

# ***Time for a Paradigm Shift: Recognizing the Critical Role of Pictures Within Literacy Learning***

*by Beth Olshansky*

In our rush to push children toward our narrow definition of literacy, we often take away the very tools that could help them the most: pictures. Both evolution and child development speak to the natural place of pictures within human beings' innate drive to make sense of their world and record their experiences. One does not have to be a history buff to have learned that the earliest record of human activity exists in the form of pictures painted on cave walls. Nor does one have to explain to parents of a toddler the innate urge to pick up a marking implement and draw on any available surface. In fact, those seemingly random markings (which we adults label "scribbles") are often replete with meaning. Recently, I watched my 18-month-old granddaughter draw what appeared to be two random lines as she sat on the deck of our lakeside cabin; she then pointed to her picture and said, "Boat."

Even the youngest children seem to be hard-wired to make sense of the world around them and, without formal instruction, to represent, express, and share their ideas and discoveries using their natural language: pictures. We observe our young explorers of life following predictable developmental patterns as they discover that they can alter a surface by making marks to express and record meaning. Scribbles morph into recognizable shapes and then into identifiable representations. A circle soon becomes a sun with lines radiating from it representing sunbeams, which then evolves into a person with arms and legs emanating from a round head. No one teaches these young recorders of their world the way to do this; they simply know how.

## *Hidden Bias*

Yet soon after children enter school, they are discouraged from using pictures as a key form of expression. Preschool and kindergarten teachers understand the value of pictures in developing children's thinking, language, and self-expression. However, beginning in first grade, there is huge pressure on teachers to steer students away from their natural visual language and to replace it with written language, which must be taught. Young children receive subtle and not-so-subtle messages that reading and writing in pictures is less valued than reading and writing words. In fact, at some point (usually during first grade), children are told that drawing pictures must wait until *after* they complete their (real) work—i.e., their writing.

When classroom teachers do allow their students to make pictures before writing, the students are given markers, crayons, or colored pencils to draw with. The message is clear: do a quick sketch before getting down to the real work of writing. Neither preservice teachers nor school administrators are typically educated regarding the full range of benefits that go hand in hand with infusing art into writing workshop. That omission is yet another manifestation of the bias, inherent in our educational system, that favors the verbal learner.

## *Unintended Consequence*

The pressure of high-stakes testing during the last decade, intensified by the misnamed No Child Left Behind Act, has only increased the devaluing of pictures as a natural tool for thinking and learning. Now, with the adoption of the Common Core by nearly all states, along with the use of more rigorous national assessments, one can only predict that the pressure

to pass linguistically driven tests will continue to increase. In turn, the bias against those who rely on pictures to think will likely deepen, and the achievement gap between verbal learners (those who work well with words) and students who are more visual, kinesthetic, or tactual learners will likely widen. This, of course, was not the intended outcome of developing new national standards, but it may well become an unintended consequence of adopting them.

Yet within this disheartening scenario, there is an inkling of hope. One of the key design considerations of the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards (ELACSS) is “a focus on results rather than means” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, p. 4). The ELACSS authors accordingly state that “the Standards do not mandate the full range of metacognitive strategies that students may need to monitor and direct their thinking and learning. Teachers are thus free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, p. 4). This statement clearly leaves room for teachers to teach in the way that works best for their students, which could be in stark contrast to a district-mandated linguistically driven language arts program. Once schools have purchased a scripted program, however, it remains to be seen whether administrators and curriculum coordinators will give teachers such leeway in implementing those lessons.

### *An Alternative Approach*

In an effort to combat the hidden bias within our schools that favors the verbal learner, I have spent the last quarter century developing, refining, and researching an alternative approach to literacy learning that is

designed to support students with a wide range of learning styles and needs. Supported by findings from several large quantitative studies over the last two decades (Frankel, 2011; O'Connor, 2010; Olshansky 2007, 2008), I have formalized what I consider to be a more democratic approach—one that has proven to better serve our diverse student population (Olshansky, n.d.).

Artists/Writers Workshop, as the name implies, expands the notion of writing workshop to include a strong visual component. Artists/Writers Workshop originally grew out of the early work of the late Donald Graves who, during the 1980s, revolutionized the way writing was taught. Moving away from fill-in-the-blank worksheets, Graves was at the forefront of treating students as professional writers and offering them authentic writing experiences (Graves & Stuart, 1985). Students wrote stories about what they knew, and their pieces were brought through the stages of the writing process: prewriting, rehearsal, drafting, revision/editing, and publication. Students in the early grades were encouraged to draw first, creating quick sketches during the rehearsal stage of the writing process. Within the writing workshop that evolved, however, the focus was almost exclusively on students' writing, with more elaborate picture-making saved for illustrating the final text (Calkins, 1986, 2013; Fletcher & Portalupi, 1998; Wood Ray & Cleaveland, 2004). Recently, however, the focus has begun to shift (Wood Ray, 2010).

Expanding the notion of text to include visual compositions (Albers, 2007; Albers & Sanders, 2010), Artists/Writers Workshop is designed around three basic premises: (a) pictures are a natural language for thinking, developing, and expressing ideas; (b) not all students work easily with words; and (c) if we are truly interested in supporting the literacy learning

of *all students*, we would be wise to expand the range of thinking tools we provide in the classroom, especially for our emerging or struggling readers and writers. Thus, in Artists/Writers Workshop, words and pictures are treated as equal languages for learning. Creating well-developed pictures (not to be confused with quick sketches) always precedes the writing, thereby providing all students both more time to think while they are creating their artwork and more elaborate concrete visual tools for developing and recording their ideas. With completed artwork in hand, students practice oral rehearsal, “reading the pictures” for meaning. As students read their pictures and then translate that meaning into words (a skill most young children have been practicing for quite some time), the oral rehearsal process provides a natural bridge from picture-making to writing.

**One of the benefits** of “writing in pictures first” is that pictures are not only subject to interpretation, but also lend themselves to a deepening of meaning as more time is spent “reading the image.” Details emerge that students may not have initially noticed, and descriptive language may emerge from those details. Reading the pictures provides endless opportunities for developing the story before any writing actually occurs. Encouraged by a peer’s or teacher’s questions about their work, students often find engaging in storytelling and embellishing their story quite enjoyable. However, most teachers will agree that once students (especially young ones) write words down on a page, revision and embellishment of a storyline becomes much more challenging.

In 1990, the very first year I began to explore the relationship between pictures and words, I observed that when given a choice, 96% of the first- and second-grade students I was working with chose to create pictures

before they wrote. This observation corresponded with research published by Teele in 1995 that documented that in a classroom of 26 first graders, 25 students displayed preferences for visual learning (Brudnak, 1995). I also observed that students who began by creating well-developed pictures first (again, not just making quick sketches) seemed to gain access to richer imagining, deeper thinking, and more descriptive language. During those early years, I observed a kind of magic that overtook the classroom; I could feel the air growing thick with creative energy as students engaged in an art process before they wrote. Years later, I discovered that the magic I witnessed time and again as students participated in Artists/Writers Workshop was the result of transmediation, a phenomenon rarely recognized within educational circles.

Transmediation is defined as the act of recasting or translating meaning from one sign system to another (Siegel, 1995). In the case of Artists/Writers Workshop, this occurs when students create meaning in pictures first and then translate that meaning into words. The experience of transmediation serves to deepen students' thinking, generate new ideas, and create opportunities for reflective thinking (Siegel). While transmediation can also occur when students write and then make pictures, if we want to improve students' writing, I have found that a "pictures first" approach is far more beneficial (Frankel, 2011; O'Connor, 2010; Olshansky, 2007, 2008). Christopher, a first grader, describes "the magic" he experienced like this: "I just don't know what happens. Whenever I go to Artists/Writers Workshop, all sorts of good stuff just pops into my head" (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1: One quiet and silent night, a raccoon sat on my snowman's head. A white owl hooted in a whisper. The moon smiled. The snowflakes fell more quietly than ever before. Drooom went the clock. The clock struck midnight and the stars sprinkled away. Art and writing by Chris, grade 1.*

### ***Two Complementary Strands***

Artists/Writers Workshop is facilitated in two complementary strands.

Teachers follow the same four simple steps to facilitate each strand:

- Literature share/discussion
- Modeling (an art or writing process)

- Work session
- Group share

While this workshop model is nothing new, the implications of implementing Artists/Writers Workshop are enormous. First, teachers must commit to treating words and pictures as *parallel, complementary, and equal languages* for learning. Within our educational system, this represents a huge paradigm shift. It means adopting a much broader view of literacy learning, one that truly embraces multimodal learning. For writing workshop, this means giving equal attention to pictures and words. For instance, when using picture books as mentor texts, it means reading the pictures for meaning and discussing how the artist made that meaning (i.e., studying the artist’s craft) in addition to reading the text for meaning and studying the writer’s craft. Second, it means providing students with concrete visual tools for developing, expressing, and recording their ideas at every stage of the writing process. Third, it means treating all students as both artists and writers—and showing them that we mean it. This means giving students access to a wider range of art materials than are typically available in the classroom and teaching them how to use those materials.

### ***Two Simple Approaches***

Recognizing that most classroom teachers have varying degrees of comfort “doing art,” I have developed two art-and-literature-based approaches to teaching writing and fostering reading that use simple art techniques while offering students a rich artistic and literary experience. It is these two models—Picturing Writing: Fostering Literacy Through Art<sup>®</sup> and Image-Making Within The Writing Process<sup>®</sup>—that have been the focus of several large research studies over the last two decades. Both are facilitated using an Artists/Writers Workshop format.

## ***Picturing Writing***

Picturing Writing: Fostering Literacy Through Art<sup>®</sup> uses a simple crayon resist art process. This involves creating a crayon drawing and then washing over it with watercolor (see Figure 2). While most young children have grown comfortable using crayons, the watercolor wash adds a much more pleasing and nuanced effect than is produced by using crayons alone, markers, or colored pencils. Within the crayon resist process, crayons offer an easily controlled medium for creating representations; the less-controlled watercolor wash creates opportunities for “happy accidents” and interesting, unanticipated results. The watercolor wash also serves to enhance the image. In addition, a wide range of supplemental texturing techniques encourages students to add detail to their paintings. Those texturing techniques do not just enhance students’ paintings, but also deepen their thinking. As students create and then read their pictures for meaning, they see more detail in their artwork and think more deeply about it; they are thus able to access more descriptive language when it is time to write. To ensure that all students receive the full benefit of reading their pictures, I have formalized the process by developing a brainstorming sheet for this purpose. The brainstorming sheet requires students to identify “the important things” in the picture and then jot down descriptive language about each of those elements (see Figure 3). This formal brainstorming process ensures that transmediation occurs for every student because it requires students to read their paintings for meaning and then write down words to convey that meaning.



Figure 2: Example of Picturing Writing by Gbibiari, grade 1.



Figure 3: Olivia uses brainstorming sheet and desktop easel stand, grade 2.

Picturing Writing is not simply defined by its art process. Facilitated in Artists/Writers Workshop, it offers a progression of art-and-literature-based minilessons designed around a variety of genre studies and integrated into the science and/or social studies curriculum. Teachers are able to teach *what* they need to teach in a way that engages *all their students*, not just those who work easily with words. As a project-based approach to learning integrated into the curriculum, students make carefully crafted picture books that reflect their knowledge of a chosen topic. In creating their artistic and literary work, students give equal attention to both the artists' and writers' crafts. Children's published books are placed in the classroom library for the remainder of the school year, often becoming favorite reading materials (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: Gbibari and Angel read Angel's published book, grade 1.

## ***Image-Making***

Image-Making Within The Writing Process<sup>®</sup> offers a collage-based approach to writing which uses a wide variety of hand-painted papers created by each student (see Figure 5). Image-Making is more involved than the crayon resist process and offers a richer thinking experience. It is easily integrated across the curriculum and can be used to teach a variety of genre studies. In addition, this rich collage medium provides visual and tactile tools for thinking and developing ideas. Students literally construct meaning through placing cut or torn shapes onto each page. As they move these shapes around before finally gluing them down, children gain access to endless opportunities for revision. By its very nature, working with collage provides students with the opportunity to rehearse, draft, and revise their stories before setting pencil to paper. Thus, students' thinking and their final collage compositions are more developed, which, in turn, is reflected in their writing. Both the collage process itself and the wide range of hand-painted textured papers students use to create their collages serve not only to stimulate their thinking, but also to help students access descriptive language (Olshansky, 1994, 2008).



*Figure 5: Example of Image-Making collage and descriptive passage, Jamie, grade 1. I know someone special. Only I can see him. He comes out at night. He seems to glow at me. He swishes through the trees. He slithers through the grass. He makes ripples in the water and he blows in the wind.*

### **Concrete Visual Tools**

In addition to providing classroom-friendly art processes, Picturing Writing and Image-Making offer a variety of concrete visual tools. These include storyboards (pictures anchored by key words) used to support the organization and development of story ideas (see Figure 6); specially designed brainstorming sheets that ensure that students read their picture to access descriptive language *and* that the words they use to describe their picture find their way onto the written page (see Figure 3); desktop easel stands used to prop up works of art during the brainstorming and

writing process (see Figure 3); an artist's frame to support the group share process; and an accordion folder which helps students and teachers clarify the literary purpose of each page of art and writing (see Figure 7). In each case, the intention is to ensure that students whose strengths lie outside the verbal realm have the tools they need to succeed.



Figure 6: Devin works on storyboard, grade 1.



*Figure 7: Brendan's accordion folder, grade 1.*

Multiple independent research studies have documented that this highly structured visual approach to literacy learning strengthens the writing and visual literacy skills as well as the standardized test scores of both students who struggle with words and those who function relatively comfortably within the more traditional, verbal instructional approach (Frankel, 2011; O'Connor, 2010; Olshansky, 2007, 2008).

### ***Making Literary Concepts Concrete***

As we shift toward treating pictures and words as equal languages for literacy learning and cognitive growth, we must reconsider how we treat pictures and words within the workshop experience. Just as we treat writing as both a sign system for making meaning (one that uses print) and a discipline (an art form worthy of focused study), we should treat

picturing-making as both a sign system (one that uses visual representations) and a discipline (another art form worthy of focused study).

In addition to teaching the mechanics of writing (recognizing and creating letter shapes, learning letter sounds, sounding out words, writing words, constructing sentences, etc.) and the mechanics of picturing-making (how to draw images to represent meaning), teachers should recognize and study the craft within each expressive form. Just as they are accustomed to using quality picture books as mentor texts for studying the writer's craft in writing workshop, in Artists/Writers Workshop (and Picturing Writing and Image-Making), teachers use quality picture books to study how artists apply simple art concepts to make meaning in their pictures. Indeed, these two languages run parallel.

For instance, teaching students about the role of lead sentences can be enhanced by a discussion of lead pictures. We can analyze both pictures and words for the information they convey. For the young writer, the concept of setting may seem abstract, at best. But when we share and discuss a “lead picture” in a picture book that depicts setting elements, students will discover that the setting picture describes not only the place, but also often the time of day, weather, and possibly the season. They can see what the term “setting” means.

**Students may also notice** that in order to show where the story takes place, an artist often chooses to use a long-distance view that allows the reader to step back and see “the big picture.” In Artists/Writers Workshop, after analyzing the lead picture within one or more picture books that have been selected because they display the elements s/he wishes to highlight, the teacher will model creating a lead or setting picture—depicting place,

time of day, weather, and season—from the long-distance perspective. When students then create the setting picture for their own story, they are quite clear about its literary purpose because they have seen and discussed examples in picture books and watched their teacher model how to take that understanding and apply it in her or his own work.



*Figure 8: It is a cold, blustering day in the frozen Arctic, even though it is late afternoon in the summer. It is still frigid! Patches of ice are circling around the clear, crystal water. Seals are playing happily. Watch out little seals! There are big footprints in the ice. Griffin creates a visual hook which he references and enhances in his writing, grade 2.*

Lead sentences often include a hook that serves to draw the reader into the story and makes them want to turn the page. First- and second-grade students can also learn about the power of a visual hook to draw the reader into the story. The hook may be a visual hint about the character (see Figure 8) or an indication of where a character might be hiding. If not explicitly visually represented, a hook can be introduced through the inclusion of a sound that serves to draw the reader into the picture as s/he searches for that hidden creature or element. In this case, the hook isn't visible in the picture; it is introduced later when it is time to write (see Figures 9 and 10).



*Figure 9: One icy winter night, snow drifted across the inky sky. All of a sudden, a howl came out of nowhere... Madeline creates a hook through the use of sound, grade 1.*



*Figure 10: One starry moonlit summer night a father owl was teaching his owlets how to fly next to a rushing river. The mother owl was out hunting for deer mice. Suddenly the father heard something slithering beside the stream. He heard danger! What could it be? Carter uses sound to draw the reader into his picture, grade 2.*

During the group share that follows, students' lead pictures are placed in the artist's frame, a simple black square that serves to frame and enhance the artwork. The student is invited to sit in the artist's chair—the seat of honor—while s/he talks about the picture. As the artist and the class

discuss the piece in the artist's frame, the teacher guides the discussion to ensure that all the elements of the lesson are reinforced. During the share process (which often involves two to four students each day, time permitting), the teacher is able to reinforce specific key elements and concepts for those students who might benefit from hearing and seeing them again. Group share also provides an opportunity to practice reading the picture for meaning and accessing descriptive language.

### ***Parallel and Complementary Languages***

During the writing strand, the same Artists/Writers Workshop format is followed: literature share/discussion, teacher modeling, students applying their understandings during the work session, and group share. This time the focus of the lesson is on the language of words. Studying purposefully selected excerpts from picture books, students analyze the function of the lead sentences. They discover that the words often describe the very same setting elements depicted in the illustration, and thus they have the opportunity to experience the parallel and complementary nature of pictures and words. This relationship becomes even clearer as their teacher models reading her or his picture for the setting information it conveys and then crafting lead sentences that contain these same setting elements. As students write to their own "lead picture", they come to understand that these two parallel and complementary languages perform the same function—*the pictures use a visual language to tell the story and the words use a verbal language to paint pictures*. Often one language enhances the other.

During the share process, a student's picture is placed in the artist's frame. After taking a seat in the artist's/writer's chair, the student reads his or her accompanying writing to the class while classmates gaze at the

picture as they listen to the words. With this simultaneous processing of pictures and words, something magical happens. The words make the picture appear to come alive. Jared, a second grader, described his experience like this: “In my story, when I read it to the class, the animals came to life out of thin air.” This is the result of what I refer to as “simultaneous transmediation.”

### ***Simultaneous Transmediation***

Simultaneous transmediation occurs when the brain processes two or more sign systems at once. We regularly experience this phenomenon without even realizing it. For instance, when we stare at an illustration in a picture book as the accompanying text is read out loud, we experience simultaneous transmediation. When we watch a video that has an audio component (words, music, or both), we experience simultaneous transmediation. Our brains are processing more than one sign system at the same time. Simultaneous transmediation is a dynamic tool that serves to draw readers into an image (moving or still) and into the story. This is particularly powerful when sensory description is used, creating a multisensory experience. In Artists/Writers Workshop, the simultaneous processing of art and writing makes clear how words and pictures work together to tell the whole story. To experience the phenomena of transmediation and simultaneous transmediation can be transformative. Perhaps this is why young artists/writers refer to the experience as “making magic.”

### ***A Changing Paradigm***

As we shift our thinking about the role of pictures in story development, it is important to understand that within the “pictures-first” Artists/Writers

Workshop model, the terms “illustrate,” “illustration,” and “illustrator” have little relevance with regard to students’ story-drafting process. A quick check in any dictionary reminds us that “illustration” refers to a picture created to accompany an existing text. In Artists/Writers Workshop, because the art always precedes the writing, there is no existing text when creating the artwork; thus, technically the creation of the art does not fall within the realm of book illustration. In students’ published books, this nuanced understanding is reflected on the back page, where readers have an opportunity to learn about the book’s creator. The “About the Author/Illustrator” page has been replaced with an “About the Artist/Writer” page. This subtle change in heading reflects a shift in thinking about the story-drafting process that has huge implications.

### ***Common Core***

As teachers wrestle with making a significant paradigm shift (and justifying it to administrators and colleagues), they should keep in mind that two decades of research documents the effectiveness of this approach for a wide range of learners and that this uncommon approach can easily be used to implement the Common Core. As educators across the nation engage in unpacking the Common Core, those who embrace Picturing Writing and/or Image-Making are discovering that the format and daily routines of Artists/Writers Workshop are well aligned with the ELACSS and that Artists/Writers Workshop helps teachers seamlessly address standards for reading, writing, listening, speaking, and language across the curriculum in ways that are effective for a wide range of learners.

Reading Anchor Standard #1, for instance, states: “Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support

conclusions drawn from the text” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, p. 10). While I am sure that the drafters of the ELACCSS envisioned this standard being fulfilled strictly through interactions with written text, if we expand our notion of text to include pictures, something interesting occurs. We discover that the youngest readers (i.e., picture readers) practice making inferences naturally and regularly as they engage in “reading a story” when they open a picture book and begin to read the pictures, i.e., to draw meaning from them. When a teacher asks students to read the pictures in a picture book for meaning, s/he is asking them to practice making inferences. Following students’ reading for meaning with a simple question (“How do you know that?”) invites them to cite evidence—a practice required by the Common Core. This simple way to practice drawing inferences and citing evidence is developmentally appropriate for young children; it also reinforces an important skill that can later be transferred to the written text. Through equal attention to both picture book illustrations and text, teachers of young children discover they can address the ELACCSS in developmentally appropriate, more inclusive ways.

### ***Higher-Order Thinking Skills***

By being defined as artists and writers and assigned the task of creating their own quality picture books designed around curriculum topics, students come to see themselves as creators of important artistic and literary work. Through genuine interest in honing their craft, they engage in deeper study of work created by professionals in their fields. Through the study of the parallel and complementary languages of pictures and words—which focuses special attention on fostering language development across the curriculum—students read, analyze, discuss, synthesize, and then create their own high-quality narrative, informational, and

opinion/argumentative pieces.

Picturing Writing and Image-Making naturally cultivate the deeper thinking promoted by the ELACSS, including 21st-century skills: creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (the 4Cs). As students become part of a community of learners who craft their own artistic and literary work, they use higher-order thinking skills. The level four depth of knowledge thinking skills<sup>[1]</sup> outlined in Webb's Depth of Knowledge Chart (Webb, 2005) are seamlessly woven throughout the students' creative process—again, in ways that are developmentally appropriate for young people.

For instance, in order for students to create their own high-quality content-driven research-based stories, they must engage in a picture book genre study focused on narrative writing. They analyze what makes a compelling story from both a literary and artistic perspective, identifying the key (literary and artistic) elements that draw a reader in and move the reader through the story. As students analyze these complementary languages of pictures and words, they connect key concepts in art and writing, observing important parallels between the two. For example, they might observe that both artists and writers use tools of their own craft to create drama and suspense in a story; the writer uses strong descriptive language to achieve those effects, while the artist uses dramatic, often dark, colors. Frequently, artists also use a close-up perspective to bring the action closer to the reader. Shifting from a third-person perspective to a first-person perspective is another visual tool for increasing dramatic tension (see Figure 11).



*Figure 11: Emily uses dark colors, a close-up, and a shift to a first-person perspective to create drama and suspense, grade 2.*

To create a content-driven story, students must conduct research on their topic and then synthesize their knowledge as they apply key concepts to design their own artistic and literary work. Throughout the creation of their picture books, students critique their own and each other's art and writing, providing endless opportunities for discussion and revision. Supported by daily literature-based minilessons, students work as a classroom community to produce their best artistic and literary work. As

they do this, they naturally engage in the 4 Cs. Though the work is intensive, the experience is highly engaging and deeply satisfying. Eight-year-old Jared reflects, “I think my book is the best book ever because I put a lot of hard work into it.”

### ***Habits of Mind***

As we reflect upon the many ways that adopting a broader view of literacy learning makes sense, one final point to consider is the often unrecognized link between art-making and the ability to visualize. Key habits of mind essential to literacy learning are naturally strengthened when students develop the habits of mind of an artist. When young children see themselves as artists because they are given access to quality art materials, regularly engage in authentic art processes, and study the work of professional artists, they naturally adopt the habits of mind of an artist. They look more closely at the world around them. They not only observe the colors, shapes, and textures within the natural world more closely, but also take mental snapshots of what they see because they understand that this is information that will be useful to them later on, during the art strand of Artists/Writers Workshop. When the time comes, students are able to retrieve those mental snapshots. Without realizing it, they are practicing visualization.

While educators understand that the ability to visualize what we read is critical to comprehension (Bell, 2007) and that the ability to visualize what we write is essential to creating writing that paints pictures in the reader’s mind (McClanahan, 1999), we somehow have overlooked the critical link between visualization and the artistic process. Art-making serves to strengthen the cognitive process of visualization inherent in becoming an effective reader and writer. The ability to visualize is naturally and joyfully

fostered through the habits of mind of the artist. The mental processes involved in reading, writing, and creating art go hand in hand. Our students will be much better served once we recognize this truth.

[<sup>1</sup>] Those skills are: design, connect, synthesize, apply concepts, critique, analyze, create, and prove.

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