

Morton Grove Champion (IL)

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COVER STORY

Students have same goal, just different ways of getting there

By Cathryn Gran

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Art can open doors and expand horizons.

For students in the **Project Eye-to-Eye** program at Golf Middle School in Morton Grove, art gives them the opportunity to express themselves in nontraditional, educational ways.

The school serves sixth- through eighth-grade students in portions of Morton Grove and Niles.

The artwork of teacher Bari Levin's charges was on display at an exhibition May 1 at the school.

Attending the art exhibition were college students who have benefitted from the **Project Eye-to-Eye** program, Levin said.

The guests share their stories about how they have turned their learning differences into positive outcomes, Levin explained.

The national organization tracks those results.

The **Project Eye-to-Eye** group takes information gleaned from participant surveys to verify strides taken to improve the learning process.

"They compile that research to provide the statistics to back up the results," Levin said.

Not everyone learns the same way.

Once a little reticent to speak, Juan Armenta now has no difficulty explaining how he developed his idea for his latest art project.

For his entry into the exhibit, Armenta chose to design the perfect classroom.

In a utopian world Armenta's classroom would include a restaurant.

"It's hard to focus if you're hungry," he explained. "You're not 'you' when you're hungry."

The classroom also has such technological upgrades as connections for iPads. And of course a few desks.

But why a restaurant?

"You have to have a good selection of food," said Armenta, who also enjoys photography.

While Armenta's project was a diorama, fellow student Hugo Cruz took an abstract view of his project.

An artist at heart, Cruz made a papier-mâché cast of his hand.

That hand dominates his entry, which included a paintbrush and an easel.

“I love to draw,” Cruz said. “I draw a lot.”

Explaining the process of creating the hand, Cruz said he used wet strips of material to cover his hand, but did so in a way to allow him to slip off the finished project.

“Like a glove,” he said.

As with Armento, Cruz said his finds inspiration online.

“Sometimes I use the computer to find images,” Cruz said, “and I use those images as models.”

Those images serve as a source of inspiration, with Cruz adding his own unique embellishments.

Now in its fifth year the **Project Eye-to-Eye** program allows students who learn differently to embrace those differences and move forward, Levin explained.

“**Project Eye-to-Eye** is a great program,” she said. “It builds self-confidence, and allows students to learn ways to accommodate their different learning strategies.”

When the students are in their regular classrooms, they feel more comfortable talking with their teachers, Levin said.

Project Eye-to-Eye encourages children who are “labeled” as different to become their own best advocates.

Through art, the program encourages students to discover their potential.

As Oscar Wilde said, “It is through art and through art only that we can realize our perfection.”

For those who do not fit into the traditional learning mold, art provides an opportunity to reach out to the mundane world.



“Many of the most intelligent people in the world have failed in traditional learning environments,” Levin noted. “We need to get rid of that stigma.”