

## Teaching Art through Engaging Decolonizing Viewpoints: Privileging an Indigenous Lens

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### ABSTRACT

Art teacher educators have obligations to prepare preservice art teachers and researchers to be culturally competent, to understand how to respectfully and knowledgeably include silenced voices into the classroom. Through this paper, we share a collaborative project we engaged with two arts-based researcher student groups toward approaching art learning from an anti-racist perspective using the lens of an Indigenous Pedagogy. We demonstrate an Anti-Racist teaching cycle we applied that begins with cultural competency and leads to cultural relevancy. The project culminated with the development of anti-racist lesson plans toward a museum exhibition that utilized recommendations shared by four contemporary Native American Artists. Our purpose was to explore a method for changing the narrative by inserting multiple Indigenous artists' voices into the classroom conversation.

**KEYWORDS:** Indigenous Pedagogy, Anti-Racist Framework, Cultural Competency, Cultural Relevancy

### Introduction

The normalization of the Western Art Canon holds artists like Van Gogh, Da Vinci, and Picasso as household names—an example of a colonized voice and erasure of Native American history. The living Native does not exist in the daily consciousness of the average U.S. citizen. In the USA, we live and work on stolen Indigenous land, yet much of the public is unaware of Native history, let alone Native artists—save for a select few historical examples. The Reclaiming Native Truth Project in April 2020 reported 90% of schools do not teach about Indigenous peoples beyond the early 1900s. Perhaps we can name the 'Tsa La Ghi' (Cherokee), Ndee (Apache), and Diné (Navajo), those commonly featured as products, and in songs or western movies, but what of the endurance and resilience of Native communities? Within the USA, there are 574 federally recognized tribes, but where are they in our art curriculum? We continue to privilege artists of the western canon in our classes out of comfort and a normalized pedagogy telling us who is worthy of being noted as great artists.

As art teacher educators, we are co-creating knowledge and experiences with the next generations of researchers, pre-service teachers, as well as assisting in-service art educators' understanding/engagement of anti-racist viewpoints. Alongside foundations, it is essential to prepare such groups to be culturally competent, including Indigenous voices in classrooms. In this paper, we share a collaborative project we engaged with two art-based research/pre-service art teacher student (ABR/PSAT) groups toward approaching art learning from an anti-racist perspective using an Indigenous pedagogical lens with the goal of removing biased narratives in mainstream Art Education by inserting Indigenous artists' voices into the classroom conversation.

The process began with our students addressing their cultural competency, then leading them toward culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies via Indigenous perspectives (German, 2021; King, Brass, & Lewis, 2019; Wilson et al, 2019). The project concluded with lesson plans developed incorporating recommendations from four Native American artists shared alongside Indigenous resources, and positionality and cultural competency self-evaluations. Our goal is to inspire educators to enable themselves/their students through a similar process of building resources with Indigenous perspectives for the art classroom.

### Our Positionalities and Experiences

Positionality is shaped by privileges/perceptions supported by social and political structures as an insider or outsider. Identifying our challenges and learning to examine possible pedagogical impacts, such as prioritizing cultural contextualization/sustainability, is paramount for educators (German, 2019; Jewell, 2020; Muhammad, 2023). Positionality can be an elusive concept to the inexperienced educator. The emerging teacher will often hold onto dependable personal beliefs while building curricula and implementing pedagogy as professional beliefs correlate heavily with personal cultural experiences (Pohan, 2006; Powell, 2011). I [Mara] remember a student once telling me she did not care what information/truth I shared about Thanksgiving. She would continue to teach about "Indians and Pilgrims" because it was how she was raised. Likewise, I [Lori] regularly experience pre-service students questioning the relevance of studying/including Indigenous artists in the curriculum as they believe they probably will not have any classroom Native students. Additionally, cultural competency seemed of no concern as they believed all children are the same.

The result of this misunderstanding means unfamiliar teachers do/will not recognize their position of power in the art classroom given contemporary education remains euro-centrally based. However, teacher training programs should be safe zones for pre-service experimentation with contextualized cultural discourse (Phelan,

2001). Such conversations could result in recognition of cultural power dynamics that have bearing on best teaching practices (i.e., decolonizing curricula and providing culturally sustainable methods). Classroom environment, students' and teachers' backgrounds, and the external community are all influential factors for teaching and learning. Collecting/manifesting those concepts into a culturally informed and sustaining curriculum is essential for an education that supports the whole K-20 student.

## Purpose of the Current Study

The Art Education field today is not culturally neutral, nor is it divisible from white western/European perspectives. Art educators are politically, socio-culturally, and historically situated. Whiteness is pervasive in education according to academic rhetoric and policy (Riffert, 2005; Roper, 2005). It is rigid, test-oriented, and focused upon absolute answers contrary to demands for critical and creative thinking necessary to meet twenty-first-century challenges (NAEA, 2016). Whiteness is what mainstream society accepts as "normal" (i.e., Christian, white, straight, male). Whiteness is a product of social contracts we sign, those who agree and those who say nothing in disagreement (German, 2019; Rodriguez, 1991).

Historically, within the U.S., whiteness is the privilege against which Others are covertly compared on an institutional level (Kendi, 2019). It is a socially constructed myth arranged and claimed by those who would most benefit from the comparison—an act of oppression amidst a hidden curriculum. Through its employment, "...the curriculum of whiteness pursues the systematic exploitation and dehumanization of one race of people by another" (Semali, 1991, p. 184). bell hooks (1992) framed whiteness in education as a form of "terrorism." Such an imposition is a direct threat on our students' positionalities and their individual means to explore or learn to inhabit their own identity through art making.

Artmaking was/is engaged by artists of all backgrounds and experiences. Discovering new techniques leads to alternative ways of seeing and knowing. Despite this fact, Art Education has privileged white perspectives and predominately taught European males as the master artist/designer paradigm toward student aspiration (Smith, 1996), negating Indigenous and other voices of the Global Majority. "White hegemony soon became embedded in systems of privilege and penalty that further legitimized and exacerbated the subordinate position of [Others]" (Howard, 1999, p. 45).

Art educators must shift our collective critical consciousness to critique and transform dominant systems that disempower us (Ballengee-Morris et al, 2010; Chalmers, 1996). Seeking a specific focus on diverse

cultural perspectives, intersectionality of identity, and decolonizing pedagogies (German, 2021; Jewell, 2020) is a necessity to deepen learner/teacher relevancy and strengthen curricula to serve our diverse students. Alternate concerns then arise, such as determining obligatory cultural information, within art teacher preparation programs. The current research project's purpose is an effort to discover/identify such information.

This project sought to: 1) determine the level of understanding and cultural knowledge ABR/PSAT groups held about Indigenous cultures and pedagogical practices in Art Education; 2) introduce tenets of Indigenous Pedagogy as a means to support culturally accurate, authentic, and relevant perspectives in a primarily non-Native art classroom; and 3) investigate the capacity Indigenous Pedagogy has to give voice to silenced Indigenous perspectives and provide means for a culturally sustaining curriculum.

## Theoretical Frameworks

### *Indigenous Research Methods: Where Decolonizing and Culturally Competent/Sustaining Pedagogy Meet*

In *Research is Ceremony*, Wilson (2008) an Opaskwayak Cree Scholar educates us that an Indigenous research method is holistic and relational. Knowledge is a way of knowing, informed by our intuition, senses, and experiences together. An Indigenous way of knowing does not separate science and the aesthetic. As a human you are engaged within the research therefore you cannot separate yourself from it. Life is a harmony of spirit, land, and all of creation; we are embedded in this; therefore we are accountable through reciprocity, relevance, respect, and a responsibility.

"Systemic and structural racism are forms of racism that are pervasively and deeply embedded in systems, laws, written or unwritten policies, and entrenched practices and beliefs that produce, condone, and perpetuate widespread unfair treatment and oppression of people of color, with adverse health consequences" (Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, Kauh, & Holm, 2022, p. 171). Connections between an individual's beliefs and practices, and the color of her/his/their skin, shape of their eyes, or hair texture often results from normalized, socially agreed-upon preconceptions through institutionalized means (German, 2021). In Art Education, countering disempowerment begins with lessons involving underrepresented artists—beyond stereotypical assignments—enabling critical reflections on complexities of cultures. Such a curriculum may engage students in discourse inclusive of individual and community intersectionalities potentially disrupting oppressive systems based on visual and/or cultural qualifiers. Inclusion of diverse cultural philosophies and ways of knowing expands Art

Education into cultural competency/relevancy and sustainability for diversified student populations (Anti-racist Art Teachers, 2021; Gay, 2010, German, 2021, Muhammad, 2023).

Cultural competency is a little bit more slippery given that culture is ever-changing (Creanza, Kolodny, & Feldman, 2017). Being culturally competent in art classrooms means understanding, for example, how colors have diverse meanings across cultures (i.e., the traditional color of a funeral outfit design for a mourner in/from the Philippines or construction paper color that should never be offered to an Apsáalooke child) (R. Charette, personal communication, 2016). Knowing answers to such complex questions connects marginalized perspectives to decolonizing art curricula. Learning diversity in cultural attributes through teaching globally situated art reveals part of that conversation.

A deep dive into cultural competency includes criticality of place. Pinar (1991) wrote, “a place of origin as well as destination, [is] a ground from which intelligence can develop, and a figure for presenting new perceptions and reviewing old ones” (p.186). Correspondingly, it has been our experience that Art Education in the U.S. often disconnects from gravity of place, privileging euro-centric concepts, and artists. Exploring that murky relationship in the pre-service art teacher classroom could challenge colonizing practices student teachers often hold on to (Phelan, 2001); such as, not knowing how little they know about Indigenous history or philosophies and normalized misinformation and why this is problematic. Teaching through a decolonizing lens invites investigation of the invisible and unrepresented in curricula. By using an Indigenous view of place, for example, educators are moved to decolonize the curriculum by acknowledging place histories; often very horrific and sad ones at that. As art educators in what is now the United States of America, we can begin with this awareness and deconstruct our values and beliefs to present a more authentic exploration of cultural visualities of Indigenous peoples of the land we now occupy (Truer, 2021; Deloria, 1988; Gilio-Whitaker, 2019; Author Santos, 2011). Decolonizing Art Education pedagogy fundamentally includes acknowledgment and awareness of how our history has disempowered people of the Global Majority. Such inclusion scrutinizes histories that inform/construct identities, including our biases, supporting first-person narratives and experiences (Lee, Ogunfemi, Neville, & Tettegah, 2023), and transcends our current curriculum toward sustainable change that empowers our communities and students.

In education, a critical consciousness can be achieved through finding awareness of the inequities in this world, critically questioning our understanding including our source of knowledge, and ultimately, transcending and empowering through taking action (Freire, 2021; Author, 2019). The same is true of Art Education.

### *Critical Anti-Racist Discourse Analysis (CARDA)*

Higher education institutions normalize settler colonial ideals and related policies (Masta, 2019). Such policies seep into how/why we discuss what we do, privileging voices of policymakers. However, questions arise regarding repercussions upon pre-service teachers by normalized settler colonial dynamics of such policies and how K-12 students are impacted by new in-service art teachers. Discourse Analysis, more specifically—Critical Anti-Racist Discourse Analysis (CARDA)—was used in this study to target and eliminate this cycle of false narratives and biased policies.

CARDA (Laughter & Hurst, 2022) assisted with framing our study by engaging deep analysis of our young researchers’ discourse on Indigenous content and their resulting documents—lesson plans and visual journaling (Gee, 2009; Laughter & Hurst, 2022). The activities the ABR/PSAT groups engaged and built upon mirrored ideals related to an Indigenous Pedagogical lens (Antoine, Mason, Mason, Palahicky, & Rodriguez de France, 2019) discussed later in this section. Kendi (2019) states there is no middle ground. A decolonizing pedagogy is undoubtedly one of action: we are either confronting racial inequality by engaging it or allowing it to exist as a by-stander.

### *Art-Based Research*

The art-based research (ABR) process is a narrative process with artwork outcomes (visual and/or textual) that evolve into further inquiry (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008; Jones, 2006). ABR educational inquiry is characterized by seven features (Barone & Eisner, 1997): a) “The creation of a virtual reality” (p. 73); b) “The presence of ambiguity” (p. 74); c) “The use of expressive language” (p. 75); d) “The use of contextualized or vernacular language” (p. 76); e) “The promotion of empathy” (p. 77); f) “Personal signature of researcher/writer” (p. 77); and g) “The presence of aesthetic form” (p. 78). However, not every ABR project needs to adhere to every attribute each time ABR work is engaged.

An overarching definition of ABR is “the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and writing” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 73). The main purpose of ABR is to tear, collapse, challenge, and leak into one another ideas, concepts, preconceptions, or processes. The goal is to simply offer an alternative perspective. To create a piece of art with inquiry at its core is to invoke critical inquiry in the viewer (Barone & Eisner, 2012). As such, the reason for including the ABR component in this study was to elucidate the learners’ own processes of learning through art making, encouraging students to discover their own viewpoints more deeply. We consider it akin to some of our own curriculum planning process: backwards thinking.

By engaging the ABR component of this study, we challenged our own and our students' preconceptions about the significance of first-person Indigenous artist voice through questioning content, alternative perspectives, and perceptions.

### *Indigenous Pedagogy*

At the heart of the project is an Indigenous Pedagogical (IP) perspective developed in Canada (Antoine et al, 2019). We chose this theoretical framework because its tenets support real-world, culturally competent/relevant, student-centered methods. The following IP intentionalities were at the core of the experiences with which we engaged the two groups: 1) personal and holistic; 2) experiential; 3) place-based; and 4) intergenerational (Antoine et al, 2019; Truer, 2021; Wilson et al, 2019). First, personal and holistic attributes focus teaching/learning on the whole individual: emotional, cognitive, physical, cultural, creative, and spiritual, which is contrary to western Art Education where developmental stages identify markers for skills accomplishment and acquisition of concepts. In our experience here in the U.S., learners are cut into parts where the mind, body, and spirit are separate entities, thus unsupportive of a holistic growth framework.

Second, an IP employs experiential learning as part of its structure. This characteristic focuses on the "doing" aspect of the learning process. For example, the experience of engaging in an artmaking procedure will build foundations for grasping the concept of process itself. In many Native American communities, the cycle of learning has traditionally included the engagement of new knowledge to build on previous experience (i.e., transferability or intentional scaffolding). In this way, all levels of experience are honored and valued throughout the learning process. Furthermore, learning happens in relationship to and under the guidance of another (Truer, 2021; Wilson et al, 2019).

Third, lessons undertaken and environments in which they are engaged are critical to what the learner takes away. The place-based component of an IP approach supports connections learners have between content and place, as well as learners building new connections within and to place. In some circumstances, place-based art activities shed further clarifying perspectives. Place-based aspects endear learners to histories and memories linked to metaphysical and spiritual realms of knowing. Finally, the fourth attribute of an IP identifies criticality of information being presented through an intergenerational lens. In many Native American communities, elders have traditionally played a large role in how, when, and where specific knowledge is shared with young people. Additionally, in many cases, it was at their discretion as to who was the recipient of that knowledge. Contemporarily, many Native populations are opening knowledge to learners with the idea that, if truthful information is shared, misperceptions may be corrected,

and stereotypes extinguished. Recognizing the importance of the life experience of an elder in the classroom builds resources and connects the community.

### **Methodology**

#### *Project Design*

We designed this study using a qualitative approach employing an Indigenous paradigm (Wilson, 2008) given that all the pathways and learning was relational. We collected the data using two methods: a pre- and post-assessment qualitative survey and autoethnographic arts-based research. The group meetings were conducted with the two following groups: Native American artists and ABR/PSAT groups. Due to the implementation of an Indigenous research methodology, we included Indigenous artists' first-person voices to help inform and guide our ABR/PSATs' activities/outcomes.

#### *Group Compositions*

Between our two universities, we engaged two groups of ABR/PSATs. The twelve learners were not versed in art-based research, nor were they aware of the potential impact decolonized and culturally competent pedagogies could have on learners (Gay, 2010; Muhammad, 2023; German, 2019). Additionally, neither group had been exposed to Indigenous Pedagogy concepts regardless that both groups were in states where Native American history plays an integral role in how and what students are taught in K-12 art classes.

Perhaps the reason we chose these two groups was the timing of the opportunity within social chronology. From our perspectives as educators embedded in Indigenous philosophies, care and concern for Indigenous communities in the United States maintains a low visibility in the mainstream regardless of heightened awareness via the Internet. Statistics (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2021; Urban Indian Health Institute, 2019) show that violent crimes against Native citizens perpetually threaten entire socio-cultural dynamics and individuals whose heritage identity is a part of that paradigm, yet very little support is provided to rectify the issues. As art teacher educators, we saw an opening for re-education through research and teaching to share information about how misperceptions/misinformation delivered mainstream society to this point and can be re-envisioned. Nearly concurrently, we decided that our two upper-division student groups from Art Education backgrounds, given their locations, access to Native artists, and project funding were a fit for this project.

## *Learner Activities*

The two learner groups engaged the following assignments and activities: a) projects and readings; b) pre- and post-assessments; and c) engagement with Native American artists. We then mined our data from the student outcomes.

### **Projects and Readings**

To meet the first criteria of an Indigenously framed teaching style—personal and holistic—learners identified and incorporated their own identities through mind mapping and visual journaling, which became the artifacts for their art-based research.

The second IP perspective we utilized—experiential—scaffolded on previous knowledge and extended their knowledge base of Native American cultural art pieces through reflective journaling on readings, videos, and direct exploration of Native artwork. The learners' experiences with the content became a method of doing by inviting further actions based on their observations, actions, and reflections.

The inclusion of place-based learning was the third IP approach in our project. Where art lessons are taught/learned is just as critical to the teaching and learning as the lessons or content themselves. The two research groups were in two different places. By applying a place-based perspective, we were aware that both groups needed to be exposed to Native art and artists that were relevant to their two specific places. As such, the artists with whom the research groups held discussions were connected to our Montana and Kansas places: Molly Murphy Adams (Lakota), Norman Akers (Osage), and Sydney Pursel (Ioway). The fourth artist included in the work was Melanie Yazzie (Navajo). While Yazzie did not have a connection to either of the two states, we felt that her work was applicable as a site of comparison and breadth for the two groups.

The final IP attribute is intergenerational. This approach was implied through the various generations of artists presented and the stories they shared. We recognize that the learners may have not been aware that they were being exposed to the concepts of learning from an elders' perspective. However, all the artists steadfastly shared intergenerational stories as this was part of their own education. As part of the narrative, we advocated for an equal platform between teachers/parents/students, and the idea of apprenticeship, the role of the learner to learn, and the parent to pass on knowledge.

## **Pre- and Post-Assessments**

Students were asked to complete two assessments that helped to evaluate their knowledge of American Indigenous cultural assets. Pre- and post-assessment questions were formulated through using the Native Knowledge 360° Essential Understandings resource from the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI, 2022). The post-assessment additionally asked two free-answer questions for further clarification of content acquisition.

### **Native Artist Engagement and Influence**

A key aspect of Indigenous cultural understanding we felt necessary to teaching cultural relevance through decolonized curricula was the inclusion of first-person voice (Antoine et al., 2019; Wilson et al, 2019). To that end, four living Native American artists spoke with our learner groups: Melanie Yazzie, Molly Murphy Adams, Sydney Pursel, and Norman Akers.

In line with the Indigenization of decolonized art curricula, the voice of Native authors was also critical for the study (Antoine et al., 2019; Huaman, 2023; Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2023; Wilson et al, 2029). Student groups read *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Indians but were Afraid to Ask* by Antoine Truer (2021) and a range of literature and webinars found on the website of the National Museum of the American Indian. Additionally, because the story of the Native is largely told through the lens of the Hollywood "Injun," our students watched the Native made film REEL Injun. Learners were astounded at what they did not know. Dr. Truer (2021) (Ojibwe) reminds us that cultures should be understood on the people's terms, not belittled or idealized by outsiders. Cultural ways of knowing from an Indigenous perspective was a learning curve for most of the students. Privileging and embracing the lived experiences of Native peoples was a new and uncomfortable start for some students.

Part of the resources used to engage the two student groups was artwork made by the Native American artists who participated as guest speakers. The art pieces served as a second voice from the primary speakers. Students were asked to explore the works using aspects of the cultural knowledge they learned through the previous materials. During the artist discussions, students asked questions in addition to inquiries we sent to all four artists before their visits. Once each discussion was completed, students engaged in art-based research activities to further analyze their responses to the artwork, artist, and cultural teaching.

Student-created art lesson plans for the local museum featuring Native artwork, and inspired by the Native artists they met, was a final study/

course outcome. Lesson plans utilized a decolonized art lesson plan template framed within a cycle of Awareness, Critical Conversations, Transformation, and Empowerment (ACT-E) model that I, (Author 2), developed during my post dissertation research. We aligned ACT-E with the four National Visual Arts Standards strands. Students engaged in an ACT-E framed lesson experience where: new awarenesses by connecting to artwork, holds critical conversations as they respond to artwork, moves toward transformation as they create artwork, and builds empowerment through presenting their work, whether through artmaking, close looking, or discussion (Author, 2016).

## Findings and Discussions

Many common themes from the student group discussions, artwork, and pre-/post-assessments emerged in the findings suggesting the need for opening further discourse regarding the importance of an Indigenous Pedagogy; specifically, as an integral part of decolonizing art teacher preparation. We share the four following points as an opportunity for reflection to strengthen art teacher preparation courses: 1) learner fragility; 2) Indigenous non-artist & Indigenous artist voice as a cultural role model (CRM); 3) varying levels of cultural competence amongst the learners; and 4) the criticality of place-based content in art teaching curriculum.

### *Learner Fragility*

We found learners had a difficult time acknowledging and defining their own culture. As scholars of Indigenous Pedagogy and cultural learning, we firmly believe that one will never understand another's culture until s/he/they understand their own.

Curiously, our ABR/PSAT groups acknowledged cultural appropriation of Native American art and culture as prevalent in the United States but wavered on knowing how to define cultural appropriation. During Zoom discussions of the topic, the ABR/PSATs shared an initial sense of oblivion to the idea that several 'American' cultural practices, foods, and places were appropriated. They initially believed there was an absence of stereotyping throughout mainstream America, at first not knowing how to identify the line where their cultural practices ended in visual representation and where the Native influences began. Inclusion of braids to denote a Native individual or stylized elements of nature is one example. However, once we identified this aspect of their work, they more readily saw their own stereotyping and acts of cultural appropriation. They then shared their new abilities to employ Native American artists as points of reference, as well as speaking out against Native American stereotypes.

### *Indigenous Non-artist & Indigenous Artist Voice as Cultural Role Model*

We recognized the importance of CRMs in art teaching and learning. Via the living artists' Zoom meetings, the learners discovered Native lifeways to be indicative of both historical and contemporary perspectives. Through first-person discussions with the artists regarding cultural attributes, the learners came to understand that pasts are impactful on the present. In Zoom meetings, students described connections between aspects they previously believed were extinct (traditional) and observations of the present, such as metaphorical symbols past and present found in Norman Akers' work. When each artist joined group meetings, they shared Tribal traditional visuals or concepts they use as communication in their artworks. Once the ABR/PSATs began perceiving influences of the artists' cultural backgrounds, they started realizing how traditional elements in Native American works are still important to contemporary/present day and living discourses/investigations.

We considered that decolonization may be addressed by considering counter arguments to historical "best practices." Such qualitative perspectives rely upon "critically describing, interpreting, and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities" (Mullet, 2018, p.116). Through this perspective, we believed that the students would be able to deconstruct and then reconstruct applicable knowledge post-discussion with guest Indigenous artists.

In contemporary art teacher preparation contexts, the inclusion of first-person Indigenous voices and Indigenous artists is simpler than in past years. During the engagement of this project, we learned, regardless of the two groups being miles apart, as were our guest artists, they were all able to meet in cyberspace to share those valuable viewpoints and draw their relevant art teaching conclusions about the criticality of Indigenous perspectives. We believe the ABR/PSATs drew strength/inspiration from one another as they were challenged by foreign pedagogical concepts.

Works of art and the makers of those works are cultural narratives holding potential to teach critical aspects about the artists' cultural backgrounds, e.g., Indigenous truths and educational reconciliation. Works of art by Native American artists are small worlds of visual communication influenced by experiential impacts. We found that the inclusion of the first-person Native American narrative is powerful for learners. The act of engaging the voices of the Indigenous artists who spoke with the two groups will, we believe, serve to further counter the cultural erasure in the curriculum. However, unless one knows what to look for as noted above, it is highly unlikely that it will be

readily seen. This perspective points to continued cultural erasure given that the visual language is not normalized, and it is not typical for educators to think of Native cultural attributes as valuable in the learning environment. This is a skill we must present and cultivate in educator preparation courses to counter the making and manifesting of agreed-upon systemic beliefs.

### *Varying Levels of Cultural Competency*

We believe (hope) many contemporary art educators facilitate critical discourse as it is a part of best practices in higher education. However, we also believe it is still uncommon these discussions address points of power and positionality of Indigenous cultures. Some educators have noted that the concept of culture for them is vague, thus authentically understanding an “Other’s” culture may be questionable (Pierce, 2015). To counter that deficit, diving deeply into how culture impacts an individual is key to navigating cultural competency in the art classroom. Cultural differences hold complex potentials to convolute power perceptions (Banks, 1998 & 2001; Desai, 2010; Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2010). Our project findings suggest that by asking the ABR/PSATs to explore their prior cultural knowledge regarding a specific culture, they could experience methods through which they would learn more about their potential to facilitate culturally-based learning in the art classroom. Without distinct inclusion of these concepts into art teacher preparation, it is possible preservice art educators and student researchers will not understand cultural foundations as essential to becoming an effective and holistic educator.

Reflection on the ABR/PSATs work revealed that the four Indigenous Pedagogy components engaged served as support for learning. The ABR/PSATs acknowledged they can and will reference Native artists/artwork authentically and appropriately with their future learners or audiences. The ABSRs made gains in several fundamental knowledge areas about Native American cultures including: fundamental American Tribal Nation understandings; descriptive relevant vocabulary (i.e. sovereignty or treaty); diversities amongst Tribal groups across the U.S. (i.e. language dialects/semantics); recognition of images past and present within Native art as markers of cultural storytelling of place and identity; and the potentials for identifying/countering stereotypes appropriately (i.e. local and national Tribal cultural lifeways and generational skills still practiced today).

A profound finding amongst the two groups was the acknowledgment of Tribal uniqueness (i.e., the distinction between diverse Native Nations). The ABR/PSATs eventually recognized Native people as individuals as opposed to a generalized umbrella group, which we viewed as a movement toward productive advocacy. The ABR/PSATs

determined, when hearing individual Tribal differences from authentic voices, diversity has a greater chance of holding relevance in learning situations. However, neither the learners’ initial cultural competency nor their post-assessments reflected the intersection of Native historical/generational trauma and teaching using decolonizing pedagogical practices. We hope to address this further during a re-iteration of the project.

Upon discussion that “art” is not a ‘traditional’ practice of individuals in Native Nations, we found that the ABR/PSAT groups had a difficult time accepting this concept. We described that what colonizers defined as art or “aesthetic practice” was, from a Native perspective, utilitarian and an integral part of a way of knowing and living life (Author, 2015). Given the invisibility of Native American perspectives regarding their objects in place of privileging colonizer interpretive viewpoints, there is much corrective work to do in this area. Fortunately, the students concluded that Native American artwork belongs in art museums alongside mainstream artists from all movements. When asked the reason they believed this to be an effective action, they determined Indigenous visual narratives as important for all viewers to see, thus in support of equity and culturally sustaining pedagogies.

### *The Criticality of Place-based Content*

A highly impactful finding was ABR/PSAT recognition that all states occupy Indigenous land today. This recurring topic permeated all artists’ discussions, conversations before/during our exhibitions, and was present in readings and videos. Early in the project, few of the learners agreed with this statement. However, by final assessments, the ABR/PSATs’ perspectives had shifted to valuing/respecting diversified ways of knowing, as well as those personal experiences that are culturally contextualized in place revering time.

We observed the two groups becoming comfortable with Native artists representing personal human themes, not just creating beautiful objects. Thus, we determined that first-person perspectives of Indigenous artists and individuals are critical and in line with an Indigenous Pedagogy. Concurrently, there were some findings we did not consider the ABR/PSATs would still believe or take from the project. However, upon reading reflection findings, the following list shows remaining gaps in understanding. We now recognize that, without first-person experiences as per the tenets of Indigenous Pedagogy, learners may erroneously believe that:

- Native American children have been given the same opportunities as other children in schools.
- Native Americans have always had the same rights as others.
- Native American artists’ artwork is just as visible in the art world

as non-Native American artists (conflicts with aspects found in the previous sub-section).

- Native American artists who use euro-western-based aesthetic styles to make art today are no longer making Native American art.

We suggest there is a necessity for a thorough discussion of Indigenous Pedagogy, discourses surrounding what “culture” means for each individual, and deep scaffolding thus an unpacking of cultural appropriation. Additionally, a thorough analysis of educational policies, such as Title IX and Title VI, will shed light on how policy makers prioritize the administrative viewpoint instead of the perspective of the oppressed given continued invisibility/denial of systemic/institutionalized oppression. We found that some of the ABR/PSATs were often perplexed as to why they needed to engage the research resources we presented. We do not believe they recognized connections between the necessity to know IP and the potential for it to be implemented as a culturally sustaining and decolonized teaching method. Occasionally, some even inquired as to why it was necessary to consider alternative viewpoints. This suggests that privilege still strongly impacts the content a teacher educator may include in their coursework.

## Future Considerations

As we reflected on the strengths and challenges of the research project, we located further considerations. Students emerging from the covid pandemic have become used to online coursework communications. The use of online resources and Zoom meetings provided an excellent platform since the student groups were remotely located from one another. In addition to having online discussions with Indigenous artists, adding in-person art-making experiences alongside the Indigenous artists could deepen first-person perspectives with Native communities and individual Indigenous artists.

Moving forward, we are currently in the midst of a related research project to document and share Native artist perspectives for art classroom inclusion. We are also hoping to learn how in-service art educators identify and include Indigenous artists and concepts in their classroom. As for the next step of the current project, we hope to stay in contact with the students to see what and how they apply concepts they experienced through this project.

## Conclusions

Native American cultures have powerful pasts, presents, and futures in relationship to their land that transcend the legend of the dying Indian and misnomer of the melting pot theory. People are linked to

aesthetic production. Values of such relationships move worlds. A decolonized art pedagogy creates liberated spaces where we become aware, question, and transform, thus empowering our students to see those relationships through a lens of contextualized cultural visibility (Santos, 2016). It is important to remember that art tells all aspects of stories of the human experience: cultural, spiritual, and personal. This intersectionality of meanings is essential when studying art and culture.

This project comes out of great concern for the pervasive lack of teaching Indigenous histories and the disenfranchisement of mainstream understandings to their connection to the lands that we occupy. The field of Art Education has historically focused on euro-western aesthetics and mainstream histories, therefore blinding us from the individual human stories art tells. We collectively focus on objects as “art” compartmentalized from cultural ways of knowing. Eliminating this disconnection between artist and object becomes a means to decolonize the curriculum and re-educate how students think about Native art and cultures.

As art educators, we must not contribute to cultural erasure by including only non-Native artists of the past, and an Indigenous Pedagogy grounded curriculum must begin with living artists of the Americas, especially those of the places where we teach to share contemporary voices. We identified IP as an informative component but given the removal of Indigenous voice from the academic conversation, there will remain a great gap if we continue not teaching cultural ways of knowing, only focusing on the euro-western visual aesthetics framed within elements and principles of design and specific skill based approaches to art making.

Additionally, a student’s cultural responsiveness is an outcome of being critically conscious of a culture other than one’s own. Lacking that level of deep-dive education during art teacher preparation will have consequences on abilities to facilitate authentic education. Teaching preparatory courses steeped in critical consciousness, reflectivity, and social justice education can reveal deeper connections between real world cultural understandings and Art Education (Reese, 1998).

It is our conclusion that the processes and perspectives through which we share methods and pedagogical attributes will lend themselves to a global consciousness and more informed researching/making/teaching force. Therefore, we support the application of decolonizing and culturally competent concepts in relationship to diverse Native American/Indigenous groups here in the United States. Inequities are sustained when people most affected by systemic oppression are forced to live within a mythic condition created by the general population. If we do not seriously look at the historical and present record of cultural

misrepresentations and deconstruct the ways these narratives have exploited and disempowered Native identities, we persist as part of the problem. Therefore, we are advocating for concepts of Indigenous Pedagogy in Art Education.

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