

Vesta A. H. Daniel

Rachel Mason has made significant contributions to public debate about multicultural issues in art education. She continues to do so by offering her analysis of five changes in multicultural theory over the past 20 years that move us deeper into an international dialectic. Although she offers it as a criticism of Western ideologies addressing multiculturalism, I am encouraged to see that she perceives it as no longer a strictly Western phenomenon. It has been my assumption that world contexts and international objectives would ultimately determine the way that issues of difference would be addressed. I think that it is necessary, however, for Mason to separate the understandable opposition to the Western canon of the "dominant white, discriminatory aesthetic . . . [which] denies the global trend towards hybridization of the arts" from the goals of multicultural education. Certainly, the Western canon, as described, must be changed. It is inconsistent with the goals of multicultural art education. Moreover, to represent the two together, as in sync, is misleading.

What appears to be Mason's new interest in the politics of difference might be enhanced by a review of literature of early twentieth century thinkers such as W. E. B. Dubois and moving through the century to the works of the contemporary intellectuals such as Cornel West and bell hooks. It is possible that she will then find a connection between the contemporary *Black British* artists in her study with many other African-descended artists over the past 100 years who were equally proficient at what she terms *cultural projection* that leads to curriculum transformation. My point here is that art educators must develop historical perspective in order to make the much needed conceptual and causal connections that have local and global implications for art study.

Contrary to Mason's position, the American experience with multiculturalism, for good or bad, is of contemporary significance and should not be discarded in what appears to be a search for a dominant world-view. The American multicultural reality is inextricably tied to a history of institutional racism and every miscreant act that is implied therein. Those of us who speak from the margin know that our voices risk being misinterpreted, ignored, or eliminated on a moment to moment basis (Daniel, 1995). Because the American model of multicultural education is flawed, its continued evolution must include changes in educational practice that actually defeat hegemonic behaviors. Given America's struggle with diversity, I agree with Mason that "deconstructing Western art history and *unlearning racist myths*" is critical. The proposition is not new and continues to be urgent. However, I think that it is nonproductive to call for "alternative multiculturalisms" (one for each nation?) when we address the global need for societies and nations that function inclusively. Yes, it is necessary to find approaches and solutions that are most appropriate for specific contexts. However, to do so does not, in my view, require factious tactics. Rather, the illumination and understanding of *the nuances*

of multiculturalism as lived in various nations can help educational theorists and practitioners to conceive of multiculturalism more broadly and to subsequently participate in reform. After all, these nuances across the globe are still about the construction and expansion of the notion of identity which is both a postmodern and a multicultural issue.

Reference

Daniel, V. A. H. (1995). Evolution to the center. *Jazz Masters Journal*, 1-2.