

A Viewpoint on Multicultural Issues in Art Education

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In Grant, Sleeter, and Anderson's (1986) review and analysis of the literature on multicultural education, they clearly point out when writers write about multicultural education the term used exemplifies a specific social and political meaning. When art educators write about multicultural issues in art education their slant is also written from a particular social, political, and art perspective. The six approaches to multicultural education Grant et al. (1986) used were: 1. Business as usual with minimal compliance to Civil Rights laws; 2. Teaching the exceptional or culturally different; 3. Human relations; 4. Single group studies; 5. Multicultural education; 6. Education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist. The purpose of approaches one, two and three are the same. They are designed to maintain social stratification and promote cultural assimilation. The purpose of approach four, Single group studies, is to reduce social stratification and assimilation by promoting knowledge and appreciation of distinct group's histories, cultures, and contributions. The fifth approach, Multicultural education, proposes to reduce social stratification and assimilation by promoting knowledge and appreciation of America's cultural diversity. The sixth approach proposes to prepare students to challenge directly social stratifications. Each of these approaches can and has made a contribution to the diversity of human development. Multilevels of categories are important when we attempt to study, understand and focus on multicultural practices. There is nothing wrong with maintaining a level of assimilation nor is there anything wrong with reducing assimilation in cultural diversity as long as the teacher is seeking to find a balance in creating a multicultural curriculum. And I certainly would not be the one that would advocate that we not study and promote learning about distinct groups and their contributions. The specific study of Native Americans or learning about the work of John Hope Franklin and the history of African Americans should be a requirement for all Americans.¹ Promoting the appreciation of cultural diversity and proposing that the next generation directly challenges social stratifications is as inevitable as the process of learning theory changing over time. One goal in multicultural art education is to seek sustainability. Cultural diversity should be built on a structure that can be sustained. It should not be extreme in any one direction which means teachers have tough decisions to make.

In James A. Bank's recent book *Multicultural Education Transformative Knowledge and Action* (1996), he lists three groups of scholars that are participating in the common debate on multicultural education: 1. the Western Traditionalists, 2. the Multiculturalists, and 3. the Afrocentrists. He further points out that while each of these groups are distinct and different, they share in a number of important assumptions about diversity in the United States. From his point of view, the Western Traditionalists have initiated a national effort to defend the dominance of West-

ern civilization in the school and university curriculum. The Multiculturalists believe that the school, college and university curriculum marginalizes the experiences of people of color and women. The Afrocentrists maintain that African culture and history should be placed at the *center* of the curriculum in order to motivate African American students to learn, and to also help students to understand the important role that Africa has played in the development of Western civilization (Asante, 1991).

In art education, F. Graeme Chalmers (1996) monograph, *Celebrating Pluralism: Art Education and Cultural Diversity*, is an excellent addition to the literature. His celebration of pluralism and diversity fills a void that was much needed. Cultural diversity, according to Chalmers, includes North America and his approaches to multiculturalism affirms that it is a fact of life. He stated that we live with multiple cultures and subcultures. He also stated that while this is a fact that we all live with, many teachers may not be prepared to embrace and implement a curriculum that respects pluralism. Many of these teachers feel they are already asked to do too much and to minor in multicultural studies is asking too much.

Long-time advocates, such as June McFee, Eldon Katter, Eugene Grigsby and James Smith have committed years in the support of multiculturalism in art education. Katter has long advocated a broad based curriculum that would include universal, cultural and individual positions that would make up a multicultural experience. McFee, on the other hand, has been interested in these issues for decades, and in 1988 argued that DBAE needed a fifth discipline: *sociocultural art*. In 1992 (Getty), McFee stated in a paper she delivered at The Getty Center For Education in The Arts seminar in Austin, Texas that at least 37 years had past since some educators called for a greater recognition of cultural diversity in art education and the call went largely unattended to. Now we have a crisis in the teaching of multicultural issues and in the styles of learning utilized by many multicultural children. She went further to say that "multicultural education must do more than expose students to the art of different cultures—it must also consider the cultural diversity of students themselves, their different learning styles, value systems, and perceptual modes" (p. 64).

Nonwhite Art Educators and Others

In 1971, Black art educators petitioned the NAEA Board of Directors to appoint a committee devoted to the problems of minority teachers, students and their lack of participation in the planning of cultural and ethnic issues for the national convention. The group was called the Committee on Minority Concerns and it is presently called the Committee on Multiethnic Concerns (COMC). Over the years this group has grown and has been responsible for publications and multicultural platforms that have affected the NAEA in numerous ways. COMC has made major contributions to keeping the dialog alive in the art education community. *Art and Ethics* (1977) by Eugene Grigsby and Young's *Art, Culture, and Ethnicity* (1990) have contributed to keeping multiethnic issues alive. Young and Erickson (in progress) have teamed up to write and edit another new text tentatively titled *Multicultural Artworlds in Transition*. Grigsby's publication was significant in laying out the foundations of ethnic art and resources that lead to materials on African Americans, Native Americans, Chicano/Mexican-Americans, Puerto

Rican/Cuban artists and others. It can not be understated how important it is for art educators of color to join in dialogue and increase the numbers in conducting research or themselves, and creating new curricular materials.

By year 2000, one third of the public school population will be children of color or multicultural children. It is well known that this population is growing faster than any other population in the nation. It is also well known that the pool of multicultural teachers are decreasing in size each year. In the 21st century one the struggles will be for influence and control over who and what type of education and art education will become part of the curriculum for people of color?

It is my hope that we will continue to make progress in multicultural issues and art in the next century. I look forward to the next generation learning about and enjoying all aspects of art. Certainly about the qualities of a work of art and the reality that Western art and thought is only a part of the art world. Finally, I expect and hope art educators will have as much interest in the learner as they have in art and there are several plans to sustain advances in multicultural issues in art education.

Note

- 1 Certainly the mention of only Native Americans and African Americans in the text is not meant to imply that the numerous multicultural groups in the United States are not as important.

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