

Thinking Through Art: A Culturally Responsive Approach to Teaching and Learning

Impact Study Executive Summary, January 2022

MEM & Associates and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

STUDY OVERVIEW

This first-of-its kind study aims to determine how well the Isabella Gardner Museum's *Thinking Through Art* year-long professional development and classroom instructional materials support the strategic initiatives of the Boston Public Schools: more culturally responsive and equitable instruction, and gains in critical thinking and social emotional learning among students at all grade levels. If the study finds that *Thinking Through Art* achieves these goals, it would present a model for how student outcomes can be improved through thoughtful cooperation between cultural institutions and public schools.

THINKING THROUGH ART AT THE GARDNER MUSEUM

Thinking Through Art provides year-long, research-based professional development, visual art curriculum materials, and access to the Museum for teachers and their students in Boston Public Schools. Currently in its fifth year, *Thinking Through Art* has served more than 230 teachers and 12,000 students. While Gardner Museum visits are an essential component of *Thinking Through Art*, a key feature of the program is that it builds capacity within schools by targeting teacher practice and locating the majority of student instruction in the classroom, led by the teacher.

In addition to drawing on the Gardner Museum's collection, *Thinking Through Art* classroom curriculum also incorporates art images from supplementary sources. This visual art curriculum is developmentally appropriate and includes diverse eras, cultures, media, and genres, with a focus on representing BIPOC artists. Teachers learn how to facilitate discussions about these artworks in a way that is student-centered, open-ended, and disrupts biases and stereotypes. Case studies confirm that students of teachers enrolled in the program increase their critical thinking skills, especially their ability to develop evidence-based argument skills.

STUDY TIMELINE

This multi-year study is scheduled across two school years, with data collection taking place during the 2022-2023 school year. Using a quasi-experimental design, the instructional practices of *Thinking Through Art* teachers and their students' outcomes will be measured at the beginning and end of the school year and compared with control group teachers and students in the same grades. From February-June 2022, the study will conduct a pilot testing phase, during which instruments will be refined to ensure that they are accessible for all learners. Student

privacy and rights will be honored throughout. Students' names will not be requested, and no list of student participants will be created.

- **January 2022 - Pilot Testing Participant Selection**
 - Research team begins meeting and planning for the pilot testing phase.
 - Teachers confirm intent to participate in the pilot testing phase. Participants will include 4 teachers currently participating in *Thinking Through Art* and 2 teachers who are not in the program.
 - Principals at participating schools confirm support of the study.
- **February 2022 - Pilot Testing Kick Off**
 - All stakeholders meet to formally begin the pilot testing phase.
 - Administration of consent forms for teachers and student's guardians.
- **February - June 2022 - Pilot Testing: Validity and Reliability**
 - Research team works with teachers to modify instruction, data collection instruments, and classroom procedures. During this phase the research team will not be present in the classroom in accordance with the Boston Public Schools COVID-19 safety protocols.
 - Monthly meetings will take place to share results of students' reactions to data collection instruments and to confirm the validity of the match between *Thinking Through Art* and Boston Public Schools goals.
 - Teachers implementing and recording *Thinking Through Art* lessons will be given guidance, equipment and support by the research team to ensure that they can collect data without undue burden.
- **Summer 2022**
 - Professional development for teachers enrolled in *Thinking Through Art*.
 - Use of observation protocol to assess teachers' skill with *Thinking Through Art* instructional practices
- **September 2022 - May 2023 - Implementation of *Thinking Through Art* and Data Collection**
 - **September.** Kick off meeting with school principals and teachers. Administration of consent forms for teachers and student's guardians.
 - **October.** Students in treatment and control groups complete pre-survey and reflection exercises.
 - **November - May.** Treatment teachers complete 8 *Thinking Through Art* lessons in class and visit the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum twice with their classes. Teachers film one *Thinking Through Art* lesson.
 - **April and May.** Students in treatment and control groups complete post-survey and reflection exercises.

- **June - September 2023 - Data Analysis**
 - **July and August.** Research team analyses data.
 - **August and September.** Research findings shared with Boston Public Schools and other stakeholders.

STUDY BENEFITS

Teachers and students who participate in this study, including both the pilot testing phase in SY 2021-2022 and the data collection phase in SY 2022-23, will experience the following benefits:

- **Teachers who participate in the treatment group** as part of the *Thinking Through Art* program will learn new practices for facilitating cognitively demanding, student-centered conversations around art that centers joy and engagement. This will benefit their ability to support equitable literacy through language development scaffolds and Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices. These teachers will also receive a Gardner Museum membership.
- **Students who participate in the treatment group** as part of the *Thinking Through Art* program will experience increased visual literacy, critical thinking skills, social-emotional learning capacity, access to the Gardner Museum, and access to art. They will participate in collaborative discussions with their peers in the classroom and at the Gardner Museum. They will learn about artworks from around the world through sustained close observation. In group discussion they will learn to support claims with visual evidence, listen to their peers and consider the importance of multiple perspectives. They will gain confidence expressing their ideas in the classroom, in museum spaces, and beyond. Students will also receive Gardner Museum family admission passes.
- **Teachers and their students who participate in the control group** will benefit through free class visits and family admission passes to the Gardner Museum after data collection is completed. They will have priority enrollment in *Thinking Through Art* for the following school year with a reduced materials fee.

The results of this study will provide administrators and teachers with data-based evidence about the merits of the *Thinking Through Art* program. If study findings support the effectiveness of the program, we anticipate that it will bolster recruitment and help us to expand student, teacher, and school access by bringing this program to scale across the district. The Museum aims to be more than just an enrichment experience for teachers and students - it can be a valued resource, closely aligned with Boston Public Schools strategic priorities: culturally responsive instruction, equity learning practices, and gains in critical thinking and social emotional learning among students at all grade levels.