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## Ana Luisa Cardona: Chutes and Ladders

[Ana Cardona](#) [Ana Luisa Cardona](#), [arts education](#), [arts integration](#), [integrating arts](#), [john berger](#), [marshall mcluhan](#), [michele root-berenstein](#), [Michigan Department of Education](#), [michigan visual and performing arts guidelines](#), [national arts standards](#), [robert root-bernstein](#), [the medium is the message](#), [ways of seeing](#)

When I arrived in graduate school forty-six years ago, it became clear that I enjoyed crossing the boundaries of academic disciplines far too often. In those days, crossing disciplinary boundaries was a practice frowned upon by those whose professional careers were built upon ever-increasing levels of specialization. Forging new chutes between education and art, communications and anthropology, image and word, movement and understanding, practice and theory didn't fall neatly into predetermined knowledge silos. Although change was in the air, evidenced by Marshall McLuhan's [The Medium is the Message](#) (1968) and John Berger's [Ways of Seeing](#) (1972), it has taken awhile for the breeze of change to take hold.

In 1984, my hunger for connections led me away from the ivory towers toward work with a community arts organization in Detroit where all forms of knowledge and skills had to converge to support a multi-arts and media community center dedicated to social change. Armed with the "just-released" ground-breaking 128

ram MacIntosh computer, this vibrant organization put the ability to combine words and images in the hands of artists and journalists, poets and musicians, community members young and old.

Continuing my dance with one foot in higher education and the other in the world of community-based arts, I happened in 1997 upon [For the Sake of Science, the Arts Deserve Support](#) by Robert Root-Bernstein in the Chronicle for Higher Education. Here was a MacArthur Fellow and “Genius Awardee” granting academic research-based permission to: make meaningful connections across the polar opposites of art and science; to align and make sense across disciplines and bodies of knowledge; and across habits of thinking and doing.

This “connected” approach later informed my work as Arts Education Consultant in Michigan’s Department of Education (1998-2011) where my mantra was – “Remember the arts...you can’t integrate what you don’t have” – a caution to those who use “arts integration” as an artifice to supplant the arts.

In fact, Michigan’s Arts Education Content Standard 5 calls for students to “recognize, analyze, and describe connections among the arts; between the arts and other disciplines; and between the arts and everyday life.” The [National Core Arts Standards](#) define the standard dedicated to connecting as “relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.” The connected approach is perhaps best illustrated by [Michigan’s Visual Performing and Applied Arts Credit Guidelines](#) developed by a committee of K-12 arts educators and higher education faculty and researchers in 2006- one of whom was the already-mentioned Robert Root-Bernstein, co-author of [Sparks of Genius: The Thirteen Thinking Tools of the World’s Most Creative People \(2001\)](#) with Michèle Root-Bernstein and professor of physiology at Michigan State University.

In these Michigan credit guidelines, silos are broken down and the artistic-creative process is described as a rather messy iterative process in which steps are revisited several times, in differing order, before creative results are finalized in significant contrast with the traditional linear process in which each step is visited once in a single order.

While discipline-based knowledge and skills are critical to developing fully in the arts, connections are essential in a world where no one discipline holds the answer to complex problems and the traditional ladders of specialization call out for the chutes that connect us and make our lives and work meaningful. Close to fifty years later, this “graduate student” continues to color outside the lines because that is where the interesting stuff is happening.

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