**Art**

**Educationation:**

**The Nation of Art Education**

**A Global View**

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March, 2015

**Research Brief**

Since 2008 I have felt the urgency as an arts educator to advance my knowledge of arts and culture beyond a Eurocentric view. I feel I do a disservice to students by only teaching material I have become familiar with over my lifetime. In my heart, I know that teaching in that way affects the students in my care, as those lessons would be passed on as important, while valuable learning from other cultures remains undiscovered. In 2010 and 2011, I took initiative to change my path and perspective to teach from a more global position. I quit my job, and began a six-month solo journey around the world documenting the arts and culture I experienced along the way. Most of my evidence collected is currently from Southeast Asia and the Middle East. I want to find a way to present and share information I gathered directly from its place of existence. Only in this way can I honestly feel good about knowing I am passing authentic information to my students with as minimal amount of bias as I can, while still being an outsider to any given community.

I have been living in rural Alaska, so we are required to do professional development to incorporate Alaskan native cultures into our teaching, even though we have almost no students of these heritages in our classes. My classes are populated instead with Russian, Ukrainian, Caucasian and Puerto Rican students. As Stuhr, Petrovich-Mwaniki and Wasson (1992) state:

A generic curriculum that can be applied to all art learning situations does not and should not exist…. a program that works for middle class children in a city suburb cannot be imposed on children in a rural farming community, not even with adaptions, which ultimately are cosmetic. Neither can one program that suits a particular multicultural setting be imposed on another multicultural setting. Each educational setting is unique. (pp. 19-20)

With this statement in mind, teachers need to have access to quality materials they can tailor and insert into the context of their teaching environment. A shift is needed from looking at cultural artifacts and reproducing, towards, “identifying, describing, analyzing, and respecting the values that exist within local, national, and international communities” (Stuhr et. al, p. 18).

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2005) identify the main purposes in teaching this curriculum quite well.

It is education which respects, celebrates and recognizes the normality of diversity in all areas of human life. It sensitizes the learner to the idea that humans have naturally developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldviews, and that this breadth of human life enriches all of us. It is education, which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination, and promotes the values upon which equality is built. (p.3)

In America, as complex and amalgamated as it is, we are still in an age where recognizing the normality of diversity seems to continue to be a challenge in many parts of the country.

There are many challenges to the progression of true intercultural education. Elizabeth Delacruz (1995) points out an important issue of teachers’ tendencies to appropriate other cultures in shallow ways that perpetuate ethnic stereotypes and teach little about the actual cultural arts. I have experienced these poor teaching practices in the American school systems, “redefining non-Western art along Western notions, disregard for cultural context, and the exclusion of problematic subject matter” (Delacruz, 1995, p. 60). Paul Gorski (2008) shares a similar memory of childhood attendance at his school Mexican fiesta taco night,

I am … certain they did not purposefully reify my growing sense of racial and ethnic supremacy by essentializing the lives and diverse cultures of an already oppressed group of people, then presenting that group to me as a clearly identifiable ‘other’. But that is exactly what they did. ( p. 516)

Without access to information from participants in the culture, teachers are left with two choices, attempt to teach about a culture through only limited knowledge or leave it untaught and unaddressed (Delacruz, 1995).

The problem is there is no classroom in the world where multicultural education is not needed. A mother’s four year old son did not like a new black student because he thought she was dirty (NCCA, 2005). The mother realized although there had been no racism talk in their home there was also a lack of imagery in the child’s home and school life and literature that supported an intercultural perspective (NCCA, 2005 ). It is not just what is presented which matters, but what is missing. There is room in every household and classroom for enrichment and expansion to not just learn about the ways and ideas of other people but to grow from the new perspective that can provide and enhance global connectivity.

UNESCO reveals a needed definer for me and helps me realize I want to be an intercultural rather than a multicultural teacher.

Multicultural education uses learning about other cultures in order to produce acceptance, or at least *tolerance,* of these cultures. Intercultural Education aims to go beyond passive coexistence to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies through the creation of *understanding* of, *respect* for, and *dialogue* between the different cultural groups. (p. 18)

I seek to develop an Intercultural learning environment and agree with the ideas of Flavia Bastos to get there. Bastos (2006) tells us ”Dialogical inquiry sees the relationship between researcher and informants from other cultures as interdependent…. Checks and balances provided by the people who are a part of that specific culture (p. 21). Bastos (2006) writes about building an equal exchange from both parties involved through everyday conversation, and that indigenous people will have important insights to share. She also writes about the “relatively simple but powerful premise that talking to one another can foster cultural understanding” (Bastos, 2006, p.21). The only difference I would like to assert is to reduce a researcher side and an informant side. I would like to develop a platform where all participants feel they are both researcher and informant. We have made the strides we have in civilization by asking questions, sharing, being open to change, working together and seeing room for improvement. I would like to improve intercultural education and our global community using these same simple tools.

**Action Plan**

I propose designing a website that provides culturally rich and authentic images, videos, and interviews with citizens from all parts of the globe. The website can be accessed freely by families and educators who wish to open the door to global citizenry to their children or students. It is my hope that by initiating the site and starting to provide meaningful, current content about life styles and arts around the world, others will join in documenting and contributing to the bounty of available information. The website will have an interactive world map, so users can mouse hover over the region of their interest and click on subject choices about the arts, beliefs, customs, values and ways of various individuals and organizations in the area. There would need to be a disclaimer mentioning that the site is aware all cultural perspectives in the area may not be represented, but any one is allowed to submit additional information for review and the site is always growing.

In addition to the resources, ideally there would be prompts for discussion at various age levels. To further develop discussion as the site grows I would seek representatives from each region of the world to be available to answer questions and help connect world web participants with local organizations and community groups to foster cross cultural relations and partnerships. A guiding example of these interactions can be seen at the Lonely Planet Thorn Tree (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree>). To take a more active stance the site could be connected to partners, such as Avaaz who are working to fight global injustices (<http://avaaz.org/en/>).

In order to make this plan a reality I will need to find computer programmers to help design the site. I will also begin building a network of global citizens who are passionate about contributing their images and experiences to the site. I will need to develop a framework/criteria for submissions, to ensure that only quality accurate information is added to the site. At this point, as a non-programmer, I am beginning this endeavor as a blog called http://arteducationation.blogspot.com. So far the most accessed post has been documentation of the work of Diego Rivera, as seen in San Francisco, California. The blog has had over 11,000 visits so far, so I feel that there is interest in this project. I hope to extend the site to include customs and traditions as well as artworks and artists, past and present from the region.

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