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Border Crossing: One Teacher's Journey Toward Becoming
a Culturally Competent Art Educator

Lindsay Renea Ruiz

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Mark Graham, Chair
Daniel T. Barney
Tara Carpenter

Department of Art
Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

Border Crossing: One Teacher's Journey Toward Becoming a Culturally Competent Art Educator

Lindsay Renea Ruiz
Department of Art, BYU
Master of Arts

This thesis explores one secondary art teacher's journey into multicultural education, multicultural art education and issues in holistic education. It delves into the difficulties and expectations in creating a classroom culture where all students feel validated and respected, and mutual understanding is fostered across cultural borders. Specific needs of multicultural students are addressed in regards to their education. Then due to an unexpected turn of events which led to a five week study abroad in India, the research looks at ways to incorporate a holistic approach, and spiritual dimension, to multicultural education based on Tibetan Buddhist principles. This narrative looks to find connections between cultural representation within the curriculum, student engagement, and teacher satisfaction.

This thesis uses both narrative inquiry and autoethnography as methodologies. It includes field notes from India, as well as excerpts from my teaching journal in the classroom, which are woven into a narrative research text. It also includes an autoethnographic section describing my connection to the Hispanic community and why this study is relevant to my teaching practice.

Keywords: multicultural art education, Latino, Hispanic, culture, borders, curriculum, holistic education

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A problem in many schools, and in my own classroom, is how to make curriculum and teaching relevant to students from different cultures. It is a disturbing fact that students often feel left out and lose interest in school, in part, because they feel no connection to their own culture within school. Intertwined with issues of culture are questions about meaning and purpose that are usually connected to spiritual or holistic approaches to education. At issue is a vexing challenge that many white teachers face; how to authentically engage with students from cultures that are different from their own background, within schools that often emphasize an Eurocentric curriculum. A related challenge is how to involve students with important questions about meaning, connection, and spirit. One of the key factors linked to student success is having a culturally appropriate or responsive curriculum (Gay, 2000). My response to the problem of students feeling culturally marginalized was to design multicultural classroom experiences where all students feel validated and respected. My response to their seemingly aimlessness was to weave elements of a holistic education into my curriculum. In the process, I found significant connections between multicultural and holistic approaches; a key, often overlooked aspect of multicultural education is its spiritual dimension. An important part of this process of creating multicultural teaching and learning were my own personal experiences with different cultures, which informed subsequent curricular and teaching experiments. These personal cultural experiences also guided me to look at the spiritual dimensions of culture and holistic education practices, because they provide beliefs, values, and patterns that give individuals meaning (Stuhr, 2003). This thesis traces my own cultural and spiritual journeys into the field of multicultural art education at the secondary level.

As an autobiographical narrative, consistent with narrative and auto-ethnographic methodologies, I will describe my background growing up in Georgia, my present bi-cultural family, my multicultural experiments within my own art classroom, and my ongoing journey of cultural exploration. Moreover, this thesis embraces a narrative format in which I describe both my curricular experiments and my own changing understandings of multicultural and holistic education. In some ways, this project is as much about the unfinished journey as it is about a final destination or conclusive results.

Autobiographical Narrative

Oh how I wanted to lie down on the cement and give the ground a hug. The hot grey asphalt would not be a deterrent to make this embrace happen. It seemed to welcome me home and a sense of security overtook me. I had crossed back home. I had crossed the border. I was still a long way from home, but that didn't seem to matter because I was at the same time a part of a greater home, the U. S. of A., and it felt so good to be back.

You see my life is a story about borders and border crossings. I've had this itch to cross boundaries, particularly cultural boundaries since I was very little, and the payoff has been indispensable. As an educator, I have the ability to create borders for my students to cross each day and occasion opportunities for students to expand not only what they know, but also what is possible. I like to refer to them as border crossings, where we step outside of what we know to not only recognize what others have, but to discover what we had all along.

In the beginning

I was raised in a small rural town outside of Atlanta, Georgia in the 80s where life was simple and traditions held tight. My entire family line was born and raised in the South. That was great when it came to buying boiled peanuts from the local produce stand and riding in the back

of the pickup truck while listening to Johnny Cash being played out the window. But there was a darker side to those beloved traditions, which included racism. There was definitely tension between the two dominant races outside of the basketball court. I remember my parents saying things such as “Oh no, a black family just moved in down the street...there goes the whole neighborhood!” There was constant tension in my home over race, and I distinctly remember being threatened by my father to leave the house when he found out that a fellow student, who was black, had called me on the phone. It was merely for help with a homework assignment, but my father was afraid I was having romantic inclinations towards another race. I knew better than to ever have those kinds of inclinations.

There was also the time when while watching TV after school that my dad asked us to turn the TV off when he noticed us watching a program that was showing a multiracial couple. My sister resisted and an argument ensued, and then my younger sister made the unwise decision to call my father a racist. Let’s just say there was a door torn from a doorframe that afternoon. Do I blame my parents? Not necessarily. They were just products of the culture in which they were raised, and hadn’t been given the opportunity to step outside of those cultural boundaries they were boxed into.

As a child I knew that there was something inherently wrong with that type of mentality and that others should be seen for who they are and their character rather than by the color of their skin. I remember my favorite friend in first grade, named Gladys. On that elementary playground, race didn’t matter. We were just two little girls who loved to play, but inherently I knew our friendship wouldn’t exist outside of school. Fast forward twelve years, and in 1999 I found myself starting college in Utah, where the race factor made a 180 shift and I found myself in a struggle not between white and black, but between white and Hispanic. I wasn’t prepared for

that conversation, because my interactions with Hispanics were so limited in Georgia. I had to refer back to all of my previously learned knowledge and references to position myself in this new cultural environment. Here is what I knew about so-called “Hispanics.”

- According to my family, all Hispanics came from Mexico. It didn’t matter where in Latin America they were from, they were all the same. If you knew one “Mexican,” you knew them all.
- Hispanics were here to make a living and to send money home to their families. It must be really bad where they live, because they all want to come here to the U.S.
- Mexico City was the most overcrowded city in the world and had the worst air pollution. (That was one of the few things I remember from one of my textbooks in school.)
- Hispanics were overly sensual and at the time they were making their mark on the American music scene with their exotic sounds, accents, and music videos.

As sad as it is, that was what I knew. I ended up developing a close friendship with a Hispanic guy in college and it was so intriguing and foreign to be in his home. I remember the smells, the furniture, the dinnerware, the decor, and the music that filled his home. I was really curious and it was the first time I had entered the home of someone who was non-white. His family broke all of the stereotypes I had of Hispanic families. They were well off financially, stable, well traveled, and all of the children were educated. In so many ways, they were more successful than my own family. There was wisdom in that home and I was drawn to them and wanted to learn more about their culture. To make a long story short, I ended up marrying this friend and now I was directly impacted by this new culture. I became open to the idea of cultural

exploration and I began to learn all I could so that I could operate within this Hispanic environment.

I took language classes to learn Spanish. I watched *telenovelas* with my mother in law. I began eating all sorts of new foods and reading Spanish magazines. I never knew corsets were a thing with Hispanics, or that they are really into European royalty! I attended church meetings in Spanish, and eventually began taking trips to Mexico, including an extensive trip to Mexico City. I was overwhelmed by the amount of history and beauty I saw there. I was understanding these people and their culture and traditions, and the wonderful things they had to offer the world, and at the same time I was becoming more and more disenchanted with the way I was raised and what my education had taught me. Because I was open and embracing, the stereotypes I had were crumbling to the ground. I threw all of my misconceptions away and began to look for understanding. I was attempting to be a blank canvas. I wanted to learn from them and interact with them, and found myself wanting to be accepted into their culture. This process allowed me to see where my own worldviews were deficient and what I could gain from others to make my perceptions more clear and whole.

Raising bicultural children

As a mother of four children who are bicultural, I placed the responsibility upon myself to make sure that they were educated about their cultural identity. As a family we celebrated Mexican culture and I found the most effective way was through the arts. When my children were really small we would celebrate Cinco de Mayo as a day to celebrate all things Mexican. I would research arts and crafts, music, and food that would help us celebrate who we were. That is very typical to Mexican culture. The folk arts were promoted after the Revolution as a way to develop Mexican identity. Later we were introduced to Mexican folk dancing, which expanded

our sense of identity and was another form of identity celebration. My husband and I began to learn about Latin America by dancing on a folk dancing group that highlighted multiple countries from South America. I quickly began to learn how Latinos interact with one another and their differences and histories. Each is unique, yet the arts bring those unique approaches together and find commonalities. The arts provide a safe place for conversation. Because of the knowledge I've gained over the last twelve years since I began this endeavor, my circle of influence has doubled, my children's lives have changed, and I have developed a passion for people and culture.

Classroom and culture: What set me on my path

In the fall of 2013, I had a really interesting experience with one of my junior high students in my art room. He was of Mexican origin and during the course of the semester he showed little or no interest in the assignments given in class. And as much as I hate to admit it, the course revolved around a sort of cultural tourism in which we attempted to borrow ideas from different cultures around the world and add our own meaning into them. The majority of the students were really engaged in what we were doing, but this particular student did not participate. It wasn't until the end of October that I introduced the Mexican folk art of nichos to the students as we approached Dia de los Muertos, a memorial day that is celebrated on November first and second each year. The students were asked to memorialize one of their deceased ancestors in the form of a reliquary. The students were all really excited by this project, but the one that really caught my attention was the Mexican student mentioned before. There was light in his eyes as he talked about his grandfather and he was so eager to share things about his culture. He asked to bring in traditional food for his project that he could share with the class, and cried as he presented his memorial to the class. I was perplexed at first as to his newfound

interest in the class. He was so eager to share and would come before and after school to discuss his project plans and what he could share with our class. When asked what he would say to any students in the future concerning this assignment he said,

“Dear 7th grade students,

My name is _____, and I’d like to say that when you do your Nichos in Art you will connect to your roots. You may think that it’s a stupid art project that you have to do for your grade. Well I’m here to tell you that you’re wrong. When you do your Nicho you will feel emotions that you’ve never felt before. You felt emotions when your family member had passed. But when you get to do a project about your relative, get to let people know about what he/she did, you get to learn about things you never knew before. When you present it, you may cry and feel emotions. That’s good. That means that we all know you cared about this project, about your relative. You may never get a chance like this, and you may, but you will work harder. I’m not saying that you will be forced to do it. Deep down inside you will want to work harder on this. Put more feeling into the project. I hope you will agree with me after this project.

Sincerely, _____”

This was a complete one hundred and eighty degree turn for this particular student. After this assignment, he went back to being apathetic and didn’t complete any further assignments in my class. So what was the deal? What was it that made such a change in his attitude and engagement? I knew my enthusiasm for this project was high and the students could feel my passion for Mexican arts and my love for Mexican people. Could that have been it? Or perhaps it was the fact that he felt validated and it was something that he related to. I had never seen such a change in engagement before and it was this experience that set me on my path for this thesis. I

wanted to find ways for my students to relate to one another the way I related to my Latino students, without them ever having to leave the country, or the classroom for that matter. And this project afforded that opportunity. I also wanted to know what happened that motivated my under-performing Mexican student to all of a sudden have an enormous amount of enthusiasm, despite his previous poor performance in class.

Teaching Multicultural Adolescents in the Art Room

I am currently teaching all of the secondary students at Freedom Preparatory Academy in Provo, Utah. The demographics for the school include a thirty percent Latino population, which is reflected within my classroom. My high school classes have a Latino population of 44% and my junior high classes have a 33% Latino population. Throughout this project I have also had Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American students in my classroom. For the purposes of this project, I will be experimenting with different concepts and ideas in both the junior high and high school classes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This thesis describes a curricular experiment designed to enhance the multicultural and holistic experiences of a group of secondary students ranging from seventh to twelfth grade. The review of literature will describe relevant research, theory, and issues in multicultural and holistic education. Because holistic education is concerned with issues of identity, meaning, purpose and connection, which are often connected with the spiritual dimensions of a culture, to omit these things from a multicultural education would perhaps be leaving out the most important parts of the culture. This chapter will also examine some of the difficulties and expectations in creating a multicultural classroom where all students feel validated and respected. Because I teach a large percentage of Hispanic students, I included research about Latino needs in education when researching multicultural education to better serve my students.

Part 1: Issues in Multicultural Education

Multicultural education has at times been a much-debated topic in education and in teacher preparation programs. There was a surge of interest in multicultural education in the 1980s and 90s, due to the changing demographics of the U.S. The major theories of this time will be acknowledged along with more current theories and terms that are being investigated in the field of art education. The challenge is that these theories often go no further than discussion, theorizing, and the acknowledgment of a problem, because multiculturalism can be messy and requires a deep-rooted commitment to equality from the teachers.

Elizabeth Delacruz (1996), suggests that multiculturalism is a highly controversial topic in education and yet it is the least practiced. It is highly controversial because the United States' history was constructed on issues of race, religion, and class, and yet it is not practiced because teachers receive inadequate training or do not have access to resources to support them.

There are many issues that are discussed under the umbrella of multiculturalism, including gender and socioeconomic status, and issues of race and ethnicity. For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on cultural issues related to multicultural education, particularly those of Hispanic/Latino students in American schools. I will use the term Hispanic and Latino interchangeably throughout this paper.

Jacqueline Chanda (1992) acknowledges that there are many terms that have been created to clarify the ideas related to multiculturalism; for example, global education, cross-cultural education, multiethnic education, education for cultural pluralism, and education that includes cultural diversity. I identify most with Chanda's (1992) concept of cultural pluralism which:

acknowledges the existence within a nation or society of groups distinctive in ethnic origin, cultural patterns, religion, or the like and implies the preservation of identities and cultures within a given nation or society. It reflects very much the same concerns as multiculturalism. However, pluralistic ideals reinforce the preservation of the distinct qualities of each group by focusing on what makes each different, in order to generate respect for the separate and healthy existence of each culture. In the 1960s, multiculturalism... focused more on that which made people the same. Pluralism reflects more the ideals of a democratic and egalitarian society, ideals that are very compatible with the goals of art education (para. 13).

The trouble with following a pluralistic approach is that it does not acknowledge the evolution of culture. Chalmers (2002) disusses the fact that physical borders may stay the same, but cultural borders are much more flexible and permeable. If a teacher takes a solely pluralistic approach then they could potentially be boxing in traditional cultures as if they existed outside of history and international relations. A contemporary approach to multicultural education has to

acknowledge the hybridity of culture in the 21st century. Creating a pluralistic or hybrid classroom is demanding on teachers. It requires extensive self-motivated learning, that is not offered in teacher preparation programs, to be considered what Graeme Chalmers (2002) calls a culturally competent teacher. Most teacher preparation programs offer a wide sweeping course in multiculturalism in education, but rarely include specifics on any given ethnic culture.

Considering the fact that eighty seven percent of teachers are white, and around half of the U.S. student population is from minority groups, it is important to develop cultural sensitivity. Toni Jones and Mary Lou Fuller (2003) claim:

cultural sensitivity requires that teachers have an idea of what a culture is generally and what their culture (the teacher's culture) looks like specifically. Too often Euro-American educators don't recognize their own culture and so feel that culture is limited to exotic people living elsewhere. Glazer and Moynihan note that even after four or five generations, people are still influenced by their ancestors' cultures even though they may have limited knowledge of those cultures (as cited in Jones & Fuller p. 84).

To know ones own culture is not enough. Teachers must take an active role in learning about the diverse cultures that they find in their communities in order to better serve the students in their classrooms. Lucy Andrus (2001) describes five characteristics of a culturally competent educator. These are educators who:

- Have examined and resolved personal biases and are aware of and accept their own cultural backgrounds.
- Posses an inclusive understanding of multiculturalism and incorporate an anthropological approach to art education.

- Are sensitive to others' cultural backgrounds and tailor their teaching to meet their students' culturally particular needs.
- Have an understanding of the traditions of diverse world cultures.
- Have made the commitment to continue their own education in multiculturalism and diversity (p.15).

Actively seeking opportunities to learn about other cultures strengthens mutual understanding and trust between our students and us. The more experience we gain with other cultures, the more tools we will have to connect with our students. Multicultural students have needs that should be addressed within the classroom that will contribute to their success. Building relationships is important as well as maintaining high expectations and diversifying the teaching staff. Teachers should also be aware of the cultural diversity in their classrooms in order to better diversify their curriculum and teaching methods.

Relationships

Lisa Delpit (1995) states that she has learned from interviews and personal experiences with teachers from communities of color that many of these individuals believe teaching begins with the establishment of relationships between themselves and their students. She describes a model of teaching where the strongest relationship is between student and teacher, with content being one aspect of the relationship.

Delpit (1995) suggests that children of color value the social aspects of an environment to a greater extent than do mainstream children, and tend to put an emphasis on feelings, acceptance, and emotional closeness. In a study done by the University of Alaska, the single characteristic that Native Alaskan students attributed to those professors they judged most positively was being human (p. 140).

Sometimes successful teachers of students of color may be responding to their students' real needs, however those teachers may receive negative teacher evaluations, because they do not dress professional enough, maintain enough professional distance, or because they communicate with students in a more informal way. For these teachers, the issue is what is most important, content or relationships (p. 141)?

High expectations

Waxman, Padrón, and García (2007) affirm that Hispanic students have historically lower test scores and academic performance according to state and national tests, which may lead some teachers to believe the problem lies with the student (p.132). Teachers may assume that if they try not to push them or set too high expectations, then they cannot fail. However, this approach is robbing them of their potential. Students want to be taught. According to Delpit (1995), we need to validate who they are without limiting their potential. Sonia Nieto (2005) says that the deficit language used, like “students at risk” or “low achievers,” implies that the problems rest with the students. That somehow the students “are “at risk” for something they *are, have, or do*, or as if the problem of the “achievement gap” is that students are too lazy or too dumb to learn”(p. 465). She goes on to conclude that risk is *created* for certain students, including Latinos. The “achievement gap” might instead be defined as the “resource gap” or the “fairness gap” (p. 465).

Toni Jones and Mary Lou Fuller state, “teachers’ expectations become the students’ self-perceptions.” They go on to quote the experience of Eugene E. Garcia (2001) from his book *Hispanic Education in the United States: Raices y Alas* that describe the effects of teacher expectations.

For me it was a critical set of teachers--teachers who did recognize my talents and challenged me to a higher standard. Most teachers did not expect much of me. I was

quiet, spoke enough English to get by, but was not articulate in English, and it was evident that I was poor and came from a background of “educational disadvantage.” It seems that this should have signaled to educators that I might need “more” help than the average student might. Instead it seemed to signal to them they should expect less than what they expected of their “gifted” students. And I obliged them...I learned not to work very hard in my studies, to get by, and to do as many of my Hispanic peers did, namely, to look elsewhere for opportunities--in sports, in gangs, or in work, but not in academic aspects of schooling. It was several Spanish teachers and several athletic coaches who were the exception. They were my lucky charms (as cited in Jones & Fuller, p. 95).

Multicultural teachers

Schools should work to develop a multicultural staff. According to Tony Jones and Mary Fuller (2003), in 2000, the composition of the teaching force in the U.S. was 87 percent white middle class, and 74 percent were females. Ulrich Boser (2014) claims that now around half of the student populations in the U.S. are students of color. The demographic divide between students and teachers will only continue to grow as the U.S. immigrant population grows. He also claims that the Hispanic population is the least represented among teacher populations, and yet Latinos represent the largest minorities in schools. Fuller and Jones (2003) suggest that fewer minority students are going into teaching.

So what difference does having teachers of color make for multicultural students? Having teachers of color would give students positive role models in their lives. Students will also view school as a more welcoming place where they have mentors who may have similar cultural backgrounds and life experiences as the students. But perhaps more importantly, teachers of color are beneficial to all students, because they provide all of the student population with a

healthy and positive avenue to interact with someone who may look or act differently than them. This allows them to gain greater social trust and a sense of community. Without these teachers there is a possibility of a greater disconnect between teachers and multicultural students (Fuller & Jones, p. xiii).

Appropriate curriculum

A way in which teachers can validate multicultural students is to develop classroom curriculum that will build and affirm who the students are, who their ancestors were, and what valuable contributions members of their cultures have made to our society. One might wonder why the Latino population has not spoken up about the lack of Hispanic history or individuals taught in schools. I've never had a Hispanic student ask me about Latino artists in class. Perhaps it is because the Latinos have come from a long line of oppression, which directly affects their culture. Paulo Freire (1996) described the pedagogy of the oppressed as

a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or people) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity, but as long as [the oppressed] live in the duality in which *to be* is *to be like*, and *to be like* is *to be like the oppressor*, this contribution is impossible (p.30).

He also states that “the oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination...and became resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom” (p. 29). This idea reflects the ideal of assimilation, where individuals abandon their own culture and adopt the culture of power. The vast majority of stories, histories, images, and successes that are taught in schools are about white European males. This is the case in most subject areas, so the students believe that that is the ideal, which leads to the abandonment of one's own sense of worth and value of tradition.

Depending on if, and when, the students immigrate to the U.S. the opposite effect could occur, where the students actually resist the culture of power. Delpit (1995) looks at the opposite effect that might occur when she talks about how students who may appear to be unable to learn are in fact choosing not to learn. This is described as resistance theory, because in doing so they are rejecting an identity in what the student might see as a “them or us” scenario. If a newly immigrated Latino student attends school and only hears about American history, English grammar, artwork from Europe, and so on and so forth, then they might find no value in it. It may appear to the student that they must give up their own culture for the dominant culture, therefore resisting to learn in order to maintain their identity. Teachers can reduce this resistance by making sure that there is a place where the students’ culture is validated in the class. Delpit suggests providing a place for glorification of the students and their forbearers (p. 164).

As mentioned above, Freire suggests, this is not a revolution they can fight on their own. Teachers must be involved and act as advocates. We can do this by showing Latino students examples of Latinos achieving greatness and how they have contributed to the traditions, histories, and culture that make up America.

Delpit describes a story about a successful teacher of a 100% African American population, that “breathe[s] the heritage of [her] students into the curriculum”(p. 181). If I were to take this teacher’s methods and apply them to my Hispanic students, it would require a study centered on South and Central America and their relationship to the U.S. This approach requires teachers to connect the required curriculum back to the students’ Hispanic ancestry. This does not replace the curriculum, but expands it. As Delpit states, “They learn to love themselves, love

their history, and love learning” (p. 182). That in turn leads them to move towards acculturation over assimilation.

Geneva Gay (2000) encourages symboling in a multicultural classroom. Symbols are powerful conveyors of meaning. She describes a successful classroom that is inundated with positive images and interactions with ethnic and cultural diversity. They learn about and celebrate their own and one another’s identities and abilities, while simultaneously being invited to extend the boundaries of their knowledge and skills. All of this occurs in a warm, supportive, affirming, and illuminating classroom climate, in which the use of culturally diverse referents in teaching and learning is habitual. When discussing the roles and responsibilities of teachers, Gay suggests that:

opportunities must be provided for students from different ethnic backgrounds to have free personal and cultural expression so that their voices and experiences can be incorporated into teaching and learning processes on a regular basis.

As cultural mediators, teachers provide opportunities for students to engage in critical dialogue about conflicts among cultures and to analyze inconsistencies between mainstream cultural ideals/realities and those of different cultural systems. They help students clarify their ethnic identities, honor other cultures, develop positive cross-ethnic and cross-cultural relationships, and avoid perpetuating prejudices, stereotypes, and racism. The goal is to create communities of culturally diverse learners who celebrate and affirm each other and work collaboratively for their mutual success, where empowerment replaces powerlessness and oppression (p. 43).

Because multiculturalism was such a highly debated topic, it began to transform through the late 90s. New terms were being used to define the changes in ideas from the

60s notion of multicultural education. Graeme Chalmers (2002) references Sonia Nieto as she has defined what is known as *critical multiculturalism* and suggests six characteristics of a critical multicultural approach in the classroom.

1. It affirms a student's culture (or constantly changing culture (Chalmers 2002) without trivializing the concept of culture.
2. Challenges hegemonic knowledge.
3. Complicates pedagogy.
4. Problematizes a simplistic focus on self-esteem.
5. Encourages "dangerous discourses.
6. Admits that multicultural education in school cannot do it all (p. 295).

This new kind of multicultural teaching attitude asks teachers to focus less on single cultural activities, but more on social justice and making the classroom a place for change. It is asking teachers to shake it up and have hard discussions in the classroom. It asks us to empower our students and to give them a voice.

Part 2: Issues in Multicultural *Art* Education

The why

Before we can look at the question of multicultural art education, we should first start with the *why* of art education. If culture is created by the arts and other intellectual manifestations of human thought and expression then the visual arts should naturally be included in education. It is what helps, and has always helped, to capture and express our history and identity. Culture is something that is taught and passed on. It is a lived experience. H. Gene Blocker (2005) reiterates this idea by stating:

We also want to help young people assimilate into their own culture, and this is the more "public" side of art education. This is why students in Korea will learn more of the history of Korean art than that of, say, North Africa. In China today there is a considerable effort to introduce Chinese aesthetic education as a means of developing a sense of national solidarity.

This brings us to the question, Why, then, multicultural art education? Our (North American) culture is multicultural, meaning that it cannot be narrowly specified religiously or ethnically or racially (in the sense in which the virtually monolithic cultures of, for example, Japan or Kuwait, very nearly can). This is for two reasons: The first is that our culture is the product of many different ethnic groups settling in North America over several centuries, and the second is due to the amazing shrinking world phenomenon. Every child needs to have some sense of Arabic, Japanese, Chinese, and African contemporary cultures as part of the world with which they, as Americans, must interact (p. 27).

Because of this shrinking world phenomenon, teachers hold the responsibility to broaden their students' visions of culture and the importance it plays, not only in their lives, but also in the lives of others. We must provide students the opportunity to reclaim and celebrate their rich cultural history and traditions.

Because of the mixed culture in which we teach, art educators need to diversify. We need to move beyond our current paradigms and cultures in order to embrace and connect with a broader range of students. This process can become empowering by not only expanding the educators personal experiences, but also expanding the impact the teacher can have on a broader range of students.

Elizabeth Sacca (1993), describes the power teachers have by stating that:

our challenge is to understand the cultures of students and to continue to invent ways of teaching that support their various cultures. Another challenge is to teach our students to appreciate the cultures of others. Art teachers who recognize the political forces working against art, community, environment, and creative work provide a great hope for the survival of all cultures (p. 80).

She tells the story of native students in Canada who describe an art classroom, and an art teacher, in a non native school “whom the native students did trust...They felt she was interested in their culture and supported them in their ideas, and art class became a refuge where ideas not tolerated by racist individuals were accepted” (p. 86). She goes on to say that “with some understanding of native culture, a teacher can respond constructively to students work and avoid judgments of their culture...In such a classroom teacher and students learn that their cultures can exist together, even within a hostile school and a hostile society” (p. 86).

The art room is a place to explore important and powerful ideas. DePillars describes it by stating that "Art is not universal, it is not value free, it is not apolitical, and it is not fun and games. Art is serious” (as cited in Delacruz, p. 92). The art classroom is where meaning is made of the world, important ideas are discussed, identity is developed, and understanding takes place. It is a place of voice.

Problems with Multicultural Art Education

Ethno-tourism. Despite all that has been researched and written about multicultural art education, there still seems to be difficulty in reaching these ideals within the classroom. Most teachers would agree that the art room is the perfect setting to bring people from all cultures together, because most cultures have communicated and expressed themselves through art. The

problem lies with the how? Teacher preparation courses often do not discuss strategies for creating a multicultural program. At most teachers are taught to diversify their curriculum, but then teachers end up doing just as I did, where they do a sampling of art from other countries without connecting the students to the whys and big ideas that are associated with the art forms. Again, there is an unfortunate discrepancy between what the ideal multicultural art classroom should look like, and what actually takes place. Elizabeth Delacruz (1996) wrote a paper entitled *Multicultural Art Curriculum Products: Business as Usual*, where she describes much of what is happening in contemporary art classrooms. She states that:

Many multicultural art programs and curriculum products attempt to promote intercultural appreciation, but teacher procedures and student activities take the form of "ethnic tourism" (a term used by Ralph Smith in 1983). Sometimes entire multicultural art programs are comprised of a smorgasbord of studio activities, one per culture, based on a selection of cultures from around the world. This relegates the artistic and symbolic expressions of unfamiliar or exotic peoples to the status of recreational *cultural consumables*, revealed in a superficial manner to students as anthropological specimens and aesthetic curiosities. Such practices trivialize art at best; they perpetuate cultural stereotyping and racism at worst (p. 91).

I was guilty of this exact thing, as I taught about artifacts from various cultures. I knew very little information about the cultures I was teaching from, so the connections were superficial. I knew there was something wrong when I taught the unit on Russian egg painting to my junior high students. Yes, I could talk about symmetry, balance, color schemes, but what had I taught them about Russian culture? How were my students any more sympathetic or connected to a group of people on the other side of the world than when they walked into my room? I

believe this is what the vast majority of teachers within the United States are doing to become more multicultural.

I see this perpetuated today through major art supply companies, art education websites, and art education publications. They produce multicultural lesson plans for teachers to use that contain objectives that solely deal with the aesthetic qualities of the pieces rather than making deeper and more meaningful connections to culture and cultural issues. An example would be a lesson plan taken from The Art of Education website designed to teach about mandalas (Kaczmarek, n.d.). The outcome of this lesson is for students to create a mandala on a CD that uses radial symmetry. This lesson primarily deals with the basic principles and elements of design and does very little in making meaningful connections to the cultures that create mandalas. The lesson plan suggests you give an introduction on the history of mandalas and mentions showing students the mandala coloring books that are in trend. This type of teaching is no more useful than taking a student to a zoo and showing them an animal behind a sheet of glass with an information card posted below. Students need to learn what happens when the glass is broken and they are able to interact with the animal, to touch it, smell it, chase it. That is when true learning happens. In much the same way, we must allow our students to try on the thinking processes that go on when making these multicultural art forms that allow them to see the world through a different paradigm.

Ethno and egocentrism. According to Graeme Chalmers (1996), Sumner was one of the first to define ethnocentrism for the social sciences as a “view of the things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (p. 13). Over the course of history, the oppressors, or culture of power, have determined what is good and what is valuable with regards to art. Anything that is considered other would naturally not be

as valuable. Chalmers (1996) describes some of the many assumptions that must be challenged by multicultural art education, such as,

the best art in the world has been produced by Europeans. Oil painting, sculpture (in marble or bronze), and monumental architecture are the most important art forms. There is a significant hierarchical distinction between art and craft. The best art has been produced by men. The best art has been made by individual geniuses. Judgments about art must be made based on such aspects as the arrangement of lines, colors, shapes, and textures; realism and proportion; use of media; and expressiveness (according to preconceived notions of “rightness” defined by experts).

Great art requires an individual aesthetic response; sociocultural meaning is secondary (p. 15).

He goes on to state that

we need to understand the past before we can expose current biased practices and embrace a future that requires art educators to respect and appreciate students’ differing cultural backgrounds, values, and traditions; to acknowledge that all groups can produce and define excellent art; and to understand that art exists for rather similar reasons in all cultures. We need art teachers who will nurture a classroom atmosphere in which students’ cultures are recognized, shared, and respected (p. 23).

A better approach. James Banks (1989) speaks of four approaches for integrating ethnic content into the curriculum; the contributions approach, the ethnic additive approach, the transformation approach, and the social action approach. He lists these by level of effectiveness, from "contribution," the least effective, to "social action," the most effective.

The social-action approach. The highest level of true multiethnic education encourages students to engage in critical thinking and to participate in their own thinking process about change. This is a problem-posing process and the problems usually center on moral and ethical issues. In art education, this level of multiethnic education could effectively focus on questions of aesthetics and art history. In the study of art criticism, it is important to examine the basic concepts, paradigms, and perspectives used in evaluating and criticizing art and the influence that these paradigms, concepts, and perspectives have had on various ethnic groups (as cited in Chanda, 1992, para. 25).

D Mann (1977) suggests questions that should be continually asked about art, such as what is art?, what is it for?, what constitutes good art?, who decides these things?, and by what standards? (as cited in Chalmers (1996), p. 26). As art educators we need to seek to answer these questions in ways that acknowledge cultural diversity, because the answers are usually culturally tied.

Chalmers (1996) believes that trying to reflect socio-cultural diversity within multiethnic and multicultural curriculum is the bare minimum that should be happening in the art classroom. He believes, along with Zimmerman (1990), that we need to move beyond acknowledgment of diversity and start challenging and questioning the dominant culture's art world canons and structures. When done correctly, the art room can become a place where social reconstruction happens and students use art to challenge oppression and make a difference.

Six years later, Chalmers (2002) reflects on his past ideas and what was happening in art education and claims that "we have yet to put the "critical" in "critical multiculturalism." We have yet to put the "multi" in multiculturalism or the "trans" in transculturalism (p. 301). Schools have not been challenged to adapt to the ever changing demographics of its students. Chalmers

(2002) says that a “commitment to multiculturalism must mean more than “conditional” hospitality (p. 301). He goes on to suggest that the interest in multiculturalism is weakening and that less and less educators are committing to the cause. Chanda (2011) suggests that if the goal of multicultural education was to give students experiences and exposure to minority groups, that need has been partially filled due to the dramatic increase of media. Students who might have never seen someone from a particular minority, might now have access to music, television, the Internet, books, textbooks, magazines, billboards, film, social media, etc...that expose children to all types of cultures and minority groups. But does this exposure to the world really "prepare [students] to accept and embrace difference as a positive aspect of society and direct them toward social change (Chanda, 2011, p. 115)?”

According to Chanda the major problem with multicultural art education today is not a lack of published art materials or lack of underrepresented groups in America, but the lack of opportunities to try on the paradigms of others. If we really want to create change and compassion among students, they need to understand one another on a philosophical level. We need to be asking our students what it would be like to live in the shoes of another person. What would that feel like? That is when change begins to happen. In the end Chanda asks which aspects of another’s culture “will allow one to say, in many ways we are different but in so many more we are alike? That should be the primary goals of multicultural education (p. 118).”

For the purpose of my thesis, I want to focus on building an empowering curriculum and classroom environment for my multicultural students, and one in which all students in the classroom can benefit. I want the curriculum to be a place where hard things are discussed and where art is used as a voice for change. I want all of my students to walk away feeling validated about who they are and what their family culture is. I want to hear their voices in my research

and to see the impact it has on their outlook on school and their futures. In order to do that I conducted a case study and used a narrative inquiry approach, where I took their perspectives and wove them into the academic literature to see what new insights could be gained. I am using an auto ethnographic approach to give my own experiences and observations meaning within my process of inquiry and teaching.

Part 3: Holistic Education

One might ask why any teacher would want to move into the realm of spiritual development in students when such topics have potential conflicts and are often superfluous to the normal purposes of education in the U.S. Maybe I am interested in these topics is because I see how troubled my students are in my classroom everyday. Maybe it is love of self and irreverence for people that I see displayed in the classroom, or the inner troubling of their minds as I view their artwork and read their artist statements. Maybe it is the time they report spending in front of the television playing violent video games and the lack of meaningful direction in their lives. Or could it be the hours they report spending behind a computer screen both at school and at home, either due to schoolwork, social media, or Internet surfing. My students cannot spend more than a few minutes without looking at some sort of media screen or without being plugged into some sort of device.

One thing I know for sure is that these students are searching for purpose and are often looking in all the wrong places. I get reports of students who have been cutting, attempting suicide, or who have been admitted to mental health institutions. We live in a world where morality seems to be deteriorating and the idea of being a spiritual or religious person is seen as a disadvantage in this self-fulfilling world. Could it be that these students never have the opportunity to nourish and listen to their souls on any given day? Do they have the opportunity

for silence, reflection, and contemplation during their seven-hour school day? I recognize that there will be exceptions to my assumptions, but from my own personal experience as a student and as a teacher, I believe that many students are silent sufferers of a society that emphasizes material success, getting ahead, outdoing, and winning just to be able to survive. They've never been taught healthy strategies on how to cope with all of the troubles they face and the stress that society places on them. Many are put on medication in order to soothe their troubled minds.

They also live in a very unauthentic and artificial world. Rachel Kessler (2005) suggests that,

“that after decades of headlines about “a generation at risk,” the void of spiritual guidance and opportunity in the lives of teenagers is still a rarely noticed factor contributing to the self-destructive and violent behavior plaguing our nation. Drugs, sex, gang violence, and even suicide may be, for some teenagers, both a search for connection, mystery, and meaning and an escape from the pain of not having a genuine source of spiritual fulfillment” (p. 101).

This lack of spiritual fulfillment, along with my experiences and research in India, led me to look into theories in holistic education. Laurel Campbell (2011) proposes that certain foundational concepts must be included if an approach is to be holistic.

These include ideas like self-inquiry and self-expression, which are not new in art education, and those that provide new possibilities for teaching visual arts, such as discussing spiritual awareness, learning empathy for others, promoting a sense of purpose, valuing relationships with all living things, learning responsibility for the well-being of others and the environment, and promoting personal transformation (p. 23).

John P. Miller (2005) defines holistic education as an attempt to nurture the development of the whole person, which includes the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions of a person (p. 2). Thomas Moore (2005) believes that in the American education system there is so much emphasis on the mind that it has generated a neglect of the soul (p. 9).

Based on this notion of spiritual deprivation, Kessler (2005) has mapped out seven spiritual yearnings that are common among teenagers in a book entitled *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School*. These yearnings include:

1. searching for meaning and purpose
2. longing for silence and solitude
3. urge for transcendence
4. hunger for joy and delight
5. creative drive
6. call for initiation
7. a deep connection (to self, one other person or meaningful group, to nature, lineage, and/or to a higher power (p.103-105).

I have found these to be true, as I've worked with high school students over the last five years. More than anything they want to be in a non-crowded classroom where they can create and feel apart of something unique. They are eager for meaningful engagement and are looking for a refuge during the school day. They are looking for a space to breath, think, and express themselves. Art minded students in particular are hungry for this type of environment and to

make connections with their teacher. My advanced students are constantly in and out of my classroom throughout the day and often comment on the space itself. The classroom environment provides a safe refuge from the rest of school. We've all commented on the fact that when we are together in the art room we forget we are at school.

Kessler (2005) quotes Ron Miller (1995), a historian of holistic education, who observes: "spirituality is nourished, not through formal rituals that students practice in school, but by the quality of relationship that is developed between person and world. We can, and must, cultivate an attitude of caring, respect, and contemplation to replace the narrow modernist view that the world is a resource to be exploited (p.96).

Kessler later goes on to explain that when students know that there is a time in school where they can express their joy and peace in their relationship to God or nature, this freedom of expression nourishes their spirits.

I have a strong interest in holistic education because I believe this type of classroom experience is not only beneficial for the students but for teachers as well. If these are experiences we are all seeking, I wonder why we can't we seek them together. The most rewarding experiences I have in the classroom are when students' eyes are opened and you can see their minds turning as they make connections, are exposed to new ideas, and new ways of thinking. That is what art affords them. It is a common occurrence that students tell me that in no other class could they have the types of conversations we have in the art room. In no other class are they going to go out and paint or draw in the natural landscape or have casual and yet thoughtful conversations while working and expressing themselves.

Reimagined holistic multicultural curricula

Patricia Stuhr (2003) is a prominent writer in holistic multicultural art education. When it comes to multicultural teaching philosophies she believes that:

all peoples have had informal and, at times, formal teachers who have helped the younger generation to understand and create meanings of and for life. We may have lost sight of this essential teaching mission, of life's meaning, and we may have become bogged down in the teaching of school subjects or disciplines in a way that they are no longer connected to the students' lives in contemporary institutional education.

For this reason, it is important to understand culture and cultural diversity because culture provides beliefs, values, and the patterns that give meaning and structure to life. It enables individuals within the multiple social groups of which they are a part to function effectively in their social and cultural environments, which are constantly changing (p. 303).

Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr (2001) state that art is a social and cultural expression of life and death and, therefore intimately connected with it. Stuhr also suggests that art is about life, from conception to death and that we all strive to understand cognitively, emotionally, physically, and sometimes spiritually the phenomena of life and death.

Leslie Owen Wilson (2005), gives suggestions for altering curricula that could help leave space to address some of the spiritual needs of the students.

- Change the focus of the projects or tasks, making them more introspective, reflective, and/or personalized. Deemphasize skill acquisition and highlight students' personal development or reflective growth, or focus on exploration of connections beyond the classroom.

- Define the lesson or project focus as having emotional, physical, or cognitive growth potential, and encourage students to be reflective throughout the process through journaling, discussing, and making applications or connections to the community and the larger world.
- Keep permanent records (snapshots, logs, video, artifacts, and so on) as projects progress. Use these to encourage review, reflection, and interactive sharing. This is easy to do with today's technology. Create a webpage where parents and the community can get a glimpse of students' progression through the project.
- Emphasize connections to larger cycles and patterns- the universe, the earth, self-development, the past, and other peoples.
- Use the stages of traditional rites of passage to create challenging experience.
- Celebrate the completion of tasks and create opportunities for students to share their journeys and processes, lessons learned, struggles overcome, and personal revelations (p.174, 175).

Multicultural theories on education and holistic principles should coincide because both challenge students to ask the big important questions about the meaning of life. Holistic education about finding meaning and exploring ideas that transcend our day-to-day lives. Studying culture becomes a study of various ways of processing what happens in every-day life and how various groups of people have chosen to cope and deal with these happenings. It is the practice of switching paradigms in order to understand others. The human race has always had to deal with the questions of where did we come from, why are we here, and what happens after we die? Culture then becomes in part a byproduct of our attempt to answer these questions and to teach future generations.

If students are looking at the art of Islam, Buddhist art, and Native American art, it will naturally cause them to consider their relationship with the natural world, and their relationship, or lack thereof, with a higher power. Giving students the opportunity to be in nature, to create and observe while there, and to give them the gift of silence can be richly rewarding and experience they will crave in the future. When leading discussions about artistic works from various cultures, teachers should focus less on the aesthetic principles and processes of making the piece, and more on the ideas and concepts that prompted its creation. Rather than merely imitating, it is important for teachers to seek to create with a mindset that includes culture and the spiritual dimensions of learning. It is only natural that holistic education and multicultural education be yoked together in a classroom

Chapter 3: Methodology

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is the process of bringing to light lived experience within a research context. It is most appropriate as a research methodology that is focused on stories of experience. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (1990), suggest the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways in which humans experience the world (p. 2).” There is a constant movement between the representation of participant experience and the experience of the researcher. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe it as a “back and forthing,” where the researcher “looks at the stories both from a reflexive and a relational point of view (p. 167).” Clandinin (2007) claims that a narrative inquiry research question is focused on a particular setting, particular people, and the particular stories we tell of our experience.

The main source of data in a narrative inquiry comes from field notes. Melanie Buffington and Sarah McKay (2013) suggest that “these field notes can come from observations, notes, interviews, memos, letters, documents, chronicles, poems, photographs, artwork, or other data collected in the field (p. 223).” When writing a narrative inquiry, the researcher will work with both experiential observations and personal reflections to find trends or patterns. This may create new questions or new insights as the researcher deconstructs the field notes. Carolyn Frank (2004) distinguishes between two types of field notes, note taking, and note making.

Note takers record rich descriptions and observations and leave out interpretations while observing, where note makers make memos of reflections, inner thoughts, questions, and

emotions as they respond to observations. It becomes too difficult to be both note taker and note maker when in a bustling classroom (p. 273).”

Buffington and McKay (2013) recognize the problem that might occur when the researcher is the classroom teacher and cannot sit and take notes while simultaneously teaching a busy class of students. In this case the best field notes would come from audio and video tapings and brief notes here and there. At the end of the day, the teacher could go back and transcribe those recordings and study the text and also write reflective thoughts.

When trying to analyze field texts and move these stories in the form of research text, Buffington and McKay (2013) suggests telling a story while creating a dialogue between theories represented in the literature. They use the metaphor of braiding, where field texts are “woven together into a narrative research text. Personal histories and experiences act as individual strings that are laced together with theoretical discussion and support from scholarly literature (p. 224).”

Auto ethnography

Sherick Hughes, Julie L. Pennington, and Sara Makris (2012) state that,

the term *auto* is commonly used in the academy when referencing publications in which the author presents critical reflections and interpretations of personal experience. In contrast, *ethnography* is commonly referenced as a key qualitative approach to studying the rules, norms, and acts of resistance associated with cultural groups. Consequently, the hybrid term, *auto ethnography*, is intended to name a form of critical self-study in which the researcher takes an active, scientific, and systematic view of personal experience in relation to cultural groups identified by the researcher as similar to the *self* (i.e., us) or as *others* who differ from the self (i.e., them) (p. 209).

An autobiography is usually an account of someone's personal experience. They will often look for epiphanies from those experiences to gain new insights and contextualize events within the past and also what may have shaped the future. Ethnographers will situate themselves within a given culture to gain understanding and new insights. However when writing an auto ethnography, it cannot just be your story. Mitch Allen says you have to:

look at experience analytically. Otherwise [you're] telling [your] story—and that's nice—but people do that on *Oprah* [a U.S.-based television program] every day. Why is your story more valid than anyone else's? What makes your story more valid is that you are a researcher. You have a set of theoretical and methodological tools and a research literature to use. That's your advantage. If you can't frame it around these tools and literature and just frame it as 'my story,' then why or how should I privilege your story over anyone else's I see 25 times a day on TV? (as cited in Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 276).

According to Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams & Arthur P. Bochner (2011),

auto ethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write auto ethnography. Thus, as a method, auto ethnography is both process and product (p. 276).

Diana Newman (2009) describes auto ethnography as being “bold, yet vulnerable, genuine and authentic. It provides a heartfelt and soulful invitation to create a dynamic relationship between storyteller and the reader to share the lived experience and personal reflections of the researcher” (p. 157).

When writing ethnographic works, one needs to separate the actual ethnographic fieldwork from the ethnographic writing that follows it. There are several ways in which to write

an ethnographic work. Michael Humphreys and Tony Watson (2009) describe four ways to write ethnography; plain, enhanced, semi-fictionalized, and fictionalized. When writing a plain ethnography it is as true to the events that take place as possible. It's a play-by-play timeline of events or an eyewitness account. When moving into the enhanced ethnography, the author will take on the role of a novelist so that the writing style will take the reader into the story as if they were there. It is a "this is more or less what happened," approach. For my particular preference, these are the two styles I will investigate.

Auto ethnographers, in general, do not make generalized claims about their research and experience. As Hughes, Pennington and Makris (2012) describe:

Like other qualitative researchers, auto ethnographers must describe phenomena in sufficient detail for the reader to determine whether findings extend to analogous situations. When claiming a generalization beyond the reported case, the researcher must build an explicit argument to support it. Generalization requires clarity in descriptions of participants, context, activities, and data collection (Duran et al. 2006). Although auto ethnography seeks to include relevant information and to develop credible conditions from which generalizations might occur, there is no mandate for such an occurrence as there is with traditional post positivist research (Duran, et al. 2006). The auto ethnographer like his or her qualitative counterparts can convey the kind and degree of evidence to readers that invites them to compare their own lived experiences and contexts of interest to those conveyed by the author(s) (p. 215).

I believe being reflective and analytical towards your experiences is an essential part of teaching. I think you gain inspiration in both your teaching and as an artist as you take time to think and ponder on your experiences. According to John Strong (2007), teachers who

consciously self-reflect show greater confidence and are able to create more positive learning environments and higher student achievement. As I take an honest look at what is happening in my classroom, I believe new insights will emerge; in fact they already have. Auto ethnography feels like a journey to the center of your soul, where all of the underpinnings are rediscovered to unveil your true thoughts, values, and core beliefs. It is that excavation that leads to new insights and connects readers to you, and also asks them to connect to their own souls. It is not all about your story; it's about getting your reader to unveil their own.

Chapter 4: Implementation & Results

After doing the research into what a truly holistic multicultural classroom could look like, sound like, and feel like, I began making steps towards making such a classroom happen. Sometimes it came out as lesson plans, or seeking out travel opportunities, but other times it was as simple as conversations held in class, classroom setup, and an occasional yoga session. In this next section I will share ways in which I began transforming my classroom to help students “clarify their ethnic identities, honor other cultures, [and] develop positive cross-ethnic and cross-cultural relationships” (Gay, 2000).

Cultural Pluralism

The first attempt at a culturally diverse curriculum

Because I watched the change in my own daughters as they participated in Mexican folk dancing, and their connectedness to a culture that they were not surrounded by, I was curious whether or not this same type of change could occur using the visual arts in my own classroom. After my positive experience with the 7th grader named Aaron, during that first semester with the Day of the Dead project, I was sure of it. It was prior to this study, and only my second year teaching, when I decided to use culture as a theme in my classroom. I would later find that my approach was somewhat uninformed and naive, but was a well-intentioned attempt at a multicultural classroom. I had placed a big map up on the wall and told the students we were going to study folk art from around the world. We would be visiting Sweden, Japan, Mexico, Panama, Russia, and other countries. I was really excited about it! I showed them examples of the artwork and we would go over techniques needed to replicate it. The students thought it was great and we were all blissfully happy. I put more effort and built up my Mexican unit, because I had so many experiences to share and build upon.

It wasn't until I had finished my Russian unit, that I realized that there were some serious flaws to my teaching. We did a Russian egg-painting project. The students had fun blowing out the eggs in class, learning about symmetry and how difficult it is to paint on an egg. But it seemed we had reduced their country and heritage to an egg painting. I had perpetuated Russian stereotypes, because I hadn't done my homework. The students were oblivious of course, but after doing my research into multicultural art education, I was disappointed in my first attempts to create a multicultural curriculum. I realized later that there is a big difference when you teach with authority based on experience.

Multicultural classroom 2.0

The second time I tried to teach a multicultural-based curriculum, I went about it quite differently. I still wanted to teach the students skills, but I wanted skills to be secondary to understanding and appreciating other cultures and the exploration of how we are all connected by universal experiences and emotions. Referring back to the suggestions made by Leslie Owens Wilson (1993) I was less concerned with formal skills and principles, but instead I wanted them to make a personal connection with their work. One of my objectives was to diversify my artist examples and then to teach big ideas which allow for personal expression in the classroom, as opposed to a cookie cutter assignment where the outcomes are similar and predictable.

Pilgrimage to the past. One of the first projects I taught with this new frame of mind was a personal heritage project where I asked students to do research on their ancestors to help them solidify their cultural and ethnic identities. The learning objectives were as follows:

- Students will discover how artists are using art as a way to connect with cultural identity, family history, and family story.

- Students will discover the power art has to open conversations about ideas that are important to us.
- Students will be able to describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may affect their artistic choices and responses to art.
- Students will be able to reflect on and explain important information about personal artwork in an artist statement.
- Students will be able to take personal research and reflect that research in a personal artwork.
- Students will understand how to create complex symbolism and metaphor to convey meaning.

The students were asked to research their family heritage and then design an article of clothing that reflected that cultural heritage. We looked at the work of Louie Gong who is of mixed heritage (Nooksack/Chinese/French/Scottish) and the ways in which he infuses his heritage into his work and encourages others to honor and be proud of who they are. We also looked at Juane Quick to See Smith (Native American) and Soraida Martinez (American/Puerto Rican). The idea is to “wear your cultural identity on your sleeve” as a conversation starter to make others aware of what makes us unique. The students designed hats, t-shirts, and shoes that reflected their cultural findings. We used Ancestry.com as a resource to find the origins of their last names, and I had the students talk to family members to learn what they could about their ancestors.



Figure 1. Student examples of Portals to the Past assignment.

Here is the reflection of one student as he talked about the design for his shoes (middle photo).

The six sails on the back are the six boats that carried the first people who inhabited Tahiti half are red which shows kingship half is white showing holiness or priest, the brown is earth the blue is ocean and the yellow is the sky. The shark is Vahitu which is the shark that protected my clan, Tamariki Vahitu, (children of Vahitu). The three men are papi (my grandfather), my dad, and I. The design that goes across most of the shoe is a warrior's mark. The waves are the ocean and the circle is a sun. The triangles on it are shark teeth again Vahitu and there are 5 symbols within the sun. 2 lizards, which are ancestors, a turtle that is passing through worlds, stingray and fish which can mean what you want, and hooks, the way of life connecting us to the ocean. On the other shoe is the seal of Melchizedek, which is important to me and my religion, the brown is earth and the yellow

heaven. There are two kanjis tiger and dragon and the red and blue represent my master who taught me tae-kwon-do. The yin and yang represents my love of Chinese art and history and my Chinese ancestral roots. The poem on the bottom was written by me and describes who I Am. (M. Alvarez, 11 Grade)

Overall, the results from this project exceeded my expectations. The majority of the students were engaged in this project and students had great conversations as they found others in the classroom with similar cultural backgrounds as their own. It occasioned the kinds of conversations that I was hoping to have in the classroom and allowed me to make connections with the students as I suggested inspiration points for design based on what they shared with me. This assignment also enabled them to connect into a history or heritage that might have been lost to them. This was a step in the right direction.

Who are you really? For this assignment, my objectives were to explore personal identity and assist students in breaking past stereotypes. I was using portraiture as the vehicle for this conversation as we discussed the work of Nicki Lee, who is a Korean photographer and filmmaker. I also introduced the work of Maynard Dixon, a Utah artist who worked at capturing the portraits of various people in the Southwestern region of the United States. We discussed stereotypes and how we wish people understood us. Students were asked to discuss what information could be gathered from a simple portrait and how the artist has the ability to control or manipulate what we think based on their composition and choices within a portrait. I was again trying to diversify my artists and talk about big ideas.

I led them through an activity where I taped up several pieces of paper around the room with labels such as Hometown, Race, Religion, Gender, Physical Abilities, IQ, Physical

Appearance, Sexual Orientation, etc. I then asked the class a series of questions and had them stand by the label they think best answers that question for them. Examples of questions included *what do others notice first in you?*, *What do you wish people noticed you for?*, and *If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?* We made sure we set ground rules at the beginning of this exercise that insured confidentiality and respect for everyone's responses. This became a really powerful exercise that allowed the students to open up and share thoughts they might be having that others could relate too. It also allowed the students an opportunity to be vulnerable. This exercise enabled students to see past the stereotypes and labels they might have given their classmates and to have more compassion and openness towards one another.

After the activity, students were taught proportions of the face and were asked to pair up with someone who they wouldn't ordinarily talk to in class. The assignment was to compose a portrait of their partner that represented a truer version of their identity. The intent of the project was to create a portrait to help an audience better understand their partner based on how they composed the portraits and what they chose to include.

The learning objectives were:

- Students will look to understand traditional portraiture as a means of understanding and deconstructing identity.
- Students will analyze a variety of symbols within artwork to differentiate between complex and trite symbolism!
- Students will critically analyze how false identity images are used in media and how a contemporary artist uses the idea of portraiture to address stereotyping.
- Students will study the physical anatomy of the face in greater detail in order to create accurate observational drawings of individuals and hone drawing skills.

- Students will discover the importance of complex symbolism in order to help convey a more accurate, deeper, and “truer” identity of their model.
- Students will verbalize their artistic method in order to create an artistic statement that involves choices made in their artwork concerning their symbolism.



Figure 2. Student example of Who Are You Really? Assignment.

The students did a good job applying their new knowledge of portrait drawing in this assignment. Some students took it more seriously than others, and in some cases we learned things we didn't know about some of the students. This exercise forced students to think about their composition, materials used, foreground and background. In the end we hung up all of the portraits in the hallway in the school and created a large “Guess Who?” game out of them.

All that's wrong in the world. This activity is one of my very favorite projects because it taught students to look beyond themselves to the world around them. We discussed the idea of impermanence and talked about the history of effigies and their use in various cultures around the world. We looked at Indonesian New Year's effigies as well as Mexican effigies used just

before Easter, and how that tradition has spread through Latin America. I asked the students to describe traditions they might have to get rid of and other unpleasant things in their lives.

Students described writing things down on paper and burning them over a campfire, or flushing them down the toilet. Some even mentioned burning homework in celebration of an ending of a year.

Students were asked to get in groups of 2-3 people and design an effigy based on a problem they wished they could rid the world of. They had the opportunity to build under-structures from newspaper, cardboard, and tape and then paper mache the monsters to get their final product. They then used tempera paint to finish them off. Students were asked to write an artist statement to describe their problem and why it is worth getting rid of. This assignment brought out deeper thinking from these early teens and I was surprised by what they had to say.



Figure 3. Student effigy based on divorce.



Figure 4. Student effigy based on sexual abuse.



Figure 5. Student effigy burning based on racism.



Figure 6. Student effigy based on eating disorders.

I felt like conversations and class discussions during this project were more meaningful. I felt like the students were more unified as they willingly became vulnerable in their artwork. We had some magic moments as we talked about labeling, what we wished people would know about us, what we believed people classified us as, as well as some sweet moments as we discussed their family heritage and ancestry. Personal stories were shared and students were being validated. In spite of this, I felt like I was teaching with an agenda and it felt forced in some instances. These lessons were a positive step forward in focusing on ideas and concepts rather than making objects that were disconnected and stereotypical. The effigy project in particular felt like a big leap forward in teaching ideas infused with cultural connections. It wasn't specific to one culture, but an idea that resonated across continents. The students were able to make cross cultural connections and use art as a form of action to bring awareness of cultural difference. Creating a multicultural classroom was going to take more than a few lessons.

plans to truly move forward, but exploring these big ideas allowed me to better understand my students. Diving into identity, cultural heritage, personal story, problems they see, and other ideas allowed me to make those connections that are key to creating a multicultural classroom.

One day while in class I sat down with one of my students whom I respected and was really engaged in the class, and I asked her if it made any difference at all whether or not she saw any Latino artists in the class or not? Angie's response was simply, "Not really, I mean, I know Latinos make art whether I see it in class or not." It was like someone had popped my balloon and now I was deflated. She thought it was nice, but it didn't make that big of a difference, and I thought I was on a mission to save the children.

After this experience, I pondered a lot about what I was doing. I knew that I connected with my students, especially my Latino students. I knew there was genuineness and honesty behind my motivation, but I soon realized that my success as a teacher was not due to some fancy curriculum, or what I did or did not show them. What my students needed was *me*. They needed me, who recognized the deep-rooted value in who they were, to validate them. To give them opportunities to talk about their traditions, crazy habits and customs, to tell jokes, and laugh about getting threatened with *the chancla*. It was in those simple conversations that the magic happened. I knew that those efforts to expand my horizons, to travel, and to immerse myself in a community occasioned those conversations with my students and built strong relationships that would help them while they were at school.

Crossing Borders as a Teacher

Multicultural education is usually described in terms of curriculum and teaching in the context of schools and the teacher's relationship to students. Another important element is the depth of the teacher's experience with other cultures. Instead of students becoming assimilated

into the dominant culture, teachers gain experience with negotiating cultural differences and gaining insights and experience with how another culture approaches both art and teaching. Kathy Hubbard (2009) claims that having these cultural exposures in foreign countries also gives us exposure to cultural symbols that can be used back in the classroom that give cultural validation and value to multicultural students. The more in-depth a teacher's experience is with a culture, the better they will be at connecting with students from that culture (p.42).

Since I began this project I have had a couple of opportunities to travel outside the county to broaden my horizons. Here I will discuss lessons learned and how they have influenced my teaching, curriculum, and classroom, including relationships with students.

India. It was towards the end of my time as a graduate student at BYU, when a marvelous opportunity presented itself to me, I applied for a study abroad to Nepal to learn about Buddhism and expand my knowledge on holistic and multicultural education. At the time I also believed this might be one of the only opportunities I would have to learn and understand Eastern cultures, something I knew so little about. I was eager to cross that border and open up my world. I was really excited to see these people practice and was open to see what I could gain by their example.

Because of the earthquake that struck Nepal while we were in transit to NYC, on our way to Katmandu, we were diverted to India. We ended up on the southern side of the Himalayas in a place called McLeod Ganj, which is the home of the exiled Tibetan government and the home of the 14th Dalai Lama. On that long 12 hour bus ride, I decided to start reading a book by Thich Nhat Hanh entitled *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. That book became a revelation to me and I couldn't put it down. Teachings on suffering, happiness, and compassion stuck to my heart and I carried those thoughts throughout that trip and even now. At the beginning of the book he

claimed: “By emerging in dialogue with other people, we have the possibility of making a change within ourselves, that we can become deeper...not a means of assimilation. We have to allow what is good, beautiful, and meaningful in other’s traditions to transform us” (p.9).

India: a teaching journey



Figure 7. Teaching an art lesson to children at a school in Chamunda, India

With all of my previous research on multicultural education, I tried to remain an open book, continually looking for things I could take back and share with my students. I felt in a way that I was on this trip for them; that I had a responsibility to come back and share with them my discoveries and insights since I had left them behind.



Figure 8. The Norblingka Institute

The Norblingka Institute is an institution that is designed to preserve artistic practices of the Tibetan people while they are in exile from Tibet. Their website describes the Institute as:

a self-sustaining community located in Dharamsala, India, dedicated to ensuring that the integrity of Tibetan artistic traditions is maintained for generations to come. Art is a large part of culture, and by maintaining artistic lineages, we help to conserve the unique identity of Tibetans and the sacred traditions which took root in Tibet. Our studios produce museum-quality artwork using methods that have been practiced and passed down for many centuries. We invite visitors to come and explore our beautiful campus and witness firsthand the splendor of Tibetan art.

Their approach caused me to question the value of tradition, the need to learn traditional arts and crafts, and what role they play in preserving culture.

We took a class at the Institute to learn how to draw the Buddha from a Tibetan thanka painting master. We learned that traditional Tibetan art was centered on preserving tradition with

exactness and that by making a religious image an artist could gain merit and progress on the path toward nirvana. According to our teacher, the Buddha was a man with perfect proportions and the job of an artist is to replicate that perfection. Students spent years learning the art of Thangka painting at the Institute in order to master the proportions of the Buddhas, Taras, and other religious figures. Each figure was made using a prescribed template; the hand of the artist appears only slightly.

Our master instructed us on how to draw using the nail system. Each section of the Buddha was so many nails in length or width. I liked the process because I knew what the intended outcome was from the beginning. That is very different than what is taught in our American art education system. I can think of a number of my students who would do well to have things this prescribed for them, and yet others that would suffer greatly from being so confined. I like that you had to work for years to be considered a master thangka painter. There was a process that had to be endured, and it was a great achievement once you had mastered it.

These artists spend their whole lives trying to recreate something that conforms to tradition and yet we, as Americans, spend our whole lives trying to invent something new and innovative; and tend to scoff at tradition. This made me ask what traditions should my students be aware of and have experience in? Is there a distinct American tradition since we are a cultural melting pot? If our country was to be invaded and our culture obliterated, what would we try to preserve in order to maintain our culture?

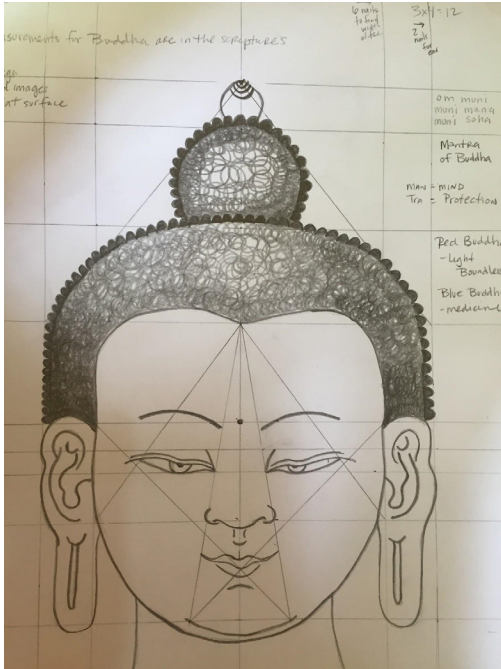


Figure 9. Drawing of the Buddha's head done at the Norblingka Institute.

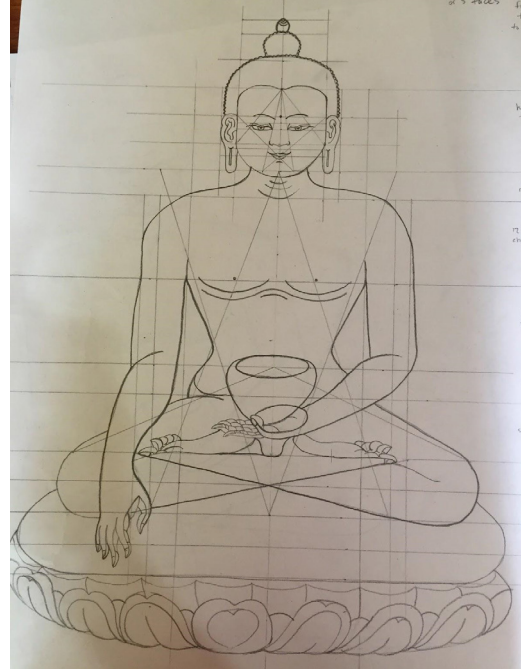


Figure 10. Drawing of the full sitting Buddha done at the Norblingka Institute.

We also visited the Tibetan Children's Village school, where we observed the art teacher teach a lesson. The school shared my university's motto: I found it quite serendipitous to see Come to Learn Go to Serve over the school's soccer field. The children in the school were Tibetan refugees. Most of them were secretly brought over the Himalayan mountains by their families and were living at the school. The parents believed that this was the safest way to preserve tradition and the future of the Tibetan people, in ways that were not possible in China. This idea rang true to me as I had just done so much studying on culture preservation among Latinos and its importance in their lives.



Figure 11. School motto at the Tibetan Children's Village.

When we entered the classroom of young children, we were met by their art teacher who invited us to take a seat around the perimeter of the room. The children were neatly dressed in their uniforms with their white boards in front of them. The teacher gave a lesson on how to draw a Tibetan landscape. Some of these children were too young to even remember what Tibet must have looked like, but again the school's emphasis is on preservation. He described the mountains, the yaks, the tents, and the students were then asked to create their own landscape drawings using his example and adding anything else they remember.

For the most part, students stuck to his basic drawing. This assignment, although not highly inventive or unique, seemed to carry a lot value for them. If I had to translate this assignment to my own classroom, it would be as if we were all refugees living in Mexico trying to teach the children what the snowy white mountains of Utah looked like.

We were then invited to look through some of the artwork created by the secondary students.

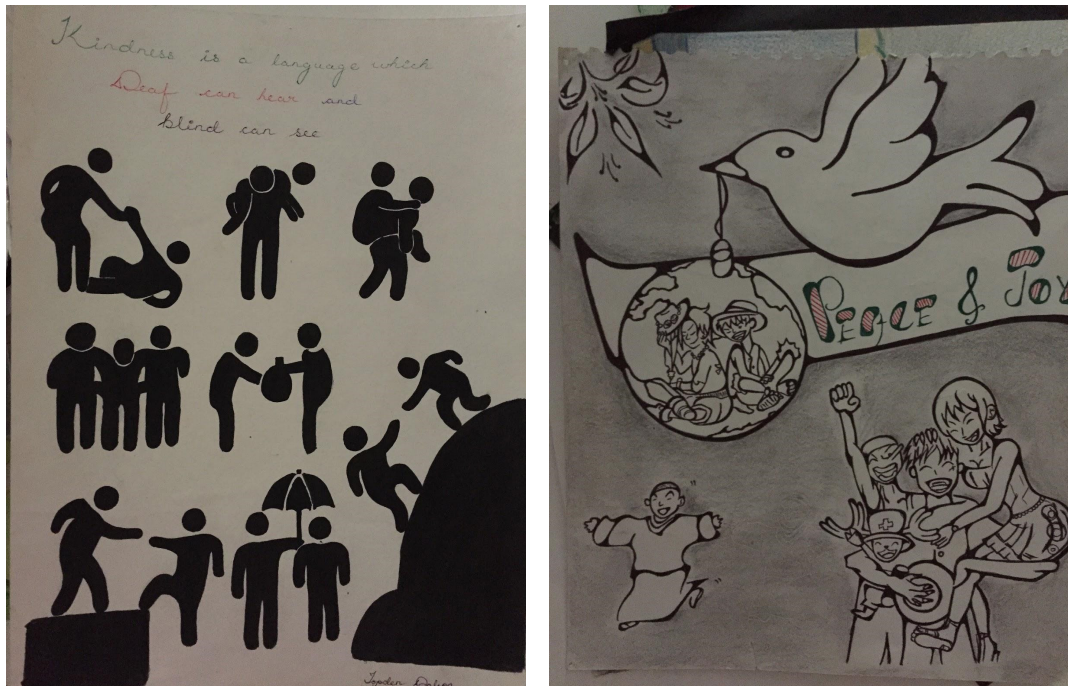


Figure 12. Artwork by student at Tibetan Children's Village.



Figure 13. Artwork by student at Tibetan Children's Village.

These students who had far less than my students back in the States, living without their families, in a foreign land were making artwork based on kindness and compassion. I was touched deeply. There did not seem to be one anxious teenage artwork among the lot. Within the walls of this school, forgiveness is taught and exemplified, compassion is extended, and kindness is what these students walk away with. How different that felt from my own classroom where I see images that are torn, ink stained, bleeding, ridden with tears and crying eyes. I had become disenchanted with my own culture, that teaches the love of self over others, and that everything is a commodity to be used, including people. I felt a great desire to make a change in the way I teach.

Questions from India

Based on this powerful experience I had in India, I developed several questions that I was particularly interested in such as:

- How do you transfer your own personal, cultural experience to others?
- How do you develop hospitality within the classroom, where everyone has a place and is validated?

- How can art be a vehicle for conversations about culture and spirit?
- How might the spiritual dimensions of art, art making, and teaching be incorporated into curriculum?
- How could curriculum and teaching be designed that authentically teaches about artistic and spiritual traditions from different cultures?
- How might you use another artistic or religious tradition to enhance your own faith?

Holistic Education in a Multicultural Classroom

After returning from India, the concept of compassion is what kept echoing in my heart. Other meaningful ideas included mindfulness and detachment. Compassion has become a state of mind and way to view the world and my fellow man. As Thich Nhat Hanh (2009) suggests in his book *Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children*, you cannot transmit wisdom and insight to another person. The seed is already there. A good teacher touches the seed, allowing it to wake up, to sprout, and to grow. If I can create the fertile soil in the classroom for those seeds to grow, then everything else I do or say becomes secondary in importance. When moving into this unfamiliar territory of holistic education I realized that my role in the classroom and my vision for my students had to change. I was drawn to this conceptualization of what a teacher could be from Matthieu Ricard's (2013), *On the Path to Enlightenment: Heart Advice from the Great Tibetan Masters*.

The teacher is like a great ship for beings to cross the perilous ocean of existence, an unerring captain who guides them to the dry land of liberation, a rain that extinguishes the fire of the passions, a bright sun and moon to dispel the darkness of ignorance, a firm ground that can bare the weight of both good and bad, a wish fulfilling tree that bestows temporal happiness and ultimate bliss, a treasury of vast and deep instructions, a wish-

fulfilling jewel granting all the qualities of realization, a father and a mother giving their love equally to all sentient beings, a great river of compassion, a mountain rising above worldly concerns unshaken by the winds of emotions and a great cloud filled with rain to soothe the torments of the passions. In brief, he is the equal of all the Buddhas. The warmth of his wisdom and compassion will melt the ore of our being and release the gold of the Buddha-nature within. (p. 148)

As I returned to teaching for the 2015-2016 school year, I wanted to incorporate holistic education principles that would weave into my continuing efforts to develop a more multicultural classroom. I was determined to meet those needs that had been spelled out so clearly during my research. I wanted to occasion experiences for them to search for meaning and purpose, to give them a space that encouraged silence and solitude, and a place where they could transcend the mundane. I wanted to make the classroom a fun and delightful place to be, where students could express their creativity. I wanted to help them feel a part of an art family, and allow them to find deep connections to things that were important to them and of value, all the while exposing them to the visual arts from around the globe. I experimented with different concepts in both the Junior High and the High School classes. The following sections are my attempts at building a more holistic multicultural experience for my students.

In my Junior High classes I was going to go back and teach my new multicultural lesson plans that were more diversified and connected with a broader range of cultures. I was really interested in teaching timeless skills to my students because of my experiences in Guatemala and India and the importance of tradition. In the following sections, I will describe the holistic practices I used in order to satisfy some of the longings and needs of teenagers I have described earlier. In terms of multiculturalism, I was focused on building relationships with students and

using my traveling experiences to as a way to relate to and educate all those I taught. I wanted to incorporate value and belief systems into my multicultural approach.

Transcending the traditional classroom environment

In order to explore the idea of of transcendence within my classroom, I started by changing the physical environment. I wanted the students to immediately feel as though their teacher had been changed by her time in India, and that they were going to get to share in that experience. I express to my students frequently that we all are growing and learning together, so I naturally wanted to share my experiences in India with them. I wanted to give them a taste of what it might be like to be in a different culture.

The first day of school felt like I was staging a production, and in a way I was. I had strung my prayer flags from India, lowered the tables close to the floor, had the Buddha at the center of the room, my rules of the Sanga on the wall, and meditative music playing. I wanted to create an impact when they first walked in the door. I wanted them to feel as if they had stepped into a completely different environment within the school.

Meet the teacher night was the first time the students and parents were able to view the space and I received a really positive response. It was a bit of a shock at first, but most were intrigued. Parents conveyed feelings of gratitude that their students would be able to have a space designed to invite calmness and relaxation within the school. The first couple of days as students came in, they had a look of surprise and shock and tried to test me to see if I was serious about sitting on the floor, but after realizing there were only a handful of chairs propped up in the corner, they quickly settled in. I have a few in each class that resisted a bit, but I loved that the space felt larger and because students sat on the outside edges, we were always ready for a dialogue with one another. It didn't feel like an everyday classroom, bur rather a space designed

for the sharing of ideas. It took me away from standing in front of the room and the source of all knowledge in the room, down to the floor as one of them, which helps to build trust between student and teacher.



Figure 14. Classroom setup before first day of school.

The following are excerpts taken from my teaching journal that describe those first couple of days of the new school year.

So I started on a high with the A.P. kids. Then Art I came in. The class is a mixed class ranging from 9th grade to 12th. The initial reaction was “are you really going to make us sit on the floor?” The class was riotous and my bubble was popped right away. The makeup of the students in the class range from those who just need one credit to graduate, to those who genuinely enjoy my class and are young, but good artists. I had one student resist and I ended up with two who sat in chairs. I could feel the desperation as I was explaining the class and some of my thoughts. These experiences are so near and dear to my heart, and I’m really emotionally tied to them, so when the students were not really feeling it, I think I felt a little bit of rejection.

Art II was somewhere in the middle. I had two girls who complained right from the get go about sitting on the floor and I could see the look on their faces as I talked about Buddhist philosophy. Other students were willing to give it a shot. I hope that I can keep

up my confidence and not start doubting myself, because if I am not confident then how do I expect them to be confident.

-taken from my teaching journal, August 2015

I got a mixed reaction from my high school students, so I kept going and introduced these ideas to my junior high students to see if there was a difference. The seventh graders were rather embracing. They seem to like it and are moldable and teachable. I talked about the idea of SUFFERING. That seemed to make an impact in their mind, just judging from their faces. Seventh graders rarely say much on the first day. I do believe the principles behind suffering are powerful. I want to impact these kids, but I first have to discover ways to open them up. I need to do more reading in order to have all of my ideas fresh. I'm going to have to practice Buddhist philosophy myself to get through the year.

Several weeks into school, the custodial committee decided to come in and clean my floors. They completely dismantled my tables and everything was pushed to the side. As I sat there contemplating what to do, I thought it might be interesting to see how the students reacted. In order to quickly get going and not have to spend 15 minutes trying to reset the tables to the floor, we quickly popped up the tables and pulled out the chairs. The students immediately expressed how much they preferred sitting on the floor and the vibe they got. The tables made it feel like a standard classroom and the room felt smaller and more congested. There was an immediate divide between students and a lack of sharing and camaraderie. Pockets began to form of students and they didn't seem to interact with one another. One of my students, who was against the tables being down from the start actually wanted to lower them back down. I smiled on the inside.

I decided to leave them up for the day to see what all of my students' responses would be. My last period high school class was the most boisterous. They disliked it so much that they immediately started asking if they could lower them back down. This happened several times since the initial cleaning. Two of my biggest complainers at the beginning of the year ended up being the biggest fans of the lowered tables. I even had one student who came and told me that she had lowered her own desk to the floor at home. There is something about the ambiance of those lowered tables that the majority of the students liked. Every time they get raised, they end up coming back down.

Buddhist Philosophies. During September, I began class by putting up a Buddhist quote on the board for my AP class and let the students discuss what it meant. One happened to be about attachment and we discussed the difficulties that arise from being attached to things. I gave them the challenge to not buy anything (besides necessities) for an entire week and to come back and report what they had experienced. One student in particular (Beck) really took off with the idea and said that she had discussed it with her mom and they were making a good solid effort to buy less and that they liked how they felt. I have a brother and sister duo in my class and the brother reported that he had found his sister that week cleaning out her room and discarding everything that she felt was unnecessary in response to our discussion on attachment.

Call for initiation

Another one of the needs of teenagers today is their need to belong. Students look for groups, both good and bad, to satisfy this need of belonging. Some may get it from home with strong family traditions, others might get from participating in team sports, but I knew that not all of my students had an opportunity to belong to something unique at school. I wanted my A.P. students to feel like they were a part of something really special and that we were about to

embark on a journey together. I explained to them that it was going to be tough, but together we were like a family and we were there to support one another. I tried to emphasize that they were an elect group of art minded people. I have included excerpts from my own teaching journal describing my introduction and practices from the first few weeks of school.

Wow, my A.P. Art/ III students just left my room. My heart was racing as I started to express the desires of my heart for them this year. There was so much racing through my mind as I thought of all of all the philosophies I want to teach them and all of the work I want them to do in order for them to be successful both in their lives and in their studies of art.

We started by passing around the string and stating what we each wanted to get from the class. Some of the responses I got were, “ I want this to be a meditative space for me and a good way to start out my days.” Others expressed wanting to be more creative in their work, increase their skills, use it to explore possible careers and if this is something she wants to pursue. Some even expressed wanting to improve their social skills and hang with great people.

After that I related how we are all affected by each other much like the string we are all attached to. It will take all of us to be successful in the class and that we will act much like a family. I went over the 6 concords of the Sangha and that we will adopt the rules of a monastic family.

I was able to watch as Eileen smiled when I mentioned I wanted to introduce them to Eastern thought and that I wanted to start each day with a Buddhist thought. I talked about how I wanted this room to feel like a refuge and that I wanted them to leave all of their troubles and worries at the door when they walked into my room. This place is a

safe haven for you. A place where you can come and escape the stress from the rest of school.

I then gave them the strings to tie around their wrist or neck that I purchased in India. They were very excited about it and some didn't want to tie it on for fear that it would wear out and wouldn't last. My heart was so full to be around like-minded people and to have all of these students in a room that I cared deeply about. My heart really is knit to my students and I hope that I can provide them with a memorable experience this year.

-Taken from my teaching journal, August 2015

The strings I mentioned were purchased as a symbol and reminder that we were in this together. It was a physical reminder that they belonged to a crazy art family and that they were apart of something unique within the school.



Figure 15. Bracelets given to A.P. students as a sign of initiation.

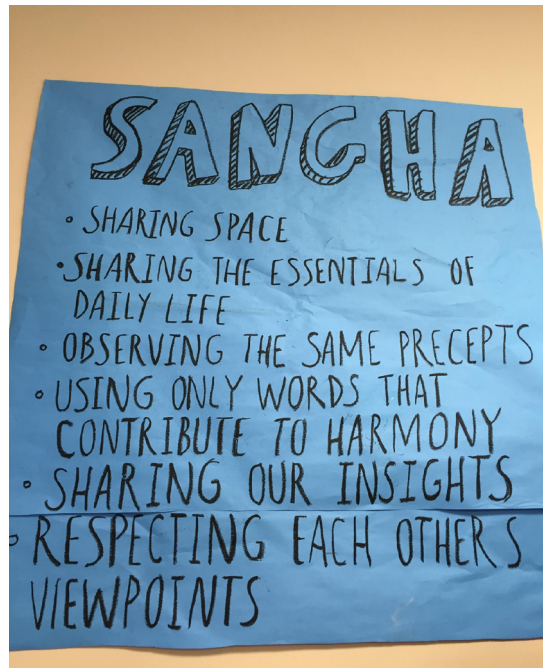


Figure 16. Classroom rules posted that reflect the rules of a monastic society.

Need for silence

In an attempt to satisfy the need for silence and solitude I introduced the students to a couple of meditations throughout the semester.

Mind in a Jar. I started off with the Mind in a Jar meditation taken from Thich Nhat Hanh's *Planting Seeds* (2007). When the students entered the room, I gathered them around a small coffee table in the center of the room that had the statue of the Buddha and the meditation bell. The table also contained a large clear pitcher filled with water, a wooden spoon, and four small bowls filled with differing grains and legumes. I asked the students to tell me their thoughts when they woke up that morning and for each thought they shared they got to add a sprinkle of the legumes or grains to the swirling pitcher. We talked about our thoughts throughout the day and how busy our mind can feel. I then taught them the power of the bell and its ability to bring calmness and stillness (mindfulness) to their minds. They seemed to be very engaged in the idea and when I rang the bell we all took three deep breaths to calm our minds and focus on our breathing. The students responded positively to this exercise.



Figure 17. Teaching Mind in a Jar meditation.



Figure 18. Detail of bell used to call students attention.

To enhance the calming atmosphere in the classroom and maintain the positive calming vibe in the room I used the bell rather than calling out to the students. If I needed their attention, I would ring the bell and we would wait silently until we couldn't hear the ring any longer and then I would begin giving instructions as needed. It seemed much more effective than my previous tactics in getting their attention and reminded them to clear their minds.

Four pebble meditation (with accompanying assignment). This assignment was an attempt to combine the holistic practices with a lesson that would be considered a traditional multicultural art lesson. We would be looking at Molas from Panama, but I wanted them to connect more with the concepts and ideas behind the works rather than it being an experiment with construction paper, knives, and color contrast. The following is an excerpt from my teaching journal where I reflect on the process:



Figure 19. Student artwork from the Pebble Mediation assignment.

For my junior high students I moved into their first project that focused on their dexterity and their ability to think conceptually. To model this idea, I went over the Four Pebble Meditation and took them on a walk outside. I asked them to find four small pebbles that they liked and would keep with them. I brought them inside and had them lay out their pebbles in

front of them. We grabbed our first rock and I explained that this rock represented a flower. I invited them to describe the characteristics of a flower and we listed them on the board. Some of our ideas were freshness, beauty, scent, attractiveness, confidence, brightness, and so on and so forth. We did this for the second, third, and fourth pebble as we described mountains, still water, and space. I then erased the titles on the board and wrote Qualities of Your Future Spouse or Your Best Friend. I explained that when we incorporate elements of the natural world into our being, we become more solid.

Each time I did this exercise I tried to improve it, so for two classes I stopped on our walk back to the school and found a flower and we tried to have our discussion in front of the actual object. We also looked at the mountains and at the sky. This turned out to be less effective because the students were more distracted by being outside and it was harder to keep them focused on having a discussion.

I also explained our disconnect with nature and compared it to the connectedness of other cultures and people. We discussed the indigenous people of Panama and their connectedness to their environment and how that gets reflected into their art styles. We looked at Panamanian Molas and their designs and then talked about how we can adopt the visual characteristics of other cultures and transform it into another medium. I asked the students to create a Paper Mola based on an element of nature that they could emulate. I told them that they would be writing an artist statement that would convince their viewer to incorporate characteristics of their chosen subject into their viewer's lives, much like we did with the pebble meditation.

The seventh graders looked a little stunned and lost, so I explained it another way and we talked about the Native American tradition of naming their children after elements of nature.

Why would they do such a thing and what would be the power of having a name like that? The intent and purpose is to adopt the qualities and characteristics of that element.

I had to remind myself that the students were just beginning to develop the capacity to think conceptually. I know a lot of them started the project just thinking of something they liked or thought would be fun to draw. I could feel my frustration rising as I was trying to get through to them and I know my motivations were pure and yet it felt like casting my pearls before swine. I started to believe that these students were not in a place in their lives to care or see how this would make a difference for them. Their vision seems to be a little too nearsighted at this point.

Music vs Stillness. I've also been playing Yoga music in my classroom. It tends to help my overall mood and the mood of my students in class. My stress level seems to decrease. The music helped a lot. It set a mood for the room. In my A.P. class, they were really interested in creating a more relaxed environment. I had students bringing in incense to burn and one student brought in a record player to play his vinyls. That went pretty well for a while, but eventually in my A.P. class we ended up working in silence. It made me feel a bit anxious, but I went back to what I had read before about the need to quietness and stillness, so I refrained from turning on the music and let them enjoy the quietness. At times it was hard for me to sit in stillness. At one point I surveyed the students and asked whether or not they felt anxious like I did, but they expressed that they actually enjoyed it, because it gave the space they needed to think and to work. They rarely had time during their regular day to have any sort of silence and therefore it was refreshing. Again, this helps create that transcendent experience in the classroom.

Yoga and meditation. Later on in the semester, I brought in a meditation specialist who came in and did several meditations with us a class. The A.P. students were very excited about this opportunity and fully embraced the experience. We participated in a walking meditation,

eating meditation, self-love meditation, and a bit of yoga. The students loved this experience and it was a fantastic way to start the day. They commented on how relaxed they felt and how prepared for the rest of the school day they were. They asked for our guest to come back again. This experience took me right back to India and it was like I was able to share a small part of my experience and all of my research with them. These type of experiences help unify us and it is an opportunity for me to become a learner along side them. I would have never thought to do an activity like this before had I not gone to India and experienced it for myself. The foreign experiences I have directly impact what I bring back into the classroom. In this particular class, I had a Chinese student who connected with these principles and a Tahitian student who already practiced Chi in his life, therefore this experience was able to validate students who already practiced holistic concepts, and expose those who didn't to new ideas and ways of experiencing their everyday life.



Figure 20. Students seated during our guided meditation.



Figure 21. Students practicing yoga in the art room.

Deep and meaningful connections

This is where I believe I had the greatest success in this research. During the summer of 2016 I decided to take my A.P. class camping in Bryce Canyon National Park. We had spent the year talking about holistic principles and trying different practices to see if they would help our emotional and physical state throughout the day. We grew a lot together and they had recently finished their A.P. portfolios, which was a big milestone in their high school careers. We had talked so much about our love of nature and being outside that I wanted to try and see if I could create the kind of experience I had had with my professor and cohort in India. I knew that a third site experience with my students was going to make a big impact on our relationships in and out of the classroom, both teacher and student, and student to student.

Lessons Learned in Holistic Multicultural Education

When charting new territory, one will inevitably run into bumps along the path. This journey was no exception, and yet there were beautiful moments when I felt like things were really coming together and I was making a difference in my students' lives. The reality of day-to-day teaching is tough. You must manage a classroom, and in my particular case, a broad range of ages and maturity levels from junior high to high school. You must also meet the expectations of your students, parent community, administration, and fellow faculty members.

I ran into some difficulties when trying to implement holistic practices in a very academically minded school. Trying to figure out the right balance of classroom activities that will be most fruitful and beneficial to the students can be difficult. Students are faced with limited time inside and outside of school, so choosing what practices to include and adjusting expectations can be tricky. I encouraged students to spend time outdoors, to meditate, and to go to bed on time, but when they do these things, is there a cost? Their mental health might

increase, but will they suffer academically because of the lack of time spent on homework?

Because some of the things I did in the classroom were unconventional, I had to really defend my teaching philosophies and practices to the administration and faculty on occasion. Sometimes defending them became too difficult and it was hard to keep my motivation up when I was teaching in a school that was more concerned with passing grades, points earned, and sports eligibility.

I feel deep remorse about these conflicts because I know deep down that these concepts and teachings are healthy for the students. I know these students need these practices and moments in their everyday lives, because they are living check-listed lives trying to fulfill college admissions expectations. Their lives leave very little room to just be still and quiet. It will take some more trial and error to find the right balance of academia and holistic practices moving forward in the art room. It's an endeavor I'm willing to keep working on.

Another observation I have made over the last several years has been the depths and limitations of thinking that is possible by both junior high and high school students. As I've tried discussing these principles in the classroom and talking about the purposes of our lives, I've learned it takes a level of maturity and life experience to grasp some of these concepts. My junior high students don't have a desire to think beyond the here and now or topics such as being still, having compassion, and being present. They are worried about what they're going to have for lunch, who they might run into at their locker, and what the latest dance craze is. It's difficult to engage them in truly meaningful discussions. I've tried exposing them to ideas from across cultures, gender, and ages, but it's difficult because of their lack of experience and desire to know more.

Working with these ideas with high school students is much easier. They start to realize they are going to go out into the world on their own and that they better have an opinion about things. They are more exploratory and are anxious for meaningful conversations. It's fun to teach them about the art world and ideas and to expose them to differing philosophies on life and the meaning of it. They soak up topics such as compassion, minimalism, and nonviolence. They have a desire to have a voice in the world and I love being able to give them tools to share their voice through the arts.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Pluralistic Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum

During my time trying to create a diverse multicultural classroom, I have had some failures and some really rewarding experiences and results. As I have learned how to shift my teaching and curriculum planning from recreating multicultural artifacts to using these artifacts as springboards to bigger ideas and discussions, my students have moved from basic art making to higher levels of thinking and expressing. It enables the students to engage in important topics about cultural values such as individualism, assimilation, identity, collectivism, equality, time, destiny, change, tradition, and other important issues. When these concepts are combined with art skills that reach across medium borders, such as ceramics, weaving, printmaking, painting, and other art forms, we begin to create a truly multicultural curriculum. Teachers should make better attempts at diversifying their art examples, to include artists from across the globe. In so doing, you validate students in the classroom who come from these cultures, as well as make positive connections for other students who are outside the chosen culture. I've loved teaching about Michel Tuffery and Pedro Reyes and watching the Polynesian and Mexican students' faces light up. They are being spotlighted and admired and the other students are finding something good and admirable outside their own culture.

I feel most successful as a teacher when students have opened up their minds and consider others in a new light and find commonalities across cultural borders. Working on tessellations could be a simple exercise in geometric forms, but when it occasions the opportunity to discuss the values that are important to the Muslim faith and the things that are good and admirable about their culture, then it becomes much more valuable. It is important for students to understand, find commonalities, and appreciate those around them for the value that

they add to this earth and global community. I believe highlighting the good, and sometimes even the hard things other people have had to go through, helps us to be more compassionate. I know that my students do not live an isolated life away from the world. They are bombarded with media that tells them all sorts of things about the world, but if I can plant a foundation of understanding, love and compassion for their fellow man through the arts, then hopefully they can become part of the solution to end hatred rather than perpetuating it.

A Teacher's Global Experiences are Essential in Building Relationships with Students

My research indicates that multicultural students need more multicultural teachers, but I would like to suggest that all students need teachers with multicultural experiences. My experiences from India, Mexico, Guatemala, Argentina, and Peru have done more for me in the classroom than any of the education I have received when it comes to building relationships with students. Foreign and cultural experiences afford opportunities to connect. They expose new ideas and paradigms that might not otherwise have happened. Teachers need to be encouraged and provided opportunities to get out and experience different places and cultures in order to connect with students on deeper levels. The more you are exposed, the more connections you will be able to make and the more students you will reach. This also helps to alleviate the marginalization of multicultural students in the classroom. These experiences have generated countless conversations between me and my students that allow me to get a glimpse into their lives. I am able to connect with them on subjects that exist outside of our teacher/student relationship. It's a way of expressing that you have a better understanding of who you are.

The bridges that I have built with parents at parent teacher conferences because I know something about Argentine culture, or the jokes I can make with the Mexican parents as I use my broken Spanish are worth the cost it takes to get out and travel. The fact that I sat in the floor one

afternoon and raved about how much I liked Peru helped my new Peruvian student completely turned a corner in my class. We had a connection from that moment on. I know my relationships have developed because I'm not afraid to kick on the mariachi music during class or introduce my students to yoga and meditation.

Another valuable byproduct of traveling is your ability to tell stories. People like stories and testimonials and are much more drawn to them than learning from a textbook or slideshow. They open up when they know you are teaching from experience and it allows them to live vicariously through you. This has happened multiple times in my classroom, whether I'm telling about my experience with an artist's work, like James Turrell, or telling them about Salvation Mountain out in the middle of the Mojave desert, which they frequently beg me to take them to. It is authentic teaching and is rewarding both for the teacher and the students.

They are eager to learn about things and some have mentioned that I have changed the way they view the world just on our discussions on Buddhism, which would have never happened had it not been for the time I spent in India. I remember how I felt sitting on a small bench at the top of a mountain in McLeod Ganj with a monk and him telling me about his experiences visiting the United States. It was as if we somehow understood each other and he knew a piece of me. That is how I hope to make those multicultural students feel when they step into my classroom. I want to let them know that although I may not know everything about them, I do know and understand a significant portion of who they are based on their inherited culture. And hopefully I will inspire others to have a desire to learn more, value, and have confidence in who they are.

Holistic Education in a 21st Century American Classroom

After teaching school for the last four years, there is one thing I know for sure. Students are struggling with emotional and mental health like I've never seen before. The number of Individual Education Plan students that I have with mental health issues, and the students that I see that are struggling with suicide, cutting, crippling anxiety, and feelings of worthlessness seem to be increasing. These students need something different than ordinary academics. I am not sure how these students are going to grow up into highly functional members of society without coping skills and a clear direction and value system. I can even see the effects on the students who have parents who struggle with these issues.

I firmly believe that we have got to make a change in our approaches to teaching in order for our students to find joy in learning, and to reduce the pressure that society continually places upon their shoulders. After watching and learning with the Buddhist monks in India, I believe they are on to something. A holistic approach to education can help alleviate some of these problems as we include ideas of compassion, tradition, connectedness, service, and kindness in our teaching.

What I do not know at this point in my research is how to infuse those practices that mean so much to the students within a high-pressured education system. In an art classroom, do I have the ability to block out the rest of the pressure the students face? Can I create a safe refuge within my four walls, where time slows down, we don't have an objective, and we can just be? Can we connect with nature, investigate tradition, environmental studies, become less attached to outcomes, and enjoy just being there and expressing our newfound insights through art? What would happen if I took every Friday to do yoga with the class?

I know I don't have all of the answers, but I know that crossing borders, in whatever forms they may be, only strengthens us and enables us to become our best selves, because we learn to appreciate others and adopt what is good. As a secondary art educator, I hope to provide meaningful experiences for my students while using art as a vehicle.

When Holistic and Multicultural Theories are Yoked Together

Multicultural theories on education and holistic principles often coincide because both challenge students to ask the big important questions about the meaning of life. Holistic education challenges my students to find deep meaning and to explore ideas that transcend our day-to-day lives. Studying culture becomes a study of various ways of processing what happens in everyday life and how various groups of people have chosen to cope and deal with these happenings. In my classroom I saw the positive effects when these two ideas come together. By exposing them to art from across the globe, sharing my own experiences, and building off of our close relationships in the classroom, the concepts and thoughts behind students' artwork were far more meaningful. They were developing opinions and seeking understanding through their art. Their own cultural voices were coming out in their work and they were more comfortable owning their cultural heritage. They were borrowing concepts and ideas that resonated with them and adding their voices to the conversations in the art world. When the holistic practices were embraced, they were making changes in their personal lives, and the environment in which it created in the classroom was a draw for them to come to school. The students left the classroom aware of others and equipped with tools and ideas to help them manage and cope with their everyday lives in more meaningful ways.

Limitations

While completing this journey I recognize there are some research challenges, primarily being that I implemented these changes on so many students all at the same time. It felt very natural to include all of my classes because of the natural ebb and flow of my classroom throughout the day. All of my students were going to experience the change in the physical classroom environment. I have always felt that these practices and philosophies are meant for all students and not any one particular class. As mentioned before, the challenges with the junior high left me teaching a predominantly multicultural curriculum throughout the year and I focused my holistic efforts on the high school students, particularly the A.P. class. I saw greater results with them, partly because of my efforts and partly due to their artminded souls and their anxious desire to experience new things from new perspectives.

With this being the case, the research was tested and tried on a large range of students and ages, across different courses, and over multiple semesters and school years. At the same time, I was exploring my own bi-cultural experiences and trying to understand effective teaching and curriculum development across cultures. For these reasons, my research does not end up with definitive results or conclusions. Each attempt is its own case study of a curricular and teaching experiment. This is curriculum as a lived experience. This was indeed a journey and I am still marching forward each semester as I try to create the ideal holistic multicultural classroom. I continue certain practices, get rid of others, but I am still focused on building valuable relationships with my students and making a difference in their lives. I am fortunate to be an art educator, because my subject matter naturally lends itself to big ideas and meaningful conversations about life. It is the perfect environment for all of us to cross borders.

Questions for Future Research

Since completing this project I still have some major questions concerning the value of cultures that prize traditions versus those that focus on individuality. The Western world values individuality, creativity, and uniqueness and yet we suffer greatly emotionally and mentally. Do American students feel disconnected to their heritage, because we fail to teach them what it means to be American? Do they perhaps feel disconnected because we teach them that to be American means to abandon their language and traditions? People move to the United States because of political and economical reasons, but must they sacrifice their own traditions and culture as a result? Maybe we need to stop trying to find a static easily defined culture that defines us and instead create new cultures that value traditions while deconstructing our taken-for-granted assumptions about cultural identity. Can building an art culture within the classroom satisfy and meet those multicultural needs, because the art world reaches through time and across cultures in its very nature? Can the student without a culture find one or construct one in art? Students need a place of belonging, an understanding of tradition, and a way to express themselves. I see my artroom as a culture that teaches alternative mindsets, compassion, understanding, self worth, work ethic, and a general curiosity about the world. Perhaps in addition to connecting students with their culture of heritage, I need to help connect them to the broader sweeping culture of the visual arts, which will naturally teach them to explore multiculturalism.

Another future area of inquiry would be how to support teachers in gaining cultural experiences, whether they are in their own community or through travel. How can school systems address these needs and/or support teachers in multicultural learning opportunities? Something needs to be done in teacher preparation programs and school districts to emphasize

the importance of reaching outside of one's comfort zone to learn about differing cultures and artistic traditions. This should be an essential part of professional development in schools in a society that is becoming more culturally diverse.

Another, related area of interest is how to better prepare undergraduate students in art education programs to be more multiculturally minded. What would a course in multicultural education look like for art educators? Perhaps this is where the foundations would be laid for cultural exploration, diverse lesson planning around big ideas, how to get students to step into the paradigms of others, and discussion of issues surrounding multicultural art education could happen.

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