Where do we go from here?
Intercultural education for peace

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Abstract

An intercultural approach to art education, facilitated by use of the Internet, can be a tool for developing world culture more oriented toward peace. Intercultural art education is briefly described, along with suggestions about how the Internet might be useful in meeting its objectives. Readers are invited to participate in a new collaborative website for art teachers, which is linked to the UNESCO-sponsored Culture of Peace Project.

In this period when international tensions seem out of control, reminding ourselves of commonalities among humans seems essential. In recent years, much educational attention has been given to learning about and understanding human diversity, a necessary corrective to prior neglect and ignorance. Attending to difference seems fundamental to the project of building tolerance, dialogue, and cooperation. But for art teachers and others asking "how do we get there from here?" the path ahead may seem unclear. How does awareness of difference contribute to harmony and good-will between people? What resources and strategies can art teachers utilize to counter divisive social policies and media misinformation that serve as obstacles to peace? I believe that an intercultural perspective can offer some helpful direction.

As I have explained elsewhere, *intercultural* differs from *multicultural* in its emphasis on understanding the interactions between cultural groups, rather than trying to appreciate any one culture-sharing group in isolation from others (Davenport, 2000). Creating culture is what human beings do (Geertz, 1973); it emerges from the interactions among group members as they negotiate toward shared understandings. This conception reflects the realization that culture is not produced *for* us, but *by* us. Viewing the dialogic construction of shared meanings as a process in which humans cannot help but participate empowers individuals to interrogate the interconnections and mutual influences among different types and levels of culture-sharing groups, from local community to global domain. Diamond (1997), Locke and Stern (1942), and Neumann (1998), among others, have suggested that just as "culture" can be seen as a record of the interactions and shared understandings between individuals, so too can civilization as a whole be viewed as a product of the interactions between cultural groups.

Addressing the extensive educational implications of this perspective may seem daunting, but teaching and learning about intercultural processes can begin with consideration of localized phenomena -- how one's own school community has developed over time. The historical record of any community anywhere in the world reveals it to be a unique confluence of and adaptation to various global dynamics and human interactions. Researching this record and sharing insights with others through artistic processes involves critical consideration of how one's community presents itself to the world and how it has been represented by others, drawing attention to which stories have been privileged and which have been left untold. Examining their own communities and their own multi-layered cultural identities sets the stage for students to begin telling their own stories to the world, so that they can learn *about* each other, *from* each other, a key process in intercultural education (Perotti, 1994). I believe this emergent model can provide the educational community with new ways of thinking about the role of art and visual culture education in preparing global citizens.

Although technology is not essential for intercultural learning, access to computers connected to the Internet can facilitate constructive interactions (McEaneany, Kolker and Ustinova, 1999), shrinking physical distance and turning media into an ally in the development of more democratic relations. Although there remains a disturbing gap between rich and poor countries in access to and use of newer technologies, nevertheless it seems unwise not to begin developing ways of turning technologies into allies for intercultural learning. One compelling reason to utilize technologies for intercultural education is that human technological advances are undisputed catalysts for intercultural contact in the contemporary world, either direct, through improved ease of travel, or indirect, through increased exposure to images and cultural products through the media and trade. For example, a recent New York Times magazine article described the explosion of Internet use among young people in Iran in recent years. "Widespread access has allowed many young Iranians to follow political or cultural developments anywhere on the planet. But even more significant, perhaps, it has allowed people to talk to one another" (Judah, 2002, p. 45).

Interestingly, Scheunpflug (1997) suggested that cross-cultural encounters facilitated through technology can actually be more effective in reducing xenophobia than face-to-face contact through travel typically accessible to the privileged few. She recommended engaging students in a joint task or a common experience that requires and structures ongoing dialogue in a collaborative exchange of ideas and issues. Technology-assisted interactions can provide opportunities for art students to overcome geographical and other barriers to work with individuals from other cultures and localities. The Internet offers amazing opportunities for intercultural exchange leading

to new expressions of human potential.

Empowering individuals to participate in the construction of human civilization is a process I believe art teachers can contribute to, because it is a creative act. As Wax (1993) suggested, "human growth and creativity tended to occur not within separate and isolated cultures, but within their meeting and intermixture." This is why the art education faculty at the University of Florida has launched the Community Stories Project through ArtJunction.org (accessible at http://www.artjunction.org/projects/communitystories): to facilitate the process of connecting the local to the global, providing a space for art teachers and students to share visions and stories of their communities, to learn about each other from each other, and work together toward the construction of a more peace-oriented global culture.

The Community Stories Project

Creating a space on the Web for art teachers and their students to share community stories has been a collaboration between two faculty members with distinct interests. Complementing my enthusiasm for intercultural art education, Craig Roland, a leading proponent of technology in the art room, designed an online space for art educators and students to develop community and collaborative learning activities around their mutual interests and concerns. It is our hope that this online tool for intercultural art education will grow into a database of projects and information for teachers and students to use in learning about and with others. Although participants are encouraged to propose their own project ideas, collaborations, and exchanges, we have included some ideas to get people started.

One way to think about a Community Stories Project is as an opportunity for students to interrogate media representations of their community, their school, or themselves. Students might be asked to consider: what images prevail in television, advertising, tourist brochures, newspaper stories, etc, that claim to describe some aspect of your community identity? Based upon such sources of information, what conclusion would an outsider likely draw about the local community and its people? Are there other aspects of the community that you would like people to know about? Students may have their own ideas about who they are and where they live that can be represented artistically and shared through the Community Stories Web site. Engaging students in researching their own evolving communities can make relevant the oral and visual traditions around them which are typically little regarded and often completely absent from formal school curricula.

As Bastos (2001), and Stuhr, Petrovich-Mwaniki, and Wasson (1992) and others have suggested, sources of information and lesson ideas can be found in local archives and libraries, family genealogies, historians or elder

members of the community, area artists, craftspeople, and musicians. Regional architecture, city planning, and the local use of natural resources can reveal different priorities and traditions at work shaping the community.

Researching and responding to community culture through art becomes a means for intercultural education when issues that are raised and understandings that result are shared and explored with others across cultural boundaries, whether across town, in the next state, or in other countries. The Community Stories website facilitates this type of intercultural exchange by providing a means for teachers and students to share local community-derived art educational resources, artworks, and ideas in a global arena. One participating teacher, Polly Werner, has initiated a project in which her students learn about their own town by examining the visual record of old newspaper photographs, researching the identity and location, and re-photographing those people or places in the present, updating the story of the town. She will be sharing the results of this lesson on the Community Stories Web site as it progresses. Another team, Linda Zidonik and Brandi Callister, have submitted an art lesson they developed on Florida's Highwaymen, a group of African-American painters little known outside of the state, and little studied in most school art programs. Understanding how the art of the Highwaymen developed—reflecting the impact of influences ranging from economic hardship, to entrepreneurship, to the Hudson River School of American painting, to the natural environment, converging in a particular time, place, and combination of individuals—can provide an revealing comparison and contrast to painting traditions in other places.

Many art teachers in the US are familiar with the indigenous Huichol people of central Mexico because of lesson plans which highlight examples of their yarn painting or bead work. Now those studying about Huichol culture can visit the Community Stories Web site to learn a bit about life in an isolated Huichol village through photographs taken by the schoolchildren who live there. On the Community Stories Web site, Dr. Sarah Corona Berkin, a professor of communications at the University of Guadalajara, shares images taken during an educational project she conducted with the children of San Miguel Huaixtita. Accompanying the students' photography and their own descriptive captions in Spanish and English is an article about Dr. Corona's project, the images, and the book that resulted from it.

An intercultural approach to art education, like the one supported by the Community Stories Project, invites students to construct new understandings about the connections between the global and the local through encounters with their own and others' cultural contexts. As participation in this project grows, teachers and students will have access to resources for learning about each other's ever-evolving communities and artistic practices that they

may not have otherwise.

This is an invitation to art educators to take advantage of and contribute to this resource for intercultural art education. As art students become more involved in examining the visual record of their own communities, consider the value of sharing those insights with students and teachers in other communities. Even different people in the same town can experience that community very differently, and can learn a great deal about their locality and each other by sharing their perspectives and working together to document or respond to their town's historical or contemporary identity and image. Art teachers and students can utilize Artjunction.org and the Community Stories Project to work with others around the globe, or around the corner.

Collaboration and dialogue result in the emergence of new shared understandings, the basis for creating culture. As Gadamer (1975) suggested, "a dialogue is not merely a matter of total self-expression and the successful assertion of one's own point of view, but a transformation into a communion, in which we do not remain what we were" (p. 377).

A Culture of Peace

Because the Community Stories Project is designed to encourage educational dialogue between individuals and communities to help transcend negative images and stereotypes, promote tolerance and solidarity, and allow for the sharing of information and knowledge (UNESCO, 2002), we have enrolled The Community Stories Project in the *Culture of Peace* network sponsored by the United Nations Education, Science, and Culture Organization (UNESCO). The years 2001-2010 have been declared an International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 53/243: Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. (See resolution A/RES/53/43 online at http://www3.unesco.org/iycp/kits/uk_res_243.pdf .) Through the Culture of Peace Web site, UNESCO invites organizations and individuals from around the globe to share ideas, projects, and resources for empowering children of the world to construct culture oriented toward peace.

At the time of writing, over 2,100 participants (including individuals, non-governmental organizations, and other local, national, and international groups) from 196 different countries are registered on the Culture of Peace Web site. Each is attempting in its own way to contribute to a Culture of Peace, defined by the United Nations as "a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations" (UN Resolutions A/RES/52/13 :

Culture of Peace and A/RES/53/243, Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace). Among the specific goals and strategies of the Culture of Peace Project are to:

- foster a culture of peace through education;
- promote sustainable economic and social development ;
- promote respect for all human rights;
- ensure equality between women and men ;
- foster democratic participation;
- advance understanding, tolerance and solidarity;
- support participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge; and
- promote international peace and security. (UNESCO, 2002, p. 5)

Despite inconsistent US governmental support of UNESCO, many educators feel strongly that UNESCO activities contribute importantly to the construction of a more peaceful world. Like the Community Stories Project, the success of the Culture of Peace initiative depends upon the active involvement of concerned individuals.

Humans create culture, so we have a choice. We have both an opportunity and a responsibility to consider what kinds of civilization we want to create. Because creative collaboration is an integral component of our profession, art teachers can play an active role in promoting intercultural learning toward more harmonious relations between diverse human communities. Empowering students to participate creatively in the construction of culture through collaboration and dialogue is a step in the right direction toward achieving a culture of peace.

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