

DEEZ STRUCT

**MAKING SPACE FOR THE
VOICES IN THE MARGINS**

BY TAYLOR VARNADO

IN THE CENTER

Deconstructing the Center: Making Space for the Voices in the Margins

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Master of Art (MA) Art + Design Education
in the Department of Teaching + Learning in Art + Design
of the Rhode Island School of Design

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Rhode Island School of Design-2022

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Reader

Reader

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Acknowledgments

Parents are your first teachers, and I would like to acknowledge my mother and father. They have continuously supported my dreams and educational goals. My father fostered my love of art and design, while my mother exemplified the passion necessary to be an impactful educator. Collectively, they cultivated my passion for art and education. Additionally, they provided a foundation of blackness and racial pride within me that informed the way I navigate the world and fight for equity.



QR Code to Ted Talk by Luvvie Ajayi Jones

Note to self

**“Did you mean it?
Can you defend it?
Did you say it with love?”**

~Luvvie Ajayi Jones



Abstract

This thesis explores the implementation of culturally relevant/responsive teaching within the art classroom. The question that guided the research was: How can art teachers incorporate culturally relevant teaching into their curriculum to support equity and inclusion within the educational setting? In order to answer this question, I examined the current state of implementation through interviews, surveys, a literature review, work-based experiences, and classroom observations. The researcher determined a need for additional resources and a pathway for implementation through this examination.



“Knowledge rooted in experience shapes what we value and as a consequence how we know what we know as well as how we use what we know.”

bell hooks, (2009),
Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom

Introduction

Growing up, I was the racial minority in most of my classes;

Growing up, I was the racial minority in most of my classes; therefore, I knew how it felt to be considered the “other.” Fortunately, at a very young age, my parents steeped me in Black culture and Black children’s books to supplement the educational curriculum I received. The bell hooks (1999) book *Happy to Be Nappy* graced my bedroom bookshelf and helped me love my natural hair. I was greeted by a black ballerina light switch plate every time I turned on the light. *So Much by Trish Cooke* (1994) mirrored my own fa-

miliar experiences, and the audio-book of *Anansi, the Spider* tales lulled me to sleep. My parent’s felt that it was essential to ground me in Blackness and self-love because they knew firsthand the experiences

I would face in the outside world. This upbringing has informed my art and how I navigate the world. Without this upbringing, I would not have been able to face the jeers of my classmates or the lack of diverse topics, literature, artists, and representation within my classrooms.

These experiences have ignited a passion within me to provide others with a culturally relevant, more inclusive curriculum. These experiences are the reason I chose this research topic. I hope to provide tools and support to educators to provide an equitable, more inclusive educational experience for others. My parents understood the importance of seeing oneself and your culture, but, unfortunately, everyone does not see the necessity of providing representation within the classroom.

The lack of teachers of color in classrooms also impacts the curriculum and exacerbates the feeling of isolation and marginalization for many students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), “About eight-in-ten U.S. public school teachers (79%) identified as non-Hispanic White during the 2017-18 school year... Fewer than one-in-ten teachers were either Black (7%), Hispanic (9%) or Asian American (2%). And fewer than 2% of teachers were either American Indian or Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, or two or more races” (n.p.). On the other hand, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), between fall 2000 and fall 2017, the percentage of public school students who were White decreased from 61 to 48 percent, and the percentage of students who were Black decreased from 17 to 15 percent. In contrast, the percentage of Hispanic public school students increased from 16 to 27 percent during the same period. These statistics show that the demographic makeup of schools is shifting; therefore, educators must shift also. Since I come from a long line of educators, I understand why representation matters. Sitting in the back of my mother’s classroom, I saw the familial relationship she had with her students. She saw them as her own children, and she wanted the best for them and from them. She held them to a high standard while nurturing them. She tackled race, inclusion, and history without batting an eye or missing a beat. She wanted her students to think critically and understand our nation’s past, so that history does not repeat itself. It was important to my mother because she experienced many

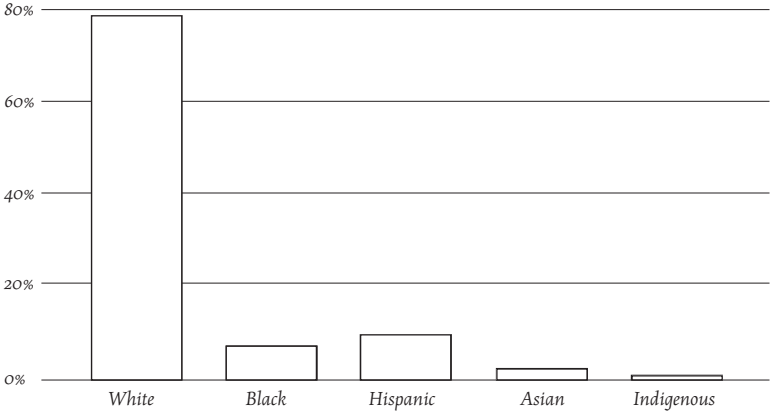


Figure 1

of the same struggles as her students. She was my personal example of a culturally relevant teacher in action. Non-POC teachers can promote the same environment but may need additional tools. Some may not see the importance of cultural relevance because they do not share the same experiences as their students. If we have learned nothing else from the racial strife of 2020, it should be that we must have the difficult conversations surrounding race and inclusion to heal the past as a nation. The educational system must help support the healing by providing a culturally relevant experience for all students and be a vehicle to increase representation and dialogue. In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) writes, “that’s the difference education as a practice of freedom makes. The bottom line assumption has to be that everyone in the classroom is able to act responsibly” (p. 152). Therefore, the classroom must be a space to empower teachers and students to fight for equity and foster learning.

This thesis focuses on cultural relevance and making the art classroom a more inclusive and equitable space. Over the past four years, most of the artists I was exposed to were white males. I had to seek out artists that represented my cultural heritage and experiences for myself. It did not seem to be a priority, or at the forefront of the minds of my college professors, so I know it is not in the forefront of the minds of elementary or secondary teachers. Art teachers must be more culturally responsive and engage students through a sense that is meaningful to them. People need to see themselves as subjects of art and see artists that look like them. Museums must incorporate a variety of artists and art forms and give more artists of color prominence. After-school programs must also incorporate meaningful lessons for the students before them. According to Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), culturally responsive teaching is an approach to teaching that connects students’ cultures, languages, and life experiences with their school experiences.

These connections assist students in making sense of rigorous curriculum and promote higher-level academic skills. If art teachers want to be on equal footing with core subjects, it is vital to engage art students in a culturally responsive manner. The art classroom must evolve beyond mimicking other artists and become a culturally responsive space.

“Sitting in the back of my mother’s classroom, I saw the familial relationship she had with her students. She saw them as her own children, and she wanted the best for them and from them. She held them to a high standard while nurturing them.”

Terms

Multicultural education

“Multicultural education is an idea, an approach to school reform, and a movement for equity, social justice, and democracy. Specialists within multicultural education emphasize different components and cultural groups. However, a significant degree of consensus exists within the field regarding its major principles, concepts, and goals. A major goal of multicultural education is to restructure schools so that all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in an ethnically and racially diverse nation and world. Multicultural education seeks to ensure educational equity for members of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups, and to facilitate their participation as critical and reflective citizens in an inclusive national civic culture.”

(Banks & Ambrosio, 2002, p. 1705)

Inclusive Education

“Inclusive education refers to a way of structuring educational services so that all students, regardless of labels or putative disabilities, are educated together in a shared community. Inclusive education is not only an administrative arrangement but also an ideological and philosophical commitment to a vision of schools and societies that are diverse and non-exclusionary. As such, inclusive education can be viewed as a civil rights issue, akin to ending racial segregation in schools. Although inclusive education originally was used specifically to describe the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, a more comprehensive definition of inclusion can be extended to discuss the ways in which education is provided that recognize, honor, and respond to other demographic differences—race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, language, sexual orientation, and family configuration—in addition to differences in students’ skills and assumed abilities.”

(Sapon-Shevin, 2012)

Social Justice Education

An educational framework that critically examines power, privilege, and oppression to empower teachers and students to understand and act on historical, social, political, and racial inequities.

Handbook of research on teaching diverse youth literature to pre-service professionals Hartsfield - Information Science Reference - 2021

Culturally Responsive

“Culturally responsive pedagogy is an approach to teaching that incorporates attributes and characteristics of, as well as knowledge from, students’ cultural background into instructional strategies and course content to improve their academic achievement. A primary aim of culturally responsive pedagogy is to create learning environments that allow students to use cultural elements, cultural capital, and other recognizable knowledge from their experiences to learn new content and information to enhance their schooling experience and academic success.”

(Howard, 2012, p.551)

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is an academic and legal framework that denotes that systemic racism is part of American society — from education and housing to employment and healthcare. Critical Race Theory recognizes that racism is more than the result of individual bias and prejudice. It is embedded in laws, policies and institutions that uphold and reproduce racial inequalities. According to CRT, societal issues like Black Americans’ higher mortality rate, outsized exposure to police violence, the school-to-prison pipeline, denial of affordable housing, and the rates of the death of Black women in childbirth are not unrelated anomalies.

(NAACP, 2022)

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) proposed three main components of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:

- (a) a focus on student learning and academic success,
- (b) developing students' cultural competence to assist students in developing positive ethnic and social identities, and
- (c) supporting students' critical consciousness or their ability to recognize and critique societal inequalities. All three components need to be utilized

(California Department of Education, 2022).

No matter what it is called, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogues all have at their base the idea of inclusion, acceptance, awareness, and equity. Student voice and culture must be included in the curriculum to enhance the educational environment. Educators must support the development of positive ethnic and social identities. Additionally educators must realize and help students realize the inequities within society and assist students in the critical reflection of these issues. This research project will focus on this ideology. In this study I will use culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching interchangeably. The discussion will focus on outcomes as an additive model to enrich students strengths, rather than a deficit model.

Research Project and Questions

This project was inspired by the reading “The Family Quilt Project: The Power of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy” by Naomi Lipschitz-Grant (2020) and the lessons on the anti-racist art teacher website. One lesson, Picasso’s Peace Flowers, used the children’s book *Shades of People*. After reviewing the lesson, I found it superficial because it did not address the four frameworks mentioned in the Lifschitz-Grant article. It did not include cultural references, engage in critical cultural reflection, facilitate cultural competence, or unmask issues of power. Reviewing this lesson made me think of books that could be used to promote this type of critical thought in the elementary classroom and how I could engage students in social justice and art simultaneously. As Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) states, the principal goal of culturally relevant teaching is “to empower students to examine critically where they live and to work for social change” (p. 314). In addition to Ladson-Billings readings, this quote made me examine the topic further:

It is critical that art curricula be fashioned and taught so the cultural practices of all students, and the people, objects, and customs studied are not trivialized or dismissed, but honored in authentic and meaningful ways. Today, and in years ahead, instructional activities in art—those involving both construction and reflection—must be designed and implemented in a manner that illuminates the rightful cultural understandings and art forms of our students as well as the people and cultural artifacts they explore” (Bolin, 2020, p.45).

As Bolin states, art educators should reflect and examine the curriculum and include creation and reflection. They must also include a critical reflection of pieces related to the larger canon of artists. The reflection must also include viewing artists not traditionally included in the cannon and creating an understanding of how they are an essential part of the cannon.

According to the Department of Labor, “statistics indicate that art teachers today are over 70% white female” (Art Teacher Education, 2014). This fact compounds the need for culturally relevant teaching. Most teachers teach what they know and what they are comfortable with. Unless they are being challenged to include cultural relevance, teachers will continue to teach mainstream artists and concepts. With these sentiments in mind, I began to formulate my research questions.

With the current state of social unrest, a resurgence of overt racism, and the changing demographics of American classrooms, how can art teachers incorporate culturally relevant teaching into their curriculum to support equity and inclusion within the educational setting?

Additional questions related to my primary questions are as follows:

- *How do art teachers currently incorporate cultural relevance in their curriculum?*
- *What does cultural relevance mean to art teacher educators?*
- *What methods can be used to incorporate culturally relevant teaching in an art setting?*

Methodology

This research project utilizes a mix of qualitative research methods, including interviews with students of color, surveys of art teachers, job shadowing experiences at schools, work experience at Project Open Door and the RISD museum, personal experience, and an analysis of literature related to the subject of culturally relevant teaching and art practices.

The interviews for this project took on two forms. First, I interviewed art teachers about their practices and comfort level surrounding culturally relevant practices. The surveyed teachers were chosen randomly from elementary and secondary, public, and private schools.

The sample sizes of both interviews were small and required self-reporting. Also, my classroom experiences were limited to the classrooms of two teachers on the secondary level and one school on the elementary level. I could have added more in-depth interview questions. For example, I should have added one question that asked for the teacher's definition of culturally relevant teaching to see how it compares to Ladson-Billings' criterion.

Classroom Observations and Work Experiences

The research included my job shadowing and classroom observations. The classroom observations and job shadowing experiences were done in pre-K, elementary, and secondary classrooms. These observations and shadowing experiences allowed me to interact with students and ask questions about curriculum implementation. It also allowed me to observe teaching practices and environments. During my observations in the high school setting, I did not see any representations of people of color on the classroom walls in the classrooms. The curriculum that was shared with me was based upon art principles and did not include cultural relevance. When I asked the students about the curriculum, they stated that they were not learning about artists or concepts that reflected their culture. However, there were some global aspects incorporated into the Illinois Baccalaureate curriculum because it is one of the tenets of the curriculum.

The elementary school I observed in was founded on the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy. The school made efforts to incorporate the community into the classroom through guest speakers and parent volunteering. Units were arranged with a particular culture in mind, and the learning revolved around that culture—the art curriculum related to the region they were studying. For example, when they were studying the continent of Africa, the students studied the work of Njideka Akunyili. While studying Mexico, the kindergarteners and 1st graders learned about Alebrijes and created their versions of the creatures. This experience allowed me to see firsthand one school's implementation of culturally relevant teaching. This helped me answer my third question—What methods can be used to incorporate culturally relevant teaching in an art setting?

In addition to the above, my work experiences at Project Open Door and the RISD Museum were used to evaluate the viability and ease of including culturally relevant practices within the art setting. Project Open Door is an afterschool art program that I worked at for 12 weeks in fall and spring of the 2021-2022 school year. I worked with a group of teens at a local high school. I also worked at the RISD Museum with the Family & Teen Programs during the spring of 2022. While creating lessons, I kept in mind how to include artists of various cultures. I also tried to include themes related to identity, culture, traditions, and self-examination while teaching art principles. The incorporation of these themes helped me better understand the culture of the students and their artistic creations. In addition, the discussions and critiques helped others understand their artistic choices and fostered a sense of community within the classroom.

Interviews and Surveys

The interviews for this project took on two forms. First, I interviewed art teachers about their practices and comfort level surrounding culturally relevant practices. The surveyed teachers were chosen randomly from elementary and secondary, public, and private schools in Illinois. The teachers were asked the following free-response questions:

- *What art media do you focus on? (i.e., photography)*
- *What artists do you cover in your curriculum?*
- *What types of mediums do you use?*
- *Do you incorporate reading into your art curriculum?*
- *If you incorporate reading, what type of text do you use?*
- *How do you incorporate cultural relevance into your art curriculum?*

The survey also included questions that involved the teachers using a Likert scale. Those questions were:

- *The books, handouts, and other materials I use to teach reflect multicultural and global awareness.*
- *How often do school leaders encourage you to teach about people from different races, ethnicities, or cultures?*
- *How often do professional development opportunities help you explore new ways to promote equity in your practice?*
- *How often are students given opportunities to learn about people from different races, ethnicities, or cultures in your classroom?*
- *How comfortable are you discussing race-related topics with your students?*
- *My classroom is decorated in ways that represent multiple cultures and global awareness.*

I recognize and value the cultures represented by the students in my classroom. The results of this survey highlighted several issues related to my research questions. How do art teachers currently incorporate cultural relevance in their curriculum? What does cultural relevance mean to art teacher educators?

Based on the survey answers, I concluded that the teachers did not fully understand the concept of culturally relevant teaching because they rated themselves high on their incorporation of cultural relevance into the curriculum; however, when asked how they incorporate it, most teachers stated it was incorporated through a unit or the student's artwork or through an open forum for listening—only two of the teachers surveyed listed artists of color that they incorporated into their curriculum. The teachers' image of themselves and their incorporation of culturally relevant teaching did not match the evidence they provided. Two of the teachers did not answer the question of how they incorporated it into the curriculum. 54% of the teachers also stated that the administration frequently or very frequently encouraged them to teach about people from different races, ethnicities, or cultures, but their answers on how culturally relevant teaching was incorporated did not reflect that. Based on this information, I concluded that one task of my research project was to provide clarity regarding the terminology surrounding cultural relevance. Buffington and Bryant (2016) confirmed this assertion when they researched the term "multicultural art lessons" on Pinterest and found that out of the 100 art lessons they reviewed, only 7 included artists, and only 4 used contemporary artists. They

also found that most lessons involved straightforward replication instead of understanding. They also found many lessons involving dreamcatchers, totems, and tribal masks. Based on these surveys and the literature, I concluded that another critical component of the research project would be clarity surrounding cultural relevance and resources that support teacher implementation and a pathway to include cultural relevance in their classrooms.

The second survey was done to gain feedback from POC college-level RISD art students about their primary and secondary experiences with art education. The following questions were asked of students:

- *Prior to attending college, how did your teachers include culturally relevant topics in your classes?*
- *What do you feel is the impact of including culturally relevant topics in classes?*
- *Did your art teachers include topics and artists related to your culture within the curriculum? If so, how was it incorporated?*
- *What was the impact of the room of silence upon you? (The room of silence is when you make artwork about race, identity, gender, sexuality, and everyone in the room is silent and has nothing to say about your work because they don't know how to talk about it or don't want to talk about it.)*
- *Did your professors address the room of silence? If so, how did they address it?*

The students who answered the survey stated that their teachers did not include artists of color or culturally relevant themes in the curriculum. Only one student stated that it was included only in a class outside the art curriculum. The students also stated that their college art professors did not address the room of silence. Based on this information, I concluded that more work needs to be done to ensure art teachers fully understand the premises of culturally relevant teaching, and art teachers need support incorporating cultural relevance into their curriculum.

Literature Review

This study investigates how K-12 grade teachers understand and incorporate culturally relevant teaching into their art classrooms. Additionally, the research investigates the methods used to incorporate it and what resources are needed to incorporate the principles into the art curriculum further. In order to assess the current state of culturally relevant teaching in the art classroom, a review of the literature was necessary.

In *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Woodson (1933) relays the following story.

“We do not offer any course in Negro history, Literature, or race relations,” recently said a professor of a Negro college. We study the Negro along with other people.” “An excellent idea,” the interviewer replied. “No one should expect you to do any more than this, but how do you do it when the Negro is not mentioned in your textbooks except to be condemned?...we Bring the Negro in here and there.” “How often does here and there connote?” The Negro has Not done much, and what they have accomplished may be briefly covered by referring to the achievements of a few men and women.” (p. 132).

Woodson utilizes this story to illustrate the need for the Negro to learn about himself. This quote also illustrates how the Negro was miseducated about himself. To Woodson, the idea of teaching about the Negro here and there was not enough. He understood the necessity of inclusive or culturally relevant education. Woodson (1933) says, “The race question is being brought before black and white children daily in their homes, in the streets, the press, and on the rostrum. How then, can the school ignore the duty of teaching the truth while other agencies are playing up falsehood?” (p. 135). Woodson’s quote addresses the need for culturally relevant teaching as a means to combat stereotypes and to combat the falsehoods perpetuated by institutions. The question raised by Woodson was further examined by Paulo Freire (1970) in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire states, “Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world” (p. 34). Freire further examines the idea that teaching does not occur

within a vacuum. Outside factors must be incorporated into the curriculum in order to bring about change. School desegregation brought about concepts like culturally appropriate (Au & Jordan, 1981), culturally congruent (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), and culturally compatible (Jordan, 1985) forms of education to meet the needs of a desegregated classroom. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) further examined these ideas and coined the term culturally relevant teaching. In *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Ladson-Billings addresses the achievement gap from the need for cultural relevance. She discusses the difference between a culturally relevant teacher and an assimilationist (p. 38) and states the following attributes of a culturally relevant teacher:

- *Teacher sees herself as an artist, teaching as an art.*
- *Teacher sees herself as part of the community and teaching as giving something back to the community, encourages students to do the same.*
- *Teacher believes that all students can succeed.*
- *Teacher helps students make connections between their community, national, and global identities.*
- *Teacher sees teaching as pulling knowledge out—like mining.*
- *Ladson-Billings (1995) goes on to say that culturally relevant pedagogy incorporates*
- *a focus on student learning and academic success,*
- *developing students' cultural competence to assist students in developing positive ethnic and social identities, and*
- *supporting students' critical consciousness or their ability to recognize and critique societal inequalities.*

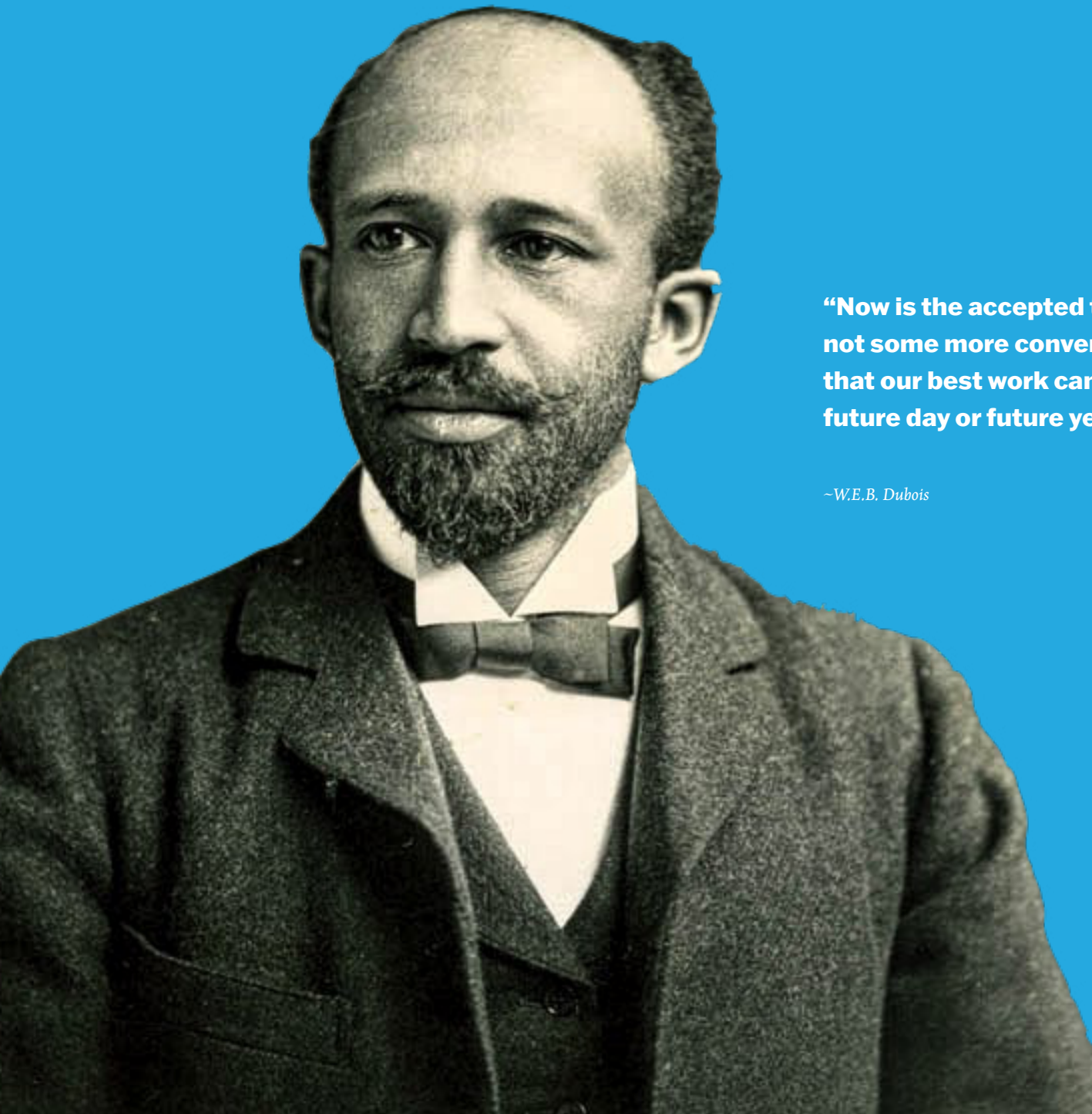
All three components need to be utilized (p.160).

These components and beliefs are integral to making an inclusive classroom that minimizes marginalization and pushes forward social equity. In addition to Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay (2013) coined culturally responsive teaching. In the journal article *Teaching to and Through Cultural Diversity*, Gay (2013) defines Culturally Responsive Teaching as

“...the behavioral expressions of knowledge that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning. It is contingent

on —seeing cultural differences as assets; creating caring learning communities where culturally different individuals and heritages are valued; using cultural knowledge of ethnically diverse cultures, families, and communities to guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students; challenging cultural stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and other forms of intolerance, injustice, and oppression; being change agents for social justice and academic equity; mediating power imbalances based on race, culture, ethnicity, and class, and accepting culturally responsiveness as endemic to educational effectiveness in all areas of learning for students...” (p. 50).

This definition seems to build upon Ladson-Billings' definition and teases out specific areas within the educational structure that should be attacked to bring about equity. Culturally Responsive Teaching expands the definition of culture. Unfortunately, some people focus solely on the instructional strategies portion of the pedagogy and less on the culture guiding curriculum portion. Other scholars have studied multicultural education as it pertains to the art classroom. Stuhr (1994) and Daniel (1990) believe that representing the cultures of minority groups in the art curriculum will have life-changing impacts on students, such as improved social and cultural awareness and enhanced ability to make informed decisions in the process of social action (Banks, 1989). Stuhr (1999) also states, “The more that is learned about various members of a particular group with its history, heritage, traditions, and cultural interactions, the more completely and richly one can understand the social and cultural groups to which they belong” (p. 7). In other words, a single unit of study is not sufficient to understand an entire group of people. Other scholars have gone beyond broad ideology to making practical suggestions on how these concepts can be implemented in an art classroom (see Cho, 1998; Daniel & Daniel, 1979). Acuff (2020) asserts that “Art educators need to consider how we can develop a future art curriculum that results in our Black students identifying art as a primary means to envision their futures” (p. 15). I agree with Acuff's idea of Afrofuturism to push our students to visualize the future while incorporating arts and crafts into the art curriculum. Often, arts and crafts are not considered a form of art to be taught in an educational setting.



**“Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow,
not some more convenient season. It is today
that our best work can be done and not some
future day or future year.”**

~W.E.B. DuBois

Part One:
Marginalization

Why Culturally relevant teaching is important.

“Silenced during my graduate years I heard myself speaking often in the voice of resistance. I cannot say that my speech was welcomed. I cannot say that my speech was heard in such a way that it altered relations between coloniser and colonised”

(hooks 1989, p. 22).

Most people of color can relate to this quote because it is a universal experience of marginalized people. Speaking in resistance and not being heard or understood is commonplace. Being in the minority, one feels the necessity of pushing against the boundaries that

divide us from the center.

One wants to challenge the position of the colonizer while simultaneously wanting the empathy of the colonizer because this empathy may bring about change. People of color desire to be seen, heard, and understood by the center. For so long, the issues created by the center have been ours alone to

deal with. I experienced this feeling while presenting the article *The Margin as a Space of Radical Openness* (hooks 1989).

Unfortunately, my presentation was met with a silence that left me questioning myself and feeling disappointed by the lack of dialogue regarding the impact of marginalization on people. This lack of dialogue allows the problems to fester and create further marginalization. Marginalization is a splintering force that simultaneously creates a dichotomy of power and powerlessness within the marginalized group. Therefore, healing can only come through the colonizer

questioning his position and leaving his comfortable place in the center.

Marginalized groups are pushed to the edges of society by those in the center. This diminished status requires the marginalized to create a space for themselves that blurs the edges. As a result, the marginalized group gains power and a safe space within the marginalized area. People of Color have learned to band together in the minimized space and create a sense of comfort and familiarity through a shared culture, a shared knowledge, a shared language, and shared tradition. This builds community. When hooks (1998) states, “I remember the smells of my childhood, hot water corn bread, fried pies” (p. 16) and “What does it mean to enjoy reading Beloved admire Schooldaze...” (p. 15) she is tapping into a shared experience that brings about comfort for African Americans. A fondness and a sense of home may engulf them at the mention of these items. A smile may even appear unknowingly on their faces. Talk of these things makes others aware of the inner you without a protracted dialogue. You are seen by your community and accepted because you have a shared common space.

A common language is also a part of the sense of community for people of color. hooks (1998) states, “I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate in the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present, but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me” (p. 16). This quote exemplifies the splintering required by people of color to enter white spaces. One must code switch and don standard English and put away African American Vernacular English (AAVE). This creates a sense of inauthenticity and stress. This mask gets tiring, so the ease and authenticity of the margins are desired. As stated in the article,

“Living as we did-on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of the whole universe, a main body, made up of both margin and Centre. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and Centre and an ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary part of the whole” (hooks, 1998 p. 20).

Being on the edge requires work, but it is primarily done to optimize the comfort of the center. The use of “standard English” is also used to combat stereotypes and compete

for opportunities within the center. It is a strategic but taxing maneuver. Some marginalized people put down the marginalized culture in favor of the colonized culture. This, too, causes strife and regret. The marginalized group can look upon it as modeling the oppressor. Both modeling the oppressor, and code-switching caused splintering and ruptures within the marginalized group. The center can heal some of the splinterings by creating an inclusive and safe environment and challenging marginalization within the institutional structure. If the center challenges the institutional structure, it will allow authenticity to rain through and less stress for the marginalized group.

Although a sense of comfort is created in this minimized space, a sense of danger is created when one must enter the center. Blacks must enter the center, Eurocentric White Spaces, to sustain themselves monetarily and improve themselves educationally. As they enter the center’s world, People of Color worry about losing the traditions and comfort of the marginalized space. When hooks (1998) quotes her mother, “You can take what the white people have to offer, but you don’t have to love them..She was saying that it is not necessary to give yourself over to them to learn” (p. 21). In other words, do not lose your culture and Blackness because you are entering a White Space. A tie to Blackness can be grounding and a form of emotional therapy. The educational arena can bring about many stressors because there is no common cultural experience to cling to or reminders of that experience daily. This is why representation matters. Organizations and safe spaces for POCs matter. A space where you can express your experiences in the Eurocentric space without being questioned is necessary. The center can be uncomfortable because you may lose ties to the marginalized space and not have access to its comfort. African Americans may seek to be understood by the center but are met by inauthentic acceptance or silence. This lack of understanding creates a desire to educate others, creating a safe space within the center.

That is why culturally relevant teaching in the educational arena is so important. It creates a structured space for opportunities to educate and learn from one another. It allows the marginalized group to see themselves represented in the center, which is a reminder of the comforts of the marginalized space. It is not enough to include cultural relevance within the curriculum, but educational institutions must also pay attention to the silences. The silences matter—The silences on the part of the marginalized and the silences on the part of the center. Both silences are detrimental to the marginalized group. Often the silence on the part of the marginalized group can signify frustration

and personal resistance. Silence on the part of the center can signify a fear of retribution, a lack of knowledge, or apathy. Whatever the reason, the marginalized group is negatively impacted by the silence. The silence creates unnecessary wondering and frustration, especially when the silence occurs mainly surrounding topics that impact the marginalized. hooks (1998) further illustrates this idea through the following quote: “We fear those who speak about us who do not speak to us and with us” (p. 23). This attention from the center is another form of marginalization. It confirms that our voices do not matter to the center. Our pain and feelings are invalidated, and the voice and ideology of the Eurocentric center holds more weight than our authentic voice. hooks (1998) writes,

“Often this speech about the “other” annihilates, erases. No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself a new. I am still author, authority. I am still the coloniser, the speaking subject and you are now at the centre of my talk” (p. 22).

This quote illustrates the colonizer’s necessity to listen and take part in a genuine dialogue instead of trying to be the authority on something they have not experienced. It is like a man mansplaining a woman’s issue to a woman who has experienced it firsthand. Reading and hearing about the issue is not the same as living it. So, the colonizer must enter the space not as an authority but as a pupil and ally. Engaging in dialogue with the marginalized can be a tricky and uncomfortable space for the colonizer, but being marginalized is also a tricky and uncomfortable space. The dialogue must occur in the space of mutual respect and foster a sense of understanding. Without it, broken voices will continue to be broken. Silent voices will continue to be silent, and healing will not occur. Healing and progress can not occur without the colonizer leaving his place of comfort and joining the resistance efforts. Becoming an ally does not mean speaking for us and not listening to us. It does mean joining the resistance efforts, engaging in dialogue, and creating safe spaces within the center.

“Real Education means inspiring people to live more abundantly, learn to begin with life as they find it, and make it better.”

Carter G. Woodson (1933, p. 22)



Part Two: It's Just Good Teaching

Ladson-Billings (1995) wrote an article entitled *But That is Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*. In this article, she argues that culturally relevant teaching is central to the academic success of African American students. I agree with this assertion. If we look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, once a person's physiological and safety needs are met, their psychological needs become a priority. A sense of belongingness is an essential step toward reaching one's full potential. Schools and educators play a significant role in developing a person's sense of belonging and psychological development, and culturally relevant teaching fosters a sense of belonging for students. It helps students understand that their opinions, issues, culture, and voices matter, so they feel a part of the school's educational process. Culturally relevant teaching also promotes a sense of self-esteem because culturally relevant teachers promote the idea that all students can succeed.



Additionally, culturally relevant teachers empower students to act, which boosts their self-esteem. Culturally relevant teachers understand that relationships matter, especially for children that have felt marginalized. It allows students to be their authentic selves when you nurture the whole person. Strategies will not work unless you have built relationships. Hammond (2015) characterizes the ideal student-teacher relationship as a partnership in *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*. She says that the partnership has two key components—rapport and alliance. Rapport is characterized as a connection based upon trust, while the alliance is a relationship based upon mutual support that pushes students toward independent learning. As Brookfield (2000) states in *The Skillful Teacher*,

“Trust between teachers and students is the affective glue that binds educational relationships together. Not trusting teachers has several consequences for students. They are unwilling to submit themselves to the perilous uncertainties of new learning. They avoid risk. They keep their most deeply felt concerns private. They view with cynical reserve the exhortations and instructions of teachers” (p. 162).

Trusting relationships allow students to be open to being vulnerable and taking risks. Effective educators utilize and see a student’s identity and culture as an asset to build upon to promote a sense of well-being, academic growth, and personal growth.

In addition to promoting student well-being, culturally relevant teaching helps students make connections. As stated by Emdin (2016) in *For White Folks that Teach in the Hood*, “When teaching does not connect to students, it is perceived as not belonging to them” (p. 39). If students can not see themselves in the learning, they will have difficulty applying and retaining it. Good teachers tap into students’ prior knowledge and use analogies that students can relate to, reinforcing the learning. Tapping into a student’s schema allows them to retain information and build neural pathways. This allows teachers to scaffold the learning upon a solid foundation. When these connections are made, students are more engaged.

How Does This Apply to the Art Classroom?

Not everyone is an artist, so art educators must create a safe place for students to create. Culturally relevant teaching helps students make connections and see themselves as a part of the art world. These connections help them be open to taking risks, developing their art skills, and creating authentic pieces. These connections allow students to think about art critically and to use it as a means by which to reshape society into a more equitable space. These connections also peak students’ interests and increase their engagement when the content is relevant. Additionally, it promotes engagement in reluctant artists.

Figure Source: Culturally responsive teaching: A reflection guide. New America. (2020, September 23). Retrieved February 3, 2022, from <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/culturally-responsive-teaching-competencies/>

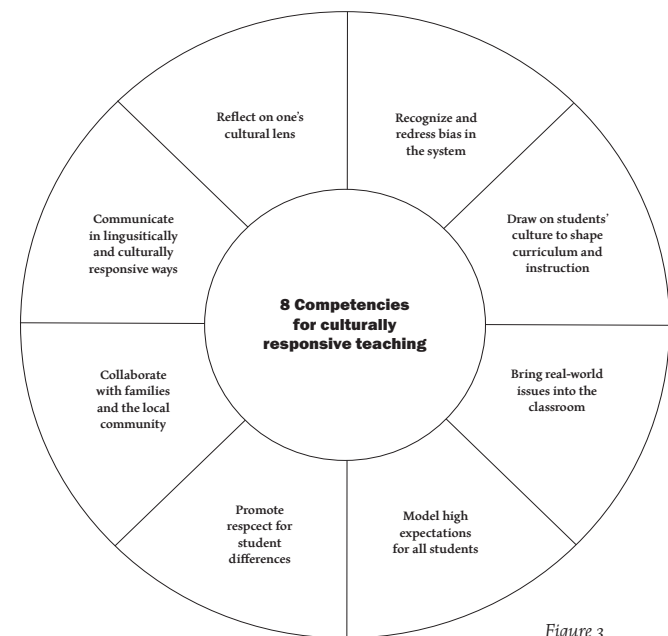


Figure 3

Part Three: How Can I Implement This in My Classroom?

Part Four: How Do I Begin?

In order to be a culturally relevant teacher, one must begin by examining the unconscious/implicit biases that exist within. Implicit bias is the unconscious stereotypes and attitudes that are developed over time that impact our decisions and choices. Art teachers' ideas of what it means to be an art teacher are formed by their personal experiences, educational experiences, and artistic experiences. Often we teach what we know. Thomas (2020) research illustrates this idea. In *Traditional Futures: Prospective Art Teachers' Possible Future Selves*, Thomas analyzes surveys of essays by pre-service art teachers goals for teaching. This research resulted in the following graph:

The graph illustrates that only a tiny percentage of the teachers communicated social

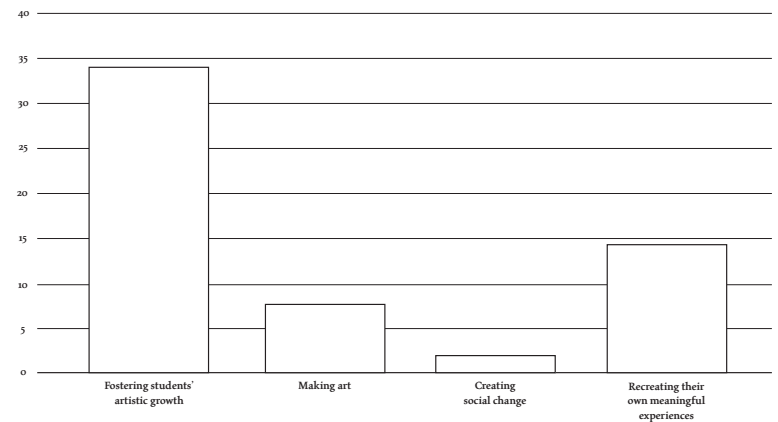


Figure 4

change as a goal. Instead, they focused more on the art and recreating their own experiences. This study stated that being a good art teacher meant recreating an influential art teacher's style and being supportive and inspiring. Being supportive and inspiring should mean being a reflective teacher that creates an inclusive classroom for the students who sit before you instead of recreating what you experienced. Examining biases allows the teacher to understand the source of their preferences, ideas, and choices. Everyone has biases. Examining biases helps you understand the choices you make within the curriculum and your actions within the classroom. It also helps you understand what systems you are validating within the classroom hinder an equitable and inclusive learning environment. There are numerous resources to use to help you discover your implicit biases. One source is the Harvard survey Project Implicit. After you have uncov-

ered some of your biases, you must take the time to reflect on those biases and how they impact your classroom. It would be best if you made a conscious effort to make different decisions and challenge your own thoughts and beliefs.

One way to do that is to review your curriculum to see if it is inclusive and differentiated. Having one isolated unit does not make others feel included. On the contrary, it makes them feel marginalized. Replicating a totem is not the same as promoting an understanding of a culture's history and beliefs related to the artifact. I learned this lesson through my graduate work myself. I developed the following questions to guide my thought process.

- *What cultures, gender, races, and ethnicities are represented in my curriculum?*
- *What percentage of the total curriculum do they represent?*
- *Are they included in a unit or segregated to a unit?*
- *How much time is devoted to each group?*
- *Does their inclusion involve replication or appropriation or a deeper meaningful understanding and promote critical thought?*
- *Does their inclusion promote stereotypes, or does it promote the groups' strengths, complexities, and critical dialogue that promotes change?*
- *Does the curriculum have real-world connections and bring in the communities I serve?*
- *What percentage of contemporary artists versus traditional artists are included?*
- *Are there contemporary artists of various races and ethnicities that I can use as examples in this lesson?*

The Anti-racist Art Teacher website suggests the use of the following questions:

- *Who is represented in your curriculum?*
- *How are they represented in your curriculum?*
- *Who holds knowledge within your instruction?*
- *Who holds power within your instruction?*

These questions are expounded upon to support a curricular review and deep dive into inclusive classroom strategies. These questions have assisted me in creating the following lesson plans:

Lesson Plan 1: Poetry Illustration

This lesson plan was used for a high school afterschool art program for Project Open Door. In this lesson I incorporated both traditional and modern author's of various races and ethnicities. The poems dealt with issues of race, identity, power, and other themes. The poems were used as a conduit to create and discuss these themes. The students were able to choose the poem that spoke to them. After creating the illustration a discussion ensued related to these issues. This lesson required critical thinking, assisted students in the recognition of societal inequalities, and promoted cultural competence and fit the criteria that Ladson-Billings (1995) provided. This lesson can also be adapted for middle school and elementary school students by changing the poems.

The teacher will have a slide-show of different Kansuke Yamamoto I'd like to think while inside the body of a horse who used poetry to create an illustration from it.

The teacher will supply poems from different poets which the student will choose from and create a companion drawing. Students create their Illustration on Drawing Paper (8X10)

The students will read over the poem and write down notes related to the following questions:

- Describe what you feel.
- Record what you see.
- Analyze and interpret the artist's (author's) intent.
- Examine your responses.
- What does this poem reveal about power, identity, or an issue within society?

After brainstorming and answering the questions, create a visual companion to the poem.

Post-Class discussion:

- How does your visual relate to the issues or themes in the poem?

Example:

Artist

Kansuke Yamamoto: I'd like to think while inside the body of a horse

Poets

Maya Angelou

Caged Bird

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48989/caged-bird>

Morgan Varnado

America is just a negro in an anthill

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/156784/america-is-just-a-negro-in-an-anthill>

Danez Smith

Alternate name for black boys

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/56843/alternate-names-for-black-boys>

Dinosaurs in the hood

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/57585/dinosaurs-in-the-hood>

Masaoka Shiki

8 haiku on falling

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/157098/8-haiku-on-falling>

Fatimah Ashgar

Smell is the Last Memory to Go

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/149512/smell-is-the-last-memory-to-go>

Jamila Woods

"Daddy Dozens"

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/58058/daddy-dozens>

Javier Zamora

Second Attempt Crossing

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/90978/second-attempt-crossing>

Supplies Needed:

Teacher:

Poems (Print out)
Slideshow

Students:

Magazine
Markers
Colored Pencils
Scissors
Glue
Drawing Paper (8X10)

Lesson Plan 2: Where I'm From

Through this lesson students were able to share their identity and cultural heritage with one another and dialogue about the similarities and differences. This lesson helped build a sense of rapport in the class. This lesson also required critical thinking, assisted students in the recognition of societal inequalities, and promoted cultural competence and fit the criteria that Ladson-Billings (1994) provided. I include examples of racially and socially diverse artists' ideas of identity and community. This lesson can be used for elementary and secondary students.

This session will focus on cultural identity and heritage. The students will create a Where I'm From poem (examples will be shown). Based upon their poem, they will create a poster of where they are from.

Session 1- Cultural identity and heritage

Introduces the idea of cultural identity and heritage art created by other artist through a powerpoint

The students will create a Where I'm From poem.

Examples of Where I'm From

[https://www.wsuu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/I_Am_From_Poem\(2\).pdf](https://www.wsuu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/I_Am_From_Poem(2).pdf)

http://www.smithsonian-education.org/educators/professional_development/workshops/writing/george_ella_lyon.pdf

<https://genius.com/Digable-planets-where-im-from-lyrics>

Students will create their posters (10X7) about where they are from, using mixed media

Class Discussion: Related to answers.

Individual Journal Assignment: What would be one thing you would like to change or improve in your community and why?

OR

What is one thing that you love about Where You Are From or your cultural heritage and why you love it?

Artists

- Njideka Akunyili Crosby
- Romare Bearden
- Firelei Baez
- Rafael Lozano-Hemmer
- Wangechi Mutu
- Michael Rakowitz
- Bisa Butler
- Kerry James Marshall
- Kehinde Wiley
- Yinka Shonibare
- Chris Pappan
- Gregg Deal

Supplies

Teacher:

- Laptop
- Snacks

Students:

- (The material will be given)*
- Mix Media paper 10X7
 - Glue
 - Mix Media Paper
 - Mix Media Supplies
 - Journal

Part Five:

What Resources Are Available to Support My Efforts?

I also found the work of Acuff (2020), Dewhurst (2010), Billings (1995), Ploff and Hochtritt (2018), and Knight (2006) as valuable resources to support culturally relevant pedagogy.

In Issues vs. Themes, Billings (1995) discusses the Issues Approach (Social Action Approach) to teaching art. In an issues approach, topics are identified, analyzed, discussed, and used to create art pieces. This approach allows for a discussion and deep dive into an issue. Artists from various racial groups and ethnicities can be included within the unit, and social justice can be promoted. Knight (2006) includes the following questions to guide the analysis of the images.

- *Record what you see.*
- *Describe what you feel.*
- *Analyze and interpret the artist's intent.*
- *Examine your responses.*

Knight incorporates a journal for reflection. Dewhurst (2010) suggests a shift in the power within the classroom to address social justice issues. Dewhurst suggests more student-driven projects. This idea of collaboration can be used to brainstorm topics before reviewing images. Knight's reflective questions can be used in conjunction with a reflective journal. Ploof and Hochtritt (2018) suggest using the following questions when creating a collaborative social justice art curriculum:

- *Personal—how is the project grounded in the lived experience of participants?*
- *Critical—how has the power of political, socioeconomic, and cultural influences shaped the situation, and why?*
- *Activist—what creative opportunities for resistance are possible that could result in both personal and social change? (pg. 39)*

Some additional examples of resources to use:

Resource	Description
Art 21-(website) https://art21.org	Source for contemporary artists. Many of the artists on this site address current issues. Videos are also provided of the artist discussing their work. This is my go to source to find artists to include within my lessons.
The Anti-racist Art Teacher (website) https://sites.google.com/view/antiracistartteachers/home	Source for contemporary artists. Many of the artists on this site address current issues. Videos are also provided of the artist discussing their work. This is my go to source to find artists to include within my lessons.
Learning for Justice (website) https://www.learningforjustice.org/	This source provides classroom resources, a magazine, and professional development for social justice.
NAEA (website) https://www.arteducators.org/	This source provides lessons, scholarly journal articles, professional development, resources, and National Visual Arts Standards.
Rethinking Schools (website) https://rethinking-schools.org/about-rethinking-schools/our-history/	This source provides resources, books, and a magazine.
The Ultimate Art Museum by Ferren Gipson (book)	This source provides art history and artwork resources from artists of various races and identities.
Teaching for Blacks Lives (book) Editors: Dyan Watson, Jesse Hagopian, and Wayne Au.	This book has readings on various issues within the Black community. This book could be used as a resource or jumping off point to create social justice art.

Conclusion

Growing up, I was the racial minority in most of my classes; therefore, I know how it feels to be considered the “other” and marginalized within a space. This marginalization harms the self-esteem and academic progress of students. These experiences have ignited a passion within me to provide others with a culturally relevant, more inclusive educational experience for others. The changing demographic makeup of the classroom necessitates a shift in the traditional curriculum to support the needs of a new student demographic population. The majority of the teaching practitioners are White, so more support is needed to promote a more equitable and inclusive classroom. Culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy is a means to provide a more inclusive educational setting and a means to promote social justice practices. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) proposed three main components of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:

- 1. A focus on student learning and academic success.*
- 2. Developing students’ cultural competence to assist students in developing positive ethnic and social identities.*
- 3. Supporting students’ critical consciousness or their ability to recognize and critique societal inequalities.*

Unfortunately, more work is needed for full implementation—especially in the art classroom. The implementation must commence by clarifying the meaning and components of the pedagogy. There seems to be a misconception surrounding the definition and often the implementation results in marginalization and cultural appropriation. Educators must also understand how this pedagogy can promote equity and inclusion. Tools and resources must be a part of the re-education process to move this pedagogical practice forward.

I started this research with these three questions from Luvvie Ajayi Jones to guide my work. I end this research with these three questions to guide the culturally relevant work of others –in order to change the culture of educational settings. Be an agent for change and justice.

**“Did you mean it?
Can you defend it?
Did you say it with love?”**

~Luvvie Ajayi Jones



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Part Two: It's Just Good Teaching

- p.* 54 Figure 3 - Figure Source: Culturally responsive teaching: A reflection guide. New America. (2020, September 23). Retrieved February 3, 2022, from <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/culturally-responsive-teaching-competencies/>

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