success is not threatened ◦ Informal learning and implicit language is welcomed • How am I encouraging student-directed inquiry? • How am I cultivating students’ capacity to ask questions? • What opportunities do students have to dialogue with peers and to reflect on their own ideas? • How are students applying literacy skills (comprehension, inferencing, using and providing evidence, etc.) in new ways? • How are students encouraged to show what they know in ways that broaden the conception of mastery or understanding? • How does student work honor students’ multimodal literacies? • How does student work highlight a reconstruction of social or cultural meaning? • What more can we learn from students’ artistic choices? What deeper meaning might those choices hold? • What more did students gain from the process (self, peers, perceptions, etc.)?

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