Art and Heritage Culture: A High-Quality Inclusive Educational Experience in One Public School in Barcelona

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to see how a joint art project between a museum and a public school affects the process of inclusion and involvement of Chinese students. This mixed-method study is based on a questionnaire as a pilot test, then following nine months of observing Art-Based Project (ABP) activities at the school and museum, as well as interviews with children. The Tandem Project, which employs the arts education model developed by the school and the museum ABP, as well as the Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) included in this art project, have a positive impact on those aspects of Chinese children: heritage culture expression, participation in school activities, and interpersonal intelligence.

Keywords: Art, heritage culture, inclusive education, social achievement.

1. INTRODUCTION

The reality is that Europe, with its increasingly relaxed borders, especially since the establishment of the European Union, has underscored the importance of education for immigrants across many European nations (Reljić *et al.*, 2015). As a member of the EU, Spain grapples with a substantial immigrant population that has significantly impacted the economic, demographic, and societal landscapes since the early 2000s. From the 1999–2000 academic year to the 2020–2021 academic year, the number of immigrants enrolled in Spanish schools climbed eightfold throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century. According to current statistics, immigrant students make up 10.3% of all students in Spain's educational system and 15.0% in Catalonia, ranking Catalonia third among the autonomous communities (Ministry of Education, 2010, 2022). Notably, Chinese immigrants (CI) held the top position among Asian immigrants in Spain during that period.

In terms of Asian and Oceanic immigrants, Catalonia, in particular, leads the autonomous community. Many students from immigrant households are classified as having special educational needs (SEN) due to their total or partial lack of command of the Spanish language. Under Catalonia's bilingualism, this SEN was especially relevant for students from non-Spanish-speaking nations (Rojas Tejada *et al.*, 2012; Siguan, 1980).

Inclusive education is a global shift that will incorporate pupils from varied backgrounds into mainstream education. According to UNESCO, inclusive education is founded on the principle that education is a fundamental human right that lays the groundwork for a more equitable society. Regardless of their specific features or obstacles, all students have the right to an education (UNESCO, 2003).

Multicultural schools are vital because they foster cultural awareness, sensitivity, and understanding, all of which are necessary for a more harmonious and inclusive society. Most countries that accept immigrants are conducting an assimilation policy or acculturation policy. With the *reverse acculturation* theory, the acculturated agent can now impact the host society's cultural reproduction (Barón *et al.*, 2014; Chan, 2013; Haugen, 2016; Kim & Park, 2009). Reverse acculturation is "*the change in direction of the acculturation process, back towards the culture of origin*", which is a process that fully acculturated individuals return to their roots (Chan, 2013, p. 1). Acculturation and Reverse Acculturation incorporate the dimension of immigrants' beliefs and conduct (Andreeva

& Unger, 2015). Reverse acculturation occurs when the immigrant student becomes the acculturating agent (Cruz & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015).

Art-Based Project (ABP) is a learner-centered and inter-disciplined method used to satisfy children's special needs in which a variety of demographic students can develop their own project tasks (Asfihana *et al.*, 2022; Baiden, 2021; Hawari & Noor, 2020; Kovácsné Pusztai, 2021; Lai, 2021; Rihter & Potočnik, 2022).

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is an approach developed in the 1980s in New York, USA, by cognitive psychologist Abigail Housen and later adopted as a tool used in museums by Philip Yenawine to launch teacher-led conversations about art images (López & Kivatinetz, 2006; Yenawine, 2013). The three basic questions of VTS are:

1. What's going on (happening) in the picture?
2. What makes you say that?
3. What more can we find?

The link between VTS and social ability has been established by research. On the one hand, it aids in the construction of the intrapersonal world, such as value construction (Raaijmakers *et al.*, 2021) and civic value development (Moreno-Vera & Cruz, 2022), emotion expression (Zapata *et al.*, 2017) and identifying and managing (Iribarren *et al.*, 2021), self-efficiency construction (Cappello *et al.*, 2019), finding and realizing personal character and interest (Tackett *et al.*, 2023). On the other hand, VTS has a positive influence on basic interpersonal skills, such as appreciating Others' Perspectives (Campbell *et al.*, 2022) and improving communication skills (Albert *et al.*, 2022; Aspden *et al.*, 2022; Cappello & Walker, 2016; Deroo, 2022; Moeller *et al.*, 2013), enhancing awareness of the social problem (Balhara *et al.*, 2023), developing culture competence (Aspden *et al.*, 2022), moving away the invisible barriers in teamworking in intercultural context (Murdoch-Kitt & Emans, 2021), and motivating social brain function (Dalia *et al.*, 2020; van Leeuwen *et al.*, 2023).

In the following part, we present an investigation carried out in a multicultural school in Barcelona with those research questions:

1. What are the main barriers in this multicultural school from the students' perspective?
2. What are the general benefits of an art-based project based on Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)?
3. How does this project influence the process of inclusion and participation of Chinese children?

2. Material and Method

To gather quantitative data for this study, we employed the Index for Inclusion questionnaire (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) as a pilot test. This was followed by a nine-month period of observing school and museum activities. Subsequently, individual interviews with students were conducted to capture qualitative data. The pilot test took place in February 2019, while observational data were collected between February 2019 and February 2021. Interviews commenced in February 2019 and extended through February 2022, conducted both in-person and online. All interviews and observations were audio and video recorded, transcribed in their native languages (Catalan or Spanish), and translations were incorporated. Thematic analysis of the transcripts in their original language was performed using qualitative software (NVivo) to preserve the authenticity of the participants' words. The essay primarily focuses on IEA viewpoints and VTS.

The Index for Inclusion questionnaire utilized two types of questions: closed-ended questions for more reliable results, employing a 4-point Likert scale (0 for needing more information, 1 for disagree, 2 for neither agree nor disagree, and 3 for total agreement); and open-ended questions with descriptive statistics to enrich closed-ended data. The questionnaire, administered in Spanish, was distributed to students in Grades 3 to 6 on printed paper. Completed questionnaires were collected at school within a week, resulting in 92 responses. To aid in statistical analysis, the data were imported into SPSS to identify general barriers related to inclusion in a multicultural school.

The interviews with students centered on their daily activities, VTS activity, and Project Tandem. Project Tandem's educational approach, experiences, and values were the main topics observed during the interviews. The interview themes encompassed children's experiences inside and outside the classroom, the influence of heritage culture, and experiences in other educational environments. The interview schedules intentionally remained open-ended to allow themes to emerge organically from conversations with Chinese students. All participants hailed from low-income families, and for ethical considerations, their names are identified by single letters.

3. Context and Tandem Project

IEA is a multicultural public school that serves kids from a variety of cultural backgrounds. It is located in Barcelona's District Sants-Montjuic, a varied area with a mix of Spanish, immigrant, and international people. Barcelona is located in the autonomous area Catalonia, which is a bilingual province (Juarros-Daussà & Lanz, 2009; Newman *et al.*, 2008; Woolard, 1992). Almost 98% of the students are from different cultures. The inclusion of those immigrant students becomes more challenging under bilingualism (Spanish and Catalan) (Reyes & Carrasco, 2018). IEA has immigrants from places outside than Spain, most of which are undeveloped. Art, immigrants, and multiculturalism are all labels given to the IEA.

This school collaborates with many other institutions on their art curriculum. Especially, it has a working relationship with the Museo Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC) through the **Tandem Project**, which is a program aimed at promoting cultural exchange and collaboration between museums in Catalonia and museums around the world. The project's purpose is to establish a network of museums that will collaborate to produce exhibitions, share ideas and best practices, and encourage the study and preservation of art and cultural heritage.

Two streams of work have been prioritized based on the school's reality: A methodological shift centered on project-based work in which art and artistic history play

TABLE I: Descriptive Statistics of the Student's Perspective

Item	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Need more information	Mean
1. I like coming to school.	88%	12%	0%	0%	2.88
2. I like playing with my friends.	94.6%	5.4%	0%	0%	2.95
3. My friends like playing with me.	73.9%	22.8%	1.1%	2.2%	2.68
4. My teachers like listening to my opinion.	76.1%	15.2%	0%	8.7%	2.59
5. My teachers like helping me.	89.1%	8.7%	0%	2.2%	2.85
6. I like helping my teachers when they have something to do.	81.5%	16.3%	0%	2.2%	2.77
7. Some children insult others.	65.2%	30.4%	4.3%	0%	2.61
8. Sometimes, the children are not kind to me.	31.5%	53.3%	15.2%	0%	2.16
9. There is always some adult who pays attention to me when I feel sad.	72.8%	19.6%	5.4%	2.2%	2.63
10. Our teachers know how to solve the problem some children fight	85.9%	10.9%	1.1%	2.2%	2.80
11. I feel satisfied with my achievement when I get something.	84.8%	10.9%	1.1%	3.3%	2.77
12. My teachers like hearing what I did at home.	53.3%	32.6%	6.5%	7.6%	2.32
13. My family thinks that this place is a good place.	80.4%	13%	2.2%	4.3%	2.70

an essential role. The projects in each course are organized around a research topic chosen by the students and teaching staff.

4. Results

4.1. Barriers and Opportunities of IEA

The overall mean of all respondents on the items related to the students' questionnaire from the Index for Inclusion was 2.67. This mean indicates a situation of inclusion in students' perspective that falls between response numbers 2 and 3, that is, between neither agree nor disagree and "agree", but leans heavily towards 3, which indicates the response "agree" on the questionnaire scale. From the student's perspective of inclusion, an item-based summary is presented in Table I.

Table I shows that for 8 of the 13 items, there is a higher response rate within the agreement level than the other three levels (Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Need more information). Most of the participants agreed with items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, and 13, which means there is an inclusive environment in this school from the students' perspective. They also indicate that there is a positive relationship between students and a considerable positive relationship between students and teachers.

However, there are differences in items 7, 8, 9, and 12, which indicate the amount of disagreement. Those items indicate that children feel less attention from the teacher. Furthermore, some of the participants felt a conflict/tense relationship with other children (need to know how to solve relationship conflict), and some of the participants disagreed with the closed relationship between school and family.

To sum up, items 7, 8, 9, and 12 show the less inclusive situation related to the peer relationship, attention from teachers, attitude, and family-school connection.

4.2. Personal and Social Skills Achievement

Tandem project activities are designed to be inclusive, accommodating different learning rhythms. The incorporation of images of artworks enhances understanding and communication, which is particularly beneficial for those who may not have a complete command of the Catalan language.

Engaging in visual art classes has proven effective in alleviating student anxiety and enhancing participation, as noted by studies (Melnikova et al., 2020; Ozkan, 2022). These classes contribute to the construction of shared values within the microsystem of participants (Probine, 2022) and foster a learner-centered environment (Cappello & Walker, 2016; Moeller et al., 2013; Smolkowski et al., 2020; Yenawine, 2013). Additionally, involvement in visual arts has been associated with improvements in cognitive qualities, such as critical thinking (Burchenal & Grohe, 2008) and intellectual development (Burchenal & Grohe, 2007). See Figs. 1 and 2 for the examples of the students' artworks.

This initiative enhances children's motivation, a crucial factor in fostering learning and academic achievement. Motivated students are inclined to actively engage with the subject matter, participate actively in class discussions, and demonstrate persistence in overcoming challenges. Additionally, motivated students tend to set and pursue objectives, take responsibility for their own learning, and readily seek assistance when needed. Conversely, students lacking motivation may face challenges in maintaining

Fig. 1. VTS in MNAC with Grade Five.
Students participate voluntarily.

Fig. 2. VTS in MNAC with Grade Two.
Chinese students eagerly describe what they see.

Fig. 3. Chinese students' creation after VTS activity (Grade 5).

Fig. 4. Chinese students' creation after VTS activity (Grade 5).

interest in the material, exhibit reluctance to participate in class activities, and may easily succumb to difficulties. Such a lack of motivation can lead to diminished academic performance, lower self-esteem, and a negative attitude towards the learning process.

Consequently, instilling inspiration in children proves pivotal for both their academic advancement and overall well-being. This approach not only cultivates a positive attitude towards learning but also enhances their confidence and academic performance.

Art serves as a powerful nonverbal means for children to convey their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, promoting self-expression. Through artistic endeavors, children can freely explore their creativity, express themselves, and develop a deeper understanding of their own identities. The Tandem Project champions equality, valuing each member equally and affording everyone the opportunity to pursue their interests. Within this collaborative environment, children are motivated by their own passions, with a focus on fostering self-determination and respecting individual expressions (Morón Velasco, 2011). In the Tandem Project, all students participate collaboratively in projects, ensuring that no one is left to work alone.

Art projects help the interaction between students and improve the between-students relationship, which is also improved in the interview of students.

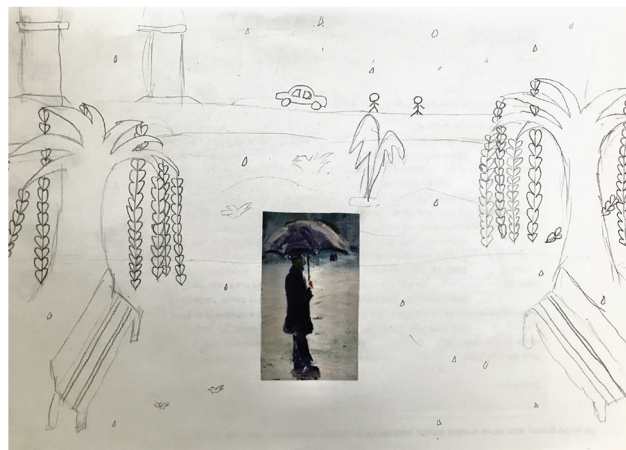*"Tandem project increased interaction (between my class-mates and me), (In the project, I spoke) more words. Contact (with my classmates) more. The art project has a lot of words to express, mainly language exercises." (Individual Interview of Student No. E)*
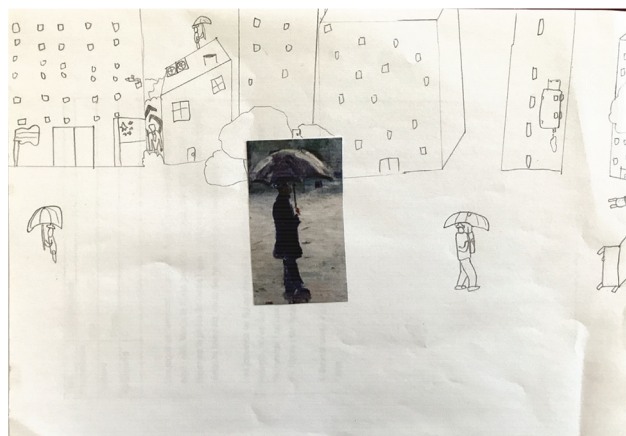
The artistic project can not only trans disciplines but also connect with social skills and cultivate *coopera-tion skills*. From this departure, students get a sense of confidence.

"I have collaborated (with my classmates). We have a project of Building blocks (magnets) in making difficult graphics. (When we succussed), I showed off with my par-ents and teachers." (Individual interview with student No. G)

4.3. Art and Heritage Culture Expression

VTS built an open-ended constructivist model using a structural conversational technique (Bell, 2016). By using VTS, students may recreate the painting. After using VTS to analyze the painting *Paris, a Rainy Day* by Gustave Caillebotte, the monitor asked the students to recreate their own painting by using one copy piece of the painting. Figs. 3 and 4 show a selection of the students' artworks.

In Fig. 3, rain is frequently associated with melancholy and farewell in Chinese culture. When parting, the willow tree communicates the sentiment of farewell. The primary figure in the artwork is surrounded entirely by open space and items. The characters in the painting are all far away, implying that the figure is lonely. His back is turned to the left, and his gaze is drawn to the crowd and the metropolis, expressing his need for human interaction. However, there is a fountain-like barrier between him and the crowd,

which may imply that there is a veil between him and the audience, making it hard to look through.

In the artwork provided in Fig. 4, the figure remains in the middle. The spacing between the core figure and the other characters is adequate, yet the surrounding individuals are all similar to the central character, implying that the people in the contact group are frequently people similar to themselves. Maybe their cultures are similar, or maybe they share similar hobbies. In the distance, the first structure from the left shows both Spanish and Chinese flags as well as surveillance equipment. It is a consulate or embassy. This is also a cultural emblem, indicating that two civilizations coexist in the mind. The embassy's door is quite tall, allowing the central figure to enter and exit. Other buildings' doors, on the other hand, are quite short and visibly inconvenient for the central figure to enter and escape. Between the embassy and another building, there is a large shadow of trees, and there is also a person who can see the front. This individual is stuck between the forest and the building, unable to move forward or back. It expresses the protagonists' cultural uneasiness in a multicultural context.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study, derived from a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, shed light on the multifaceted dynamics within a multicultural school setting, with a particular focus on Chinese students. The application of the Index for Inclusion questionnaire as a pilot test, coupled with extensive observations spanning nine months and in-depth individual interviews, has provided a comprehensive understanding of various aspects influencing the educational experiences of these students.

The quantitative arm of the study, facilitated by the Index for Inclusion questionnaire, allowed for a structured examination of inclusion-related factors. The use of closed-ended questions, employing a 4-point Likert scale, offered a quantifiable measure of participants' perspectives. The integration of open-ended questions further enriched the dataset, providing nuanced insights into the complexities of inclusion in a multicultural school. The statistical analysis, conducted using SPSS, aimed to identify overarching barriers to inclusion.

One key observation from the quantitative data was the prevalence of loneliness among Chinese children from low-income households. The reluctance of parents to intervene in public conflicts, opting for a more inconspicuous approach, emerged as a significant factor influencing the social development of these students. This insight underscores the importance of considering family dynamics and socio-economic factors when addressing inclusion in multicultural educational settings.

The qualitative component, including interviews and observations, delved into the lived experiences of Chinese students. Notably, the Tandem Project emerged as a positive influence on peer interactions, fostering respect, self-expression, and collaborative skills. The holistic approach of the project, evident in its impact on both daily activities and educational values, suggests that initiatives emphasizing collaboration and self-expression can contribute significantly to the overall well-being of students in multicultural environments.

The thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed a range of topics, including students' daily activities, the VTS activity, and Project Tandem. By intentionally keeping the interview schedules open-ended, the researchers aimed to allow for the emergence of themes organically, capturing the unique experiences and perspectives of Chinese students in a multicultural school.

Importantly, all study participants came from low-income families, emphasizing the need for an inclusive educational approach that addresses not only cultural factors but also socio-economic challenges. The ethical decision to designate participants by single letters underscores the commitment to confidentiality and respect for the privacy of the individuals involved.

In conclusion, the amalgamation of quantitative and qualitative methods has provided a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities within a multicultural school environment for Chinese students. The findings underscore the importance of considering socio-economic factors, family dynamics, and the positive impact of collaborative projects in fostering inclusion and enhancing the educational experiences of students in multicultural settings.

6. Conclusion

This investigation specifically examines Chinese students in a multicultural school, albeit on a limited scale. Nonetheless, aligning with the researcher's comparable cultural background enhances the robustness of the findings.

Our research reveals that Chinese children from low-income families experience loneliness, compounded by parents who are reluctant to intervene or defend their children publicly, preferring to maintain a low profile in conflicts. These behaviors significantly impact the social development of Chinese children. Addressing the challenges faced by immigrant families begins with supporting parents rather than solely focusing on the children. Additionally, the Tandem Project exerts a substantial positive influence on the peer interactions of Chinese students. Participation in group activities within the project enables students to cultivate respect, self-expression, and collaborative skills, contributing to the completion of projects through collective efforts. Collectively, these findings underscore the significance of the Tandem Project as a commendable initiative.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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