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## **Cultural Relevance In Art Matters: An Accessible Curriculum**

Mary Beth Magyar

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CULTURAL RELEVANCE IN ART MATTERS: AN ACCESSIBLE CURRICULUM

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Education

By

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“You can’t be what you can’t see.”  
Marian Wright Edelman

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction**

My first formal foray into education was tutoring writing at Michigan State University's (MSU) Office of Supportive Services. Students were allowed free tutoring if they were minorities, had a physical disability or were failing. I really enjoyed helping the students pick through the meanings of the literature they were assigned and help them write in a way that honored their background and culture. One student, a first generation Chinese student, was failing until she began writing about her own culture and life in a Chinese American community in Detroit.

On the other hand, as a student at MSU, I had quite a different experience. As a woman I was not encouraged to take sculpture; the culture in the all male "shop" was misogynistic and there were no female professors, yet this was a medium that I wanted to explore. In fact, there was only one female faculty in the entire visual arts department. As a result, I chose painting but later pursued sculpture on my own after college.

These were the very beginnings of my understanding of how cultural relevance matters. It helped one student embrace her heritage and use it as inspiration, and left myself discouraged, pursuing a less desirable path. As an art educator for the last twenty years I wonder, how can art be taught with cultural relevance in a financially and physically accessible way for all educators? Could I develop a website that provided a list of diverse artists with accompanying lessons, resources, museums and galleries that highlighted Minnesota artists that was accessible and free?

## **Background**

I like to say I accidentally started teaching. After college, I worked at a studio that produced other artists' work. The art market was not doing well and I lost my job. Work in other art studios was difficult to find and I was told “the women here answer phones”. It was 1991 and incredibly disheartening. I mistakenly felt that the art world would be more forward thinking; I was wrong. Through a series of connections to friends and family I had an opportunity to teach high school art for one year.

The teacher I would be subbing for, would be on maternity leave and agreed to mentor me through the year since I had no formal educational training. My first year was incredibly hard, but I really loved teaching. The school was in a rural part of Florida and it exposed me to the deep racial inequities that exist in the south and the lack of willingness by fellow teachers to address those divides. Many teachers described the poorer performing students as lacking morally and mentally and somehow responsible for their shortcomings. I knew that mentality was wrong but I was twenty two years old, brand new to teaching and unsure of how to begin to remedy those false notions.

During that year, I ended up spending less time with teachers and opened my room at lunch for students to seek sanctuary. Many students gravitated towards me because they did not fit into this school environment either. This was when I realized that I could influence my own environment. I could create a culture of honesty and understanding by providing a safe and caring space where students could confide in me. Once I learned more about my students, I was able to adapt my teaching techniques to better help them. At that point, I was working with a newly written set of standards



written by my mentor teacher. It was better than no standards, which at the time there were no state standards, but it did not address cultural relevance.

After my year of teaching high school finished, I moved to Charlottesville, Virginia and became the site director for an elementary after school and summer program. We were licensed and started as a grassroots organization by parents to pool resources for better after care for their children. State standard mandated lessons were written by me that could be tailored to my school. My program was primarily Black American students. The state curriculum was not inclusive or accurate based on the experiences of Black Americans in the south.

This inspired me to write a curriculum including culturally relevant lessons about Thanksgiving, The Lewis and Clark Expedition and the mythology around Thomas Jefferson and his legacy. The students were engaged and intrigued by these lessons. We learned together what people truly ate, what they read and why Sacagawea was so much more important than she was ever given credit for. We dug into the complicated history of owning humans and the rationales white people used to make that morally acceptable.

Even though I had no data on cultural relevance, and little educational training, I knew these students had the right to understand the full history of Virginia, the good, the bad and the horrible. Over time I began to better understand some of the nuances of Black culture and language in Virginia. This helped inform my teaching and strengthen my relationships with parents and caregivers. The challenge of learning as much as I could to make the program as responsive as possible motivated me throughout these early years. Unfortunately, this was the beginning of the “No Child Left Behind” movement in education and it would prove to be detrimental to arts programs.

## **My Personal Experience**

While running the after school program in Charlottesville, I began my studio practice in earnest. Showing art was difficult as an emerging artist and I struggled with how to show my work and find a community of artists in town. Two other women and myself formed an artist's cooperative that continues to thrive after 25 years. We were all women identifying in the beginning and made strides quickly into the art culture within Charlottesville. We provided a place of mentorship, critique and growth. We shared tools, ideas and work; we made the entire Bozart Gallery manageable. Eventually we expanded to a more diverse group of artists and continued in the vein of partnership and support. The power of cultural relevance; women artists mentoring, guiding and helping one another was an incredible experience.

In my professional art educator life it was very different. As a part of continuing education for my Elementary school job, I attended a day long class from an Art Education professor from Virginia Commonwealth University. The focus was teaching art to k-5 students and she used many well known artists as examples. A few hours into the lecture I realized she had not mentioned one female, Black, Indigenous, LatinX, or LGBTQIA+ artist. It was uncomfortable and I stopped listening. Instead, I began making a list of all the women artists I could remember. By the end of the class, I had at least 30 names, and approached the professor. I commented that I enjoyed the class—I fibbed a little here—but I found it odd that there were no women mentioned. Assuming this was an oversight on her part, I gave her my list. She was incensed and sarcastically apologized for her class being “so lacking.” It was not the reaction I anticipated and I was shocked and embarrassed; it stuck with me. At least I had an art background and could pull these

names up, the other 25 women in the all female class most likely did not. Many of these educators would return to their schools and continue to talk about white, european, male cis-gendered artists as the only examples for their diverse pool of students.

A Recent study by the National Institute of Health that surveyed 18 major U.S. and museums found that: “85% of artists showing work are white and that 87% are men...” (Topaz et al., 2019). Overall, there is a problem with over representation of white, male cis-gendered artists. The overrepresentation of white men had been something I believed, and now it was officially confirmed. The idea that in order to really work towards a culturally sustaining pedagogy we must “...form alliances, must ourselves be producers, must put ourselves on the line in terms of participating in practice on the ground” became a cornerstone to my beliefs (Paris, 2017, p.170). This desire to be a part of the solution to cultural relevance has driven me from the beginning of this graduate program. What if I designed a way to help other educators bring multiculturalism into their school and community spaces?

### **Lack of understanding as to what art accomplishes**

The regularity of art in schools continues to be a problem. As budget cuts continue in education, the arts are deemed “electives” or “extras” compared to writing or math. Art is not prioritized as students are exposed once a week or less than that. Standardized tests do not have a visual arts component so they are not valued. Numerous studies have shown that art does help with learning, particularly with youth that are marginalized. This initial research although uplifting is flawed because there were too many variables to prove that it was art and art alone that made the difference. Subsequently, research was done by Harvard and found that art teaches dispositional

thinking also called “studio habits of mind” that are paramount to a successful student (Tishman & Palmer, 2006). The research is there, and yet, arts continue to be deemphasized.

In Rochester, Minnesota, the average elementary student receives roughly fifty minutes of art every six school days. Claudia Dreyer, an art educator for Rochester Public Schools for the last two decades, shared that this lack of time with elementary students prompted her to move to the high school level. Minnesota elementary students are required to go to school for 935 hours. At roughly 30 hours of art instruction per year, that equals just 3.2% of their time spent in an art class. I would point out that 3.2% would not be considered an “arts-rich experience.” This is where community education and better contextual integration into general k-12 education can be a boon for visual arts. For example, when learning about the French Revolution, look at French Neoclassical art for why and how art was being used to push for revolution. Community after school programs can leverage their schedule, with students attending daily, to build a more in depth and multi-faceted culturally relevant art program. More mediums can be explored and longer term projects that reflect student interest can be implemented.

### **Cultural Competency and responsiveness in the arts**

Art can be a powerful form of self expression, a political statement, an exploration of history, and a way to improve academically. Allowing each student room for their unique artistic voice is empowering; art is a language that all income levels and abilities could and should have access to. Students should have the opportunity to explore making and learning about art while guided by an educator for the most comprehensive positive results. All educators should have the resources to feature local artists and works

that are compatible with their students' demographics, as well as challenge the status quo with the works they choose if their population lacks diversity. Art can provide visual cues of inclusivity and cultural support outside of the art classroom and help support communities.

### **Summary**

As the curriculum narrows and the visual arts are discarded; *How can art be taught with cultural relevance in a financially and physically accessible way for all art educators?* There are many types of people that make art. Any time there is an art project or example offered there should be a woman, LGBTQIA+, and a Black or Indigenous person of color (BIPOC) included. Even in all white schools or communities it is important to present diversity. Banks et al. (2003) discuss this in their article:

A mainstream-centric curriculum has negative consequences for mainstream students because it reinforces their false sense of superiority, gives them a misleading conception of their relationship with other racial and ethnic groups, and denies them the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge, perspectives, and frames of reference that can be gained from studying and experiencing other cultures and groups. (p. 242)

The examples are out there as the internet made this information more accessible than ever. The question though is where to look? There are also thousands of mediums to use to make art and that can be overwhelming and expensive. There are also ways, particularly in Minnesota, that professional artists can work in schools through grants. These artists can assist a teacher in their quest for more art exploration while the state finances it. There are studies that I will present in Chapter 2 that reinforce how cultural

relevance and art matter, as well as why art is so important to critical thinking and how it can aid in positive mental health which has been an increasingly acute problem in children.

Chapter Three will present how I synthesized the research from Chapter Two and produced a website with culturally responsive art lessons that can be stand-alone projects or can be integrated into a mainstream elementary and high school curriculum. There will be a list of Minnesota based artists that can be referenced. There will be a section for galleries and museums that present specific cultures, like the Somali Museum of Minnesota, as well as other institutions with a broader purview of ancient and contemporary art. These lessons will be presented on a website that will be physically and financially accessible to any school, community or after school programs. Visual art lessons will be made available to all and will reflect the amazing diversity and complexities in which art is made and reference an inclusive list of artists that make it.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

This project will explore why art matters and the relationship of art to curriculum narrowing, cultural relevance, and mental health. Art can engage students at many levels, with making or learning about art history or focusing on contemporary work. As an educator in many non-traditional settings I have witnessed and personally experienced firsthand how important it can be to see oneself reflected in the visual arts. This review will define, compare and add context to my research question; *How can art be taught with cultural relevance in a financially and physically accessible way for all educators?* This chapter will have four parts with multiple subsections in each part.

The first section is designed to explain why art matters; why should students have access to visual arts? Next, cultural relevance will be defined and examined. I will explore how culturally relevant pedagogy for the visual arts can be utilized to make a larger positive impact on students and the community. There are conflicting opinions on how cultural relevance is being implemented and that will also be addressed. The history of curriculum narrowing, also known as “teaching to the test” will be defined. The effects of curriculum narrowing on education and how it has impacted the visual arts will also be summarized. Anxiety and depression are on the rise especially among school aged girls. Schools will continue to face significant mental health challenges among school aged children, particularly with the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 that continues to march on. I will provide research that explains how art can be used to help improve overall mental health with students. Accessibility to quality and quantities of art is an issue for many

students, particularly marginalized and lower socioeconomic students. This final section will provide a way to utilize a website that integrates art more fully into a general education classroom for non art educators as well as community leaders and educators to access a relevant curriculum of visual art to share with all students regardless of means.

### ***Why does art matter?***

Art can be a powerful form of self expression, a political statement, and an exploration of history. Art can also be a way to improve critical thinking (Hetland, et. al, 2007). It is important to understand that art educators are teaching thinking and making skills; art educators understand that not all students will be professional artists. Making art that expresses one's culture or heritage can be a way to integrate multicultural learning. Allowing each student room for their unique artistic voice is empowering and can help them understand their own racial identity (Pollock, 2015). An art educator that is following a multicultural pedagogy will be aware and invested into the local art community. This art educator has the resources to feature local artists and works that are compatible with their students' demographics (Hobbs, 1992), as well as challenge the status quo with the works they choose if their population lacks diversity. It is just as important for homogeneous communities to view art by different makers to broaden their perspectives about what other makers think and feel. Art can provide visual cues of inclusivity and cultural support outside of the art classroom and help support communities (Fitzsousa et al., 2019). In addition to supporting cultural identities, art can simply enhance one's mood. Making art can put a student into a flow state, which has been linked to making people happier (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). Being in "the flow" allows one to be so immersed in an activity that the rest of the world fades away. In one



study, art was used with immigrant children that were having trouble adjusting to life in the US. Making art allowed them to enter a flow state and the study found that these students were better at managing the difficulties they faced as immigrant children. These positive art making experiences carried them throughout their day and even out into their communities (Lee, 2013).

For students struggling with core subjects, art can be a high point in their day (Farkas Duffett Research, 2012). By including visual art, the student can reset their mood and come back to the core subjects confident and reset emotionally. Art is also a subject riddled with mistakes; some are workable and some are not. For the gifted academic student that does not make many mistakes, it is important to help them explore errors as a natural part of learning. Students and educators need to be able to embrace failure as part of learning (Laufenberg, 2010). Many things can go wrong and art is a great way for students to embrace failure as simply part of the process and can often lead to unforeseen breakthroughs with ideas or mediums.

Art by nature is subjective; there are no wrong answers and failing often leads to creative problem solving. As the educational landscape continues to change, it is imperative to have art available for students to be successful regardless of their ethnicity, gender, social or economical status. To better serve all students, there should be visual art experiences and they should also be culturally relevant, in the next section this idea will be defined and explored.

## Cultural Relevance

### *What is cultural relevance and multiculturalism?*

The definition of multiculturalism is, “the view that cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, deserve special acknowledgment of their differences within a dominant political culture” (Eagan, 2022). In order to be considered culturally relevant, three standards should be followed: “An ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483). Multiculturalism is the broader definition of honoring cultures and ethnicities, whereas cultural relevance embraces multiculturalism and encourages students to have agency and to advocate for change within society. In this paper the terms of multiculturalism and cultural relevance will be mostly interchangeable. For students to grow academically it is important that they learn to problem solve and reason. The cultural competence component supports students to appreciate their cultural heritage while learning to navigate at least one other culture. The critical consciousness aspect encourages students to recognize, examine and work towards solving problems that stem from inequities within their local and national communities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Honoring each culture and ethnicity within one’s school or community is key to multiculturalism. Discriminating or ignoring a group of students in school or in the larger community does not make a culturally relevant classroom. Discrimination is also a form of domination (Burke, 2004). Ignoring a culture, gender, race or heritage of a student or school of students and teaching content that does not include them is harmful (Kohl, 1993).

There are subtle differences between multiculturalism and cultural relevance and the next section will show how James A. Banks uses the term multiculturalism but also adds an element of agency to his culturally relevant pedagogy. It is important to have a classroom that supports multiculturalism and gives students of all colors a chance to appreciate all artists.

### ***How educators can get it wrong***

Multiculturalism grew from a belief in the 1930's that African-American history should be included in schools, and that Black students should learn about African history and the culture of their own people, not just white European history (Banks, 1993). As the civil rights era evolved, so did a stronger push from all minorities to be included in school curriculum (Banks, 1993). James A. Banks was essential in defining Multiculturalism. He posited that there are levels to multiculturalism and took issue with how some ideas were deemed as multicultural, but in fact were not. There were four levels that he defined in his work. Level 1 was what he called "Heroes and Holidays." This approach is just that, a day of celebrating with no lesson before and no contextualizing the event after. An example would be a Cinco de Mayo party or a poster up of Rosa Parks with no context. Level 2 called the additive approach is when an educator adds cultural relevance to a curriculum but does not change or amend the other curriculum to reflect this new information. For example, Rosa Parks is added to the curriculum but she is never discussed for her unique perspective and role that she played in the Civil Rights movement, particularly the differences between the roles of Black men and Black women. Level 3, the Transformation Approach, is when the curriculum is changed so students may now see ideas and concepts through the lens of a different

ethnic or cultural group. This would be when Rosa Parks and her point of view would be included and discussed. How many other Black women were out there protesting? What was left out of the books written by white people about the civil rights movement?

Finally, Level 4 is the Social Action Approach. This final level encourages students to see issues in their local or wider community that are unequal, unfair or unjust and prepare actions to combat these unjust ideas (Banks, James A., 1995). An example of a level four would be a student group formed to attend local city council meetings to advocate for change in their communities. Ladson-Billings(1995) and Banks (1995) both advocate for a student to become involved and have agency in their academic lives. Both academicians advocated for multiculturalism rather than a colorblind approach to race. Although in a study that measured the introduction of multiculturalism into learning situations with a group of white Americans that identify highly with their white ethnicity, multiculturalism may be perceived as a threat to their “whiteness” and values (Rios Morrison, 2010). In schools with a high level of students that identify strongly with their white heritage, it will be necessary for the educator to tread carefully as they introduce multiculturalism or it may have the reverse effect they had hoped. The same study, Rios Morrison, did note that white Americans that identified less with their white heritage were positively affected by multiculturalism. It is essential to follow the guidelines from Ladson-Billings and Banks in order to provide a comprehensive curriculum to students. If only the “Heroes and Holidays” level is used, it would simply not be enough to challenge perspectives and change the system. That being said, it is important to note the climate of a school, particularly an all white school, when assessing how to approach and implement Banks’ steps to a culturally relevant art classroom.

### ***Prepare the educators***

As the population of the United States becomes more diverse it is imperative that educators prepare for this. In 2019, more than half of the nation under 16 years old identified as a racial or ethnic minority. The white population decreased in every state since 2010 (Frey, 2020). This is the time to rethink all white pedagogies and incorporate more diversity. The first and easiest thing for every classroom teacher is to put up on their walls their multicultural ideals. One study pointed out a university that touted an inclusive manifesto, yet the halls were filled with portraits of wealthy white, cis-gender males. The women and other minorities were queried and they responded that the portraits made them feel unwelcome (Fitzsousa et al., 2019). Posters and pictures on the walls should represent a diverse group of artists, writers, politicians and other leaders. Educators need to be aware of and acknowledge their own history; if an educator is white, there is white history. The dominant culture is its *own culture*, not *the only* culture. White culture is absorbed by white people without realizing it is its own distinct culture (Landsman, 2009). It is also important for educators to understand the culture and language of their students; to have actual knowledge or experience with the different ethnic groups and how there are differences between their cultures and mainstream, or mostly white, cultures (Ogbu, 1992). Ogbu (1992) also wrote about voluntary and involuntary immigrants and how that distinction can affect the cultural differences and approaches used with ethnic student bodies. Educators need to understand who is coming to school and how they can best teach students in a culturally appropriate way using actual knowledge of the student, their language and heritage (Ogbu, 1992). In a multicultural class, students think about art in their own way. Educators think about that

same art in a different way and have their own biases. It is important for teachers to confront their bias and help students understand that there are many ways of viewing the same piece and it is healthy to respectfully disagree with peers or educators (Stuhr et al., 1992). Cultural relevance is as important for the educators as it is necessary for the students.

### ***Prepare students***

As the nation diversifies, it is important to prepare students for a diverse environment. In Minnesota, between 2010 and 2018, the minority groups have increased by five times their previous numbers (MN State Demographic Center, 2018). The twin cities area, Minneapolis and St. Paul, and larger towns still hold the most diversity, but Minnesota is changing (MN State Demographic Center, 2018). The numbers bear the reality that these students will go on to live, work, or learn with students that are not the same as they are. In Southeastern Minnesota, there are many all white communities that do not value teaching about diversity. Courtney Bergey-Swanson, Vice President of Development and Collaborative Services at Community and Economic Development Associates, or CEDA, a rural economic developer, stated that many of the communities she works with, 50 in total, are all white and do not believe diversity is something worth exploring or teaching in their communities (c. Bergey-Swanson, personal communication, June 14, 2022). She argued for diversity in front of the school board in Harmony, MN after a relative's Black Lives Matter artwork was defaced in school with racial epithets. The reality for many communities is that the white population is shrinking and by teaching and preparing the younger generation to understand people that are not white they will preserve their town; albeit a different version. Faribault, Minnesota

diversified through immigrants seeking jobs in their community. It has been slow going for acceptance but ultimately this acceptance allowed the community to flourish and not decline as other communities like Faribault have (Hirsi, 2018). Faribault recently hired an educational diversity coordinator to help develop strategies to teach minority students as well as hire more educators that reflect this new diverse population (Deziel, 2022).

Understanding how to interact with others, regardless of race, ethnicity or gender is helpful to all students to build a more accepting community. Cultural relevance matters in an art classroom and outside of school.

### ***White Supremacy and how it can be combated using art***

Extremist hate groups have decreased in numbers since their all time height in 2018. In Minnesota in 2021 there were four distinct white nationalist groups; Neo Nazi, White Nationalist, and two Neo-Völkisch, as well as five “general” hate groups (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2022). Although the specific hate groups have diminished in Minnesota, overt racism became more mainstream since 2018; groups that were secretive now feel comfortable being out in public (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2022).

Visual art is a direct way to see another person’s point of view. An aesthetic art education engages the mind as well as the heart (Weitz, 1972). The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, designed by Maya Lin, was meant to be honest and not glorify war; the people on the wall were not coming back (Blakemore, 2021). The shiny surface reflected back the visitor and reminded the visitor it could have been them. The two “arms” spanned out, one directed towards the Lincoln Memorial and the other pointed to The Washington Memorial. The idea was to make the monument part of the park, to exist in the landscape just as the war had become part of the history of the US (US National Park Service, n.d.)

**Figure 1**

*Vietnam Memorial*



*Note.* C. Scruggs (L), President of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, and Project Director Bob Doubek (R) display the final design for the memorial, designed by Yale architecture student Maya Ying Lin. (Copyright Bettmann/Getty Images)

Kehinde Wiley, a Queer Black painter, chose Black and Brown people off of the street, had them look through historical paintings of white people to choose one that inspired them.

**Figure 1**

*Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps*





*Note.* Wiley, Kehinde. (2005). Napoleon leading the Army Over the Alps [Painting]. Brooklyn Museum. Brooklyn, NY, United States. Copyright Brooklyn Museum.

Wiley then painted the Black people he found in public in a new culturally appropriate contemporary way for his series "A New Republic" (CNN, 2015). His work was inspired by the fact that he never saw paintings in museums that had people in them that looked like him. His view offered a unique perspective that was historical and contemporary simultaneously. Maya Lin, a first generation Chinese-American and designer of a national war memorial and Kehinde Wiley, descendant of Africa and painter of The National Gallery portrait of President Barack Obama, are both examples of successful non-white artists. It is detrimental to show only white accomplishments to white students because it can foster a sense of superiority that is neither appropriate nor warranted. The policies that keep education from being more culturally relevant can be considered an act of white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005). This may sound like an overstatement, but according to Minnesota State Visual Art k-12 Standards, recently updated in 2020, provides that students be able to understand that artistic works are "influenced by personal, societal, cultural, and historical contexts, including the contributions of Minnesota American Indian tribes and communities" (MN Dept. of Education, 2020, 5.1.5.10.1) This is the only directive for inclusivity in the entire art education for K-12 in Minnesota. No reference to Somalis, Black, Hmong, Latin/X, LGTBTQIA+, or the intersections thereof. Two icons of American pop culture, a war memorial and the presidential portrait, are made by people of color and should be celebrated alongside non-minority artists instead of leaving them out of the curriculum. These and other examples of art can help white students understand that there is a white

culture, a racial hierarchy, and that these artists' were working against the prevailing white culture (Van Der Valk, 2019). Lin chose not to glorify war with a statue of a soldier or general. Wiley chose Black and Brown people and juxtaposed them with paintings of aristocratic white people; he literally painted the discrepancies between Black and white cultures. When a group of people are excluded, it is damaging (Kohl, 1993). How can white students appreciate all of the influences of culture in the US if these voices are left out of the conversation? White supremacy is a subtle but a very possible takeaway from a non culturally relevant educational curriculum.

### **Summary of cultural relevance/multiculturalism**

The definitions of cultural relevance and multiculturalism are interchangeable. Both definitions describe that other cultures and ethnicities should be studied and understood, and the particular perspectives of those communities are examined in addition to learning and understanding the dominant culture. The social structures in which many cultural inequities are held must be questioned; how is that culture being dominated or mistreated by the dominant culture? It is not enough to celebrate a holiday with some food and flags, there needs to be a deeper examination of culture, heritage and community. The key point by Ladson-Billings (1995) is that not only do educators support these minority groups but that educators *believe* these students are capable of learning and excelling. A fuller understanding of the cultures and ethnicities in an educator's class also helps the educator better respond to their students. Understanding cultural norms within minority groups will help educators adjust their teachings. Understanding the minority cultures can help those educators get in touch with their own bias and question their own perspectives before passing that bias on to students (Stuhr et

al., 1992). Educators can question their choices of art examples and look to see if they are putting out a curriculum that reflects their school and students. Many art educators might need to unlearn the dominant white history that has prevailed in art history. Teaching a white version of art education can lead to a false sense of superiority by white students as well as disenfranchise those non-white students (Ogbu & Simons, 1988).

Teaching from a culturally relevant pedagogy helps students, all students, to better understand their communities and help them to see how different cultures have affected, enhanced and inspired contemporary history and culture.

### **Why art should be integrated**

#### ***The effects of No Child Left Behind***

Curriculum Narrowing is a result of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) implemented in 2002 (Boehner, 2002). The NCLB act was intended to keep students and schools well rounded and originally included a focus on the visual arts. As a part of NCLB there were standards and test scores that schools needed to meet in order to receive federal funding. These standards needed to be followed in order for students to test well; hence the term “teach to the test” became linked with NCLB. The test scores were directly linked to federal funding; low test scores meant schools did not get the federal funding that was needed (Beveridge, 2010) The high stakes testing overvalued test scores and did not help measure students’ ability to critically think (Berliner, 2011). Art is not measurable with multiple choice questions and often thought of and termed at schools as “extras” or “specials”. As a result, the curriculum was increasingly whittled down to focus on the subjects that were easily measured; math and english. Art education programs were scaled back and some disappeared altogether (Farkas Duffett Research,

2012). Some research that showed how exposure to the arts boosted grades is flawed (Catterall, 1998). There were too many variables to accurately measure art's impact and it was linking art to a system of testing that is biased and based on incorrect statistics to begin with (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Art on its own is a way to learn a craft, express oneself, and explore cultures and heritage. The ability to understand more than one culture is a way to empower students and their communities.

### ***What art education teaches***

In addition to making art simply for the pleasure and joy of it, art education teaches “Studio Habits of Mind” or dispositions (Tishman & Palmer, 2006). The eight habits of mind are: develop the craft, engage and persist, envision, express, observe, reflect, stretch and explore, and finally, understand the art world (Hetland et. al, 2007). When students develop a craft they learn to use tools and materials, the application of materials for color mixing, and to take care of these materials. The engage and persist habit encourages students to “...embrace problems of relevance within the art world/or of personal importance, to develop focus and other mental states conducive to working and persevering...” (Hetland et al, 2007, p. 6). Envisioning relates to making a mental picture of what the student wants to accomplish and lay out the steps necessary for the project. Express is to learn how to make art that conveys an idea or issue, a personal emotion or feeling. Observe teaches students to look carefully and think deeper about the images presented so that they might find a deeper or obscured meaning. Reflection is a way for students to learn to talk to others about their work, their ideas and self reflect on their own work and its positives and negatives. To stretch and explore is to push oneself further into an idea; try new colors, new materials, larger formats and offer room to make

mistakes and learn from those mistakes. The last habit or disposition of mind is to Understand the Art World; learn art history and study current artists' ways of working, studio visits, field trips and other interactive ways to engage with the art world. All of these habits of mind can be applied to other subjects and guide non-arts teachers to teach art in an authentic way.

Medical schools have found success when including arts classes. Looking at art can help medical students come to terms with their own emotions as well as develop empathy for future patients (Hajar, 2018, 2019). Doctors often have patients that tell them they are “fine” when asked, yet the doctor sees the patient is grasping their purse, or wringing their hands, fidgeting or near tears. Learning to observe rather than just take patients at their word is imperative. Good observational skills are clearly a necessity for any physician and yet many doctors are not practiced at it. Yale School of Medicine uses paintings as a way of learning observational skills and then analyzing what they see (*“Using art to sharpen observational skills”*, 1998). Clues within the paintings point to social status, health status, social and or political beliefs and emotional state. Art can also help students learn to better read for propaganda or misuse of information.

Visual art is a way to build a critical eye that can help students “...make sense of the various propaganda tactics of cultures and how these seep through into popular visual production, masquerading as reportage” (Knight, 2010). In this era of having so much news on multiple visual platforms, it is important to nurture a visual literacy that can help disseminate facts. There is not a lot of research that is dedicated to why art should not be taught. One dissertation claimed that art and education are often at odds with one another thus it can be difficult to teach them together. She found that tests are “value assessments”

and art does not fit into that category since art is subjective and designed to teach a process rather than a product in an educational setting (Nicolson, 2013). Even though this paper starts out against teaching art education it does agree with the fact that it teaches more about process and is devalued because it does not push positive test results. Ultimately art does not set out to make artists, its goal is to teach thinking. These habits of mind coupled with a broad knowledge of diverse artists and art forms can help students in many subjects.

### ***Where art can be integrated into mainstream classes***

Arts learning experiences benefit students on multiple levels. It can help lower behavioral infractions, create a more compassionate student and improve writing skills (Kisida, 2019). These positive attributes coupled with studio habits of mind can make positive inroads into other areas of schooling. The process of making art can be integrated into other subjects and projects. Dioramas, small drawings, portraits, sculpture can all be incorporated into a history lesson or a social studies unit. Educators can use art history to help understand history, social mores, gender roles, metaphorical imagery and the political climate of the era (Hetland, et.al, 2007). 83% of grades 3-12th teachers surveyed across the US believed that electives are vital for learners that are struggling in other subjects. Electives are often something students look forward to and make their education more complete (Farkas Duffett Research, 2012). Many students need that outlet of creativity to boost their confidence and come back to core subjects, recharged and ready to learn.

Art is at the heart of creativity. Making and seeing inspires creativity that is currently lacking in many school settings (TED, 2006). Art can help provide a

differentiated classroom. Differentiated classrooms, ones that offer a variety of learning opportunities, help students become more self-reliant and allow for different kinds of learners to learn better (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Providing students the opportunity to express their understanding and learning in multiple ways can inspire creativity and allow students that might not be as proficient in other areas flourish when allowed to build, paint or express themselves with non-traditional methods.

Not only does art provide different ways to learn and express understanding, it is a powerful visual way to see minorities and different ethnicities positively represented. There is an overabundance of white art history in art galleries and museums therefore it is important to make a point to show minority makers. In the US seventeen major art museums were surveyed and found they show an overwhelming majority of white artists, 85% are white male artists (Topaz et al., 2019). An educator has the means and opportunity to counteract these abysmal numbers of representation. This is an opportunity to show women, LGBTQIA+, Native, or Black artists that are successful and successfully embracing their heritage. These statistics can also be used to make a point; Who is missing and why? Where are the portraits of non-white people? What art is attributed to women or immigrants? Even in its most negative state the art world can be questioned and disseminated to reveal truths about society and the underlying values it emphasizes. Artist Nick Cave, a gay, Black American and professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, is internationally acclaimed. Cave began making *Soundsuits* as a way to express his anguish over the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles. King was unarmed and savagely beaten by white Los Angeles police officers.

The incident was caught on camera and the outrage over his inhumane treatment sparked national debate about police brutality (Editors, n.d.).

### Figure 3

#### *HEARD*



*Note.* This photograph demonstrates *HEARD-NY*, a choreographed performance by Nick Cave of thirty dancers in horse themed soundsuits in New York City's Grand Central Terminal, USA, P, 2013. <https://creativetime.org/projects/heard-ny/>

The original soundsuit was a way Cave used to express himself without showing his skin color; the suit was a form of protection. The suits have evolved from a sense of survival to a way to engage others and push the boundaries of sculpture with dance and performance. Cave's art evolved into a way to engage with community and a celebration of what it means to be human (Patterson, 2020). This is an example of a ground breaking, Queer, Black man that all students can relate to. His journey of self expression and



ultimate celebration of humanity is a perspective that is important to share in a culturally relevant classroom.

The Western Canon of Art, the hierarchy of what is considered worthy and unworthy in fine art, was established using a western cis-male gendered viewpoint. European males made masterpieces and African artists, and all other non-white makers, were ‘primitive’ and not included in the shows or museum collections as fine art (Tator et al., 1998). The visual arts have an abundance of cultural relevance and in the questioning of *who* made the rules on what is and is not called art is a question that can be applied to any subject. Who decided these leaders, makers, thinkers were important and what lens did they look through to decide this?

**Figure 4**

*Brick House*



*Note.* This photograph depicts *Brick House*, a sculpture by Simone Leigh displayed at The Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy Copyright 2022.

Black, female artist Simone Leigh is “alternately registering as a vessel, a dwelling, a space of comfort, and as a site of sanctuary, *Brick House* powerfully portrays the Black woman’s body as a site of multiplicity” (Weisburg, 2022, para.1). The artist uses the very techniques and inspirations to make this piece that have been dismissed as primitive by the white Western Canon of art. It is a visual protest of western art norms and a celebration and complicated view of what it means to be a Black woman in contemporary society. She is extremely successful and was chosen to represent the United States in the Venice Biennale, one of the most prestigious art shows in the world. Her perspective is integral to discuss cultural relevance and the changing norms in society and the art world.

Galleries and museums can feel disenfranchising because the art inside does not represent the students or the community. It can also feel uncomfortable because the art world can use language and designs that cater to a very specific wealthy audience (Boucher, 2019). The quiet, the docents and guards present and the costs to attend can all make students feel unwelcome or out of place. Museums also support the idea that white is the dominant culture and white supremacy is a part of many museums' culture. It defines how a community is viewed and how students are treated during field trips. It is defined by who works at the museum, who makes decisions, what language is used and which viewpoints matter (Murawski, 2020) This is unfortunate because there is so much to learn, see and experience. To have an entire wealth of art history and perspectives unavailable because the spaces are dominated by white culture is a loss. A field trip to a museum, or skype visit with a curator should be carefully considered by the educator to make sure students will feel included and their perspectives can be discussed or challenged. It is also important to make sure the docent, a volunteer art interpreter, or

whomever the guide is understands the audience and helps make the skype or visit relevant. The educators must believe these students are capable of learning and excelling from this visit (Ladson-Billings, 1995). With focus and some background knowledge, a museum trip can be informative and inspirational and provide a Banks' worthy Transformational type of culturally relevant experience.

Art is relevant and prevalent in social media. Tik Tok is embraced by millions of viewers and is laden with art themed posts (Tan, 2020). This digital revolution of art and non-fungible tokens or NFTs, are digitally produced and distributed artworks, are changing how the art world is operating (Tripathi, 2022). This is contemporary art in real time that can be explored and participated in in ways that were too difficult or costly. The platforms to make art are changing and that can be discussed on multiple levels with multiple subjects. The ability to make art and express oneself through culturally relevant art could and should be available through all types of classes.

### **Summary**

The NCLB act of the early 2000's was based on false data from a Texas based testing program in education (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The testing results were used to grade schools and fund them accordingly. Schools that tested poorly could be in financial trouble. The government in 2006 claimed unequivocal success with NCLB. (*No child left behind: Expanding the promise, guide to president bush's FY 2006 education agenda.* 2021) A paper that studied multiple research on the real effects of NCLB did not have such a favorable report. Certain test scores were suspiciously high and there was evidence of administrators falsifying results. NCLB also required escalating sanctions towards all schools, particularly those receiving Title 1 money; in other words, schools that were

already struggling with poverty. (Dee & Jacob, 2010) Art education teaches thinking habits and art making skills, neither of which are testable therefore many schools reduced the time students got for art to make sure the test scores stay in range of funding. Advocating for art in all classrooms gives students more opportunity to express themselves and for teachers to provide a culturally relevant differentiated style of teaching (Tishman & Palmer, 2006; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). To see and even experience art in person is a powerful way to reinforce pride in cultural heritage and ethnic or gender identities. Challenge what is shown and question what is not seen. NCLB was a flawed framework in which to build a well rounded education for students. Promoting cultural relevance and empowering students to express themselves in a variety of subjects is a better approach. This approach is beneficial for white students as well they will better appreciate the experience of students that are non-white.

### **The Mental Health Benefits of Art Education**

#### **Depression, suicide, anxiety and COVID 19**

Anxiety and depression have been on the rise even before the pandemic. The rate of depressive episodes among teens, at least once per year, has increased 59% from 2007 to 2017 (Geiger et al., 2019). Adolescent girls have a significantly higher rate of depression than boys (Lewinsohn et al., 1993). In order to better understand why girls and women become depressed, a study was conducted that asked the women what they were feeling when they became depressed; the overall theme was feeling demoralized (Hurst, 1999). Ethnic youth, particularly those that are exposed to violence within their community or home do not report in the same numbers as white youth. Their ethnic identity affects how, why and when they reach out for mental health support

(Tummala-Narra et al., 2014). If minority youth are not reporting in the same way as white youths it is important to address why. The research in which this study found the statistics of underreporting was limited to one primarily Black, urban high school in Wisconsin. The evidence does suggest a more nuanced approach to how different youth seek help. Art can at least be a starting point to express oneself in school.

In 2020, suicide was the second leading cause of death for ages of 10-14 and the third leading cause for people aged 15-24 (Suicide, 2022). In 2022, 45% of LGBTQ youth contemplated suicide. If the gay identifying youth was also a minority the rates were even higher. (National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, 2022) This same Trevor Project study pointed out that if students attended a school that was supportive of their identity the LGBTQ student's suicide rates were less. Puerto Rican youth were studied to see if having a disadvantaged place to live would or could cause depression or anxiety. Interestingly the youth that lived in a neighborhood in which they were minorities had higher rates of depression and anxiety. If the youth lived in an area that held a majority of Puerto Rican people it was less so; even when both groups shared similar poverty levels (Alegria et al., 2019). The community of Puerto Rican people shared culture, heritage, language and similar ideals; students there felt supported. Rates of suicide in Black youth are the fastest rising in all the minority groups. One of the leading causes is a mistrust in the healthcare system that then leads to fewer diagnosis and interventions. (*AACAP policy statement on increased suicide among black youth in the U.S.*, 2022). Black American youth, particularly the Involuntary immigrants have a mistrust of the systems like healthcare that could help them (Ogbu & Simons, 1988).

As COVID-19 entered the US in early 2020 school was put online or disrupted in

some other way. Multiple studies have been done since then on youth as they are not as vulnerable to the effects of the virus, but more of the side effects of a pandemic. An inclusive study that looked at all of the other studies about COVID concluded that youth risk is determined by their developmental stage, where they receive their education, pre-existing mental health conditions and economic status (Singh et al., 2020). In other words, the less wealth and status a child had, the less well they were likely to do. During the pandemic, short term benefits like the CARES act and child tax credits actually helped children in poverty significantly (Boghani, 2021). Even though there were positive changes in 2019 with less poverty among Black and Hispanic people in the US these minorities still disproportionately make up the poor in the US. The majority of people in poverty in the US are minorities; this pandemic has unequally affected minority families. These statistics are alarming and a curriculum that can help with mood, and mindset particularly with ethnic and minority groups most affected is another reason why multiculturalism is imperative in all classrooms.

### **How art can help**

With the rise in depression, anxiety and suicide among youth, particularly minority youth it is vital to their health to create supportive culturally relevant environments. Art is a way to engage students and provide a way to lift anxiety and depression. One study from the United Kingdom focused on how to feel better mentally during the pandemic. The study demonstrated that 30 minutes per day spent making art can uplift depressive or anxious states (How the arts can improve mental health, especially during the pandemic. 2020). In another example a study of children that were sad were given the option to write, vent or draw. Drawing was the best at adjusting the

mood positively (Drake et al., 2011). The drawing focused the student and had the effect of resetting the student's mood.

In the UK, a literature review that looked at studies of arts interventions in Anglo-Saxon countries found that art activities have positive and consistent psychological effects, mainly better mental health (Jensen & Bonde, 2018). The act of making doesn't need words and the artist does not need to speak while making the work. Making art also allows for people to put down on paper what might be too difficult to put into words or say to a therapist (Cleveland Clinic, 2020).

Making art in the older population helps with cognitive decline (Harvard Health Review, 2017). It stands to reason that making art throughout one's life will be positive and help with mental health and overall brain health. Making art is not the only way that mental health can be boosted by art. There are many outstanding visual art museums in Minnesota and throughout the US. A recent study showed how visiting museums can elevate one's mood (Cotter & Pawelski, 2022).

Art education is also a way to teach an aesthetic education. "Aesthetic education ... is an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed" (Greene, 2001, p. 6 as cited in Romano, 2010). In other words aesthetic education or knowing follows two branches. One is the instantaneous response that is based on touch, sight, hearing and reactions to the piece of artwork. The second branch is the intellectual one that regards the feelings and reactions generated from viewing the art (Katz-Buonincontro, 2011). The use of repeated visual arts experiences will help a child develop cognitive and observational skills that encourage them to have better emotional

awareness and a tendency to be empathetic and open minded. This way of learning to really see art and question it will lead students to question social structures and challenge the injustices within their community and larger world. (Romano, 2010)

In a large study in Ireland, the country in the UK that suffers the most from the tolls of poor mental health, percentage and cost wise, the people in the study that made art had better self-esteem and began to feel agency over their lives. This use of art in a mental health setting also proved positive for people in poor physical and mental health with a variety of positive outcomes (Heenan, 2006).

Aesthetic educational principles were employed by two artists, Chiura Obata in a Japanese World War II internment camp and Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, in Terezín, a concentration camp in Europe. The teachers created a way to use art as a form of resistance against the horror of the surroundings. Both artists created environments that allowed their students to resist while simultaneously combatting starvation, loneliness, putrid living conditions and constant terror (Collier et al., 2018). Many students are not facing these dire conditions reminiscent of World War II but if art can make a place of sanctuary and provide a way to feel better in that time it could certainly help create a sense of calm and resilience among young people facing the challenges of today. Culturally relevant art can be a point of positive escape for students needing respite from their difficult life situations or circumstances.

### **Summary of the benefits of art on mental health**

The anxiety, depression and suicide rates for teens are increasing and have been since 2016 (Geiger et al., 2019). The ongoing pandemic and disruptions to school life has not helped those averages. It has been shown how art can improve mental health in



school age children (Drake et al., 2011). The effects of art making during the pandemic have also proven to be positive (“How the arts can improve mental health, especially during the pandemic”, 2020). There was no research available to show that art causes poor mental health. There were no papers that stated art made poor mental health worse. There was a paper that showed how important art was to people in internment and concentration camps; an extreme environment that was made better with regular access to art (Collier et al., 2018). There are many benefits to integrating art into an education for students, with few side effects as far noted.

### **Accessibility**

#### ***Availability and affordability***

Visual art is a way for students to express their ideas and reflect what they have learned. Art can be integrated into all aspects of other core subjects. The internet can be a wide open space with an abundance of information. Educators rely on the internet to help create lesson plans (Rowand, 1999). The web can cut costs and save on trips to the bookstore for educators. If used in a school setting the internet is free, or at home very affordable. The internet allows educators access to preview materials before purchasing, particularly in an area where art books and supplies are limited. The art world can use language and designs to make many people feel uncomfortable (Boucher, 2019). A culturally relevant website will focus on ways to engage educators and explain ideas in an approachable, easily utilized format. The visual arts have an abundance of cultural relevance to offer if the educator knows where to look. This project is designed to allow any educator, even non-artist educators to implement diverse lessons. Minnesota has a rich history of the Dakota (or Sioux) and the Ojibwe (Anishinaabe or Chippewa), the

Ho-Chunk, Cheyenne, Oto, Iowa, and the Sac & Fox tribes (Minnesota Historical Society, ). All of these Native communities can teach, inspire and uplift. One of the goals of a culturally relevant art classroom is to feature the local makers and culture present (Stuhr et al., 1992). In the guidelines it also emphasizes that by tapping into the local community this builds bridges between school and the local people as well as gives the people a voice. Minnesota has a series of 11 regional arts commissions, along with the Minnesota State Arts Board. All of these arts organizations provide grants for teachers working with artists and artists working with schools. The Legacy Amendment passed in 2008 collects state taxes for four initiatives, one is for art and “may be spent only for arts, arts education, and arts access and to preserve Minnesota’s history and cultural heritage” (Minn. Const. Art). One of the reasons often cited by schools for cutting their arts education classes is because of costs (Kisida, 2019). In this report about cutting costs, it also stated that by not teaching arts with all of the benefits that art education brings, these costs will be felt by middle schoolers disengaging from school. The study explained that a lack of arts exposure was found to affect middle schoolers and cause them to have less interest in school as they aged up. The short term cost benefits did not help with the long term results of students losing interest in school.

Teachers that work in lower income school districts spend more of their own money on school supplies than teachers in more affluent areas (Walker, 2019). A website is free and the materials used with lessons can be attuned to different economic abilities. With the addition of computers many costs can be cut in gathering appropriate lessons. A downside of computer usage is that in wealthier school districts, teachers use the internet to plan and teach more than teachers in schools that have higher poverty rates; 52 % to

32% in the poorer areas (Rowand, 1999). This statistic is dated but it was difficult to find a breakdown of how teacher's use the internet to plan. A compilation of data from the National Center for Education statistics reports that 81 % of fourth graders have access as well as 88% of eighth graders to the internet at home (Hemphill, et. al, 2021). This helps educators know that most students have access to the internet at home to complete work. If a teacher assigns an art lesson that requires use of an art database, nearly all students will have access to it. The availability of all kinds of art means that educators can find work that speaks to their particular student, there are search engines to find whatever category the student identifies with; computers can be used as an instant cultural relevance tool.

### *Access to digital archives*

There are six tenets or positions to a multicultural art education. The first is that art is based contextually on the maker and their heritage. Tenet number two is that teaching is an intervention and an educator needs to be aware of their own biases. The third is to support a student centered learning environment, honor the beliefs and culture of the community. Honor the maker and their background to identify the values that affect production, in other words, do not follow what might be previously thought of this art form and the value it did or did not have previously. The fifth is to teach in a way that is democratic to your students. If there is a large population of Hmong students, honor that and teach accordingly. The sixth is to give everyone a voice in their art education. Regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, political beliefs, religion, physical or mental ability everyone should be allowed a say in their education, particularly those that have been left out of the art conversation because of the above factors. Finally those that have had

access and privilege should better understand the barriers others have faced along the way (Stuhr et al., 1992). The internet and the availability to so many art resources online has been an important equalizer in access to art. Museums now keep collections online and even provide digital “walkthroughs” of their spaces. Google has been at the forefront of making sure more art can be seen by all. The Google Art Project had 1000 pieces from 400 artists hailing from 17 worldwide institutions (Sood, 2011). In 2022 The Google Art and Culture program boasts access to 2000 museums worldwide with a very nuanced search engine that allows searching by artist, medium, art movement and color just to name a few (Google Art & Culture, 2022). The possibilities are endless and free. An educator, program or class that is struggling with affordability of art supplies can rely more heavily on technology and art history as a way to explore cultural relevance. The internet also allows educators to better access their local artist community. Instagram in particular has been an important tool for artists. It has troubling consequences when the art being shown on instagram becomes more about the selfie than the work, but it can also be a way to connect artists and provide experiences that are positive and uplifting (Martin, 2020). Educators can post student work and find local professional artists in the area to work with. If the area is remote the possibility to skype with an artist from school is also possible. The pandemic helped make zoom, google chat and other connecting platforms part of the normal ways to connect. Six in ten adults took to the chat platforms to work and play. Schools have leaned heavily on technology to connect with students and 75% of those asked said they will continue to use after the pandemic (Newall & Chen, 2020). As technology and the use of technology increases it is more vital to offer culturally relevant lesson plans that are accessible online and free for all educators.

### **Summary of Availability and Accessibility**

As the internet grows there is more and more access to art and art museums (Google Art and Culture, n.d.). With 2000 museums in the google art and culture site there are limitless possibilities to look at art and find specific museums that align with an educators population. A culturally relevant art lesson plan website would help keep costs low for schools and educators. The lesson plans could be mixed and matched to provide the best fit for an educator so that it was aligned with transformational multiculturalism. (Banks, 1995) As the pandemic began it helped usher technology forward with sites like Zoom. It also forced many people to use these platforms that previously had not considered using technology (Newall & Chen, 2020). Now that more schools and people are technologically savvy, a website that can connect educators with local, regional, and international artists and arts professionals is fitting. Building a website will give educators the most efficient access to a culturally relevant and diverse art education.

### **Conclusion**

Art matters and is essential to a well rounded education. The research shows this repeatedly. There was no research that I could find that expressed that art was not important or that it should be taken out of the curriculum. With the start of No Child Left Behind, the curriculum narrowing diminished the quantity of art education in the US. The knowledge that an art education provides is not measurable on a standardized test. The ability to self assess, critically question artwork, observe images thoughtfully, engage others about art, visit a museum, express oneself, empower oneself and one's community are all important things students should have access to regularly. The skills acquired by using the tools to make different kinds of art is another aptitude that applies to many

subjects and also basic life readiness. Students should not only have access to art but access to the culture, images and artists that look, speak or identify in some way as they do. I had a student that didn't want to make art, she was about 14, Somali and didn't seem interested. I gave her a book of Kehinde Wiley's paintings for her to look through. I was busy with her siblings but looked up and asked her what she thought, she had no words, she just kept pointing at this gorgeous painting of powerful Black women and looking at me. I could feel the impact it was having on her; she was awestruck. It made a difference to her that day and she began to join the group making art. There are Black, Native gay artists and brown women bisexual painters, religious artists and artists that question the role of religion; there is something for everyone and as many ways to be an artist as one can think of. Students that are white will also benefit by seeing artists that are non-white and see their unique viewpoints. White students shown only white artists can erroneously believe that only white people are capable. Mental health among teens has been declining since 2016, with the ongoing pandemic continuing to add to the stress and anxiety of contemporary society. Art is shown to be beneficial not only for mood but also for brain growth. There is more research on the positive brain impacts in elderly people but I can hypothesize that regular art making throughout life could be helpful. Art may be the only way that some students know how to express themselves therefore it should be available consistently throughout a student's day, not just an art class once every six days or worse, none at all. The amount of access to art online is impressive, 2000 museums from around the world with specific search engines to aid in finding the right pieces. Different apps or programs on computers can be used to make art. The internet also gives the educator access to artists, lesson plans and materials that are local, appropriate and culture

affirming for that community's population. If there are not local groups then the internet can be searched to find the community one is seeking. Art lessons can be designed to implement social change on the Banks scale (Banks, 1995). Instead of just skimming through a “Heroes and Holidays” approach educators can use transformative, impactful lessons that can lead to social change and action by students.

The website I will design for my project will provide the answer to “How can Art be taught with cultural relevance in a financially and physically accessible way for all educators? I will provide lessons that are based on James A. Banks, and Gloria Ladson-Billings research on how to implement a culturally responsive pedagogy. There will be scaffolded lessons that will help art educators be responsive to different levels of art capabilities among their student pool. The lessons will also be designed to be a part of a Transformational art lesson that general k-5 educators may incorporate into their classes. Materials, artists, and local knowledge of museums and culture will be shared for educators to use freely. Understanding by Design will be the framework in which the art lessons are created. The finished product will have concise menus, clean lines, easily readable lessons that will be a good addition to the regular classroom learning. The website will make cultural relevance accessible, available and free of charge.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Introduction**

How can art be taught with cultural relevance in a financially and physically accessible way for all educators? I will build a website that will provide lessons designed with the Understanding by Design (UbD) Framework or commonly known as Backward Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). There will be menus to connect k-12 teachers to art lessons that will help them integrate art into regular education classrooms, primarily through social studies. There will be menu bars for art educators to look into local Minnesota artists, grants, museums and online resources that are available to them. There will also be UbD art lessons for all educators to access whether they teach in a school system or are in a community center or are homeschooling. The website will follow a combination of Ladson-Billings cultural relevance, Banks' multicultural levels as they pertain to an arts classroom (Bautista et al., 2016). The website will be a wide array of ways to incorporate art into general education classrooms, community centers, art rooms and living rooms.

### **Methodology and participants**

There are some universal web design principles to follow. I used a guideline that included nine, but one of the principles deals with handing money so I will employ eight (Prabhu, 2020). The first is to make the site easy to navigate with easy, simple menu layouts. Responsive design is the second principle which means that the website fits well on all devices and can be read clearly on a phone, computer or a tablet. Third, focus on a consistent color scheme that is neither too bright or too dark. It is inadvisable to change



the color scheme throughout the site. Fourth Make the User Interface (UI) comfortable.

That means make the fonts readable, remove outdated material and keep the overall design as simple as possible. The fifth principle reminds the builder to make the content meet the user goals. Make sure to include information that the user will want.

Performance is the sixth tenet, which means to try and keep the site running smoothly and as quickly as possible; keep images small and try to limit wait times. The seventh is feedback which I will employ through an embedded form. Number eight is the one about money and finally nine is to make sure there are few 404, or error messages. This means to check links and make sure they go somewhere (Prabhu, 2020). I built my first website through the GoDaddy Platform and found it to be frustratingly slow with images.

Weebly/Squarespace is what I use now for both my personal site and my public art site.

The interface is easier with images and editing and it gives more nuanced data on page views and website views. Wix is another platform I have read good things about and will explore the possibilities of that site and decide between Weebly and Wix. Overall I feel that with my experience of building three other websites I will be able to meet this challenge of building a user friendly, well designed culturally relevant site.

The participants that I anticipate using this site are art educators, k-12 educators, community educators and homeschool educators and students. The art educators that want to meet and excel state art standards and will use the site to offer women, minorities, LGBTQIA+ into their curriculum. General education classrooms educators will reach out to see if the grade standards they need to fulfill could be met with an accompanying art project that will differentiate their classroom. Community education educators, after school programs and homeschool educators can use the site to build a

culturally relevant curriculum that can be successfully implemented without having to spend money on an arts curriculum.

### **State Standards and lesson plans**

In order to fulfill the ideal of having art in any or every classroom I will study the Minnesota State Standards for k-12 and find the “benchmarks” that lend themselves to differentiating with art lessons. The state standards for art education k-12 are a repeating set of values that get a bit more complex as the student ages, but in general they repeat every year so I am already familiar with them. I will read through the standards and designate certain art lessons that will correspond with different standards. I will think carefully about how to make that clear and design a way to search the site if possible so educators can do their own searches to make connections with art. I am also working on a name for the site that will make sense and be easy to remember as well as give a clue as to what I am trying to build. The working title is All the Artists. It is important to have a brand that is designed well and easy to recognize amongst all the other websites on the internet. I have done a precursory look at k-12 art lesson websites available online. They are a bit cumbersome, often expensive and they range from simple to more craft and are filled with pop-up ads. There is also an abundance of white male cis-gendered artists so I believe my website will be a much needed addition to the genre. There is definitely space for a pop-up ad free, culturally relevant art lesson website.

### **Framework for the lessons**

The design of the lessons will use the Understanding by Design (UbD), or “Backwards” design method. This method starts with asking what the big ideas are to learn. This style of curriculum design emphasizes the design on what the major

takeaways are for each unit, rather than a series of facts from a book. The design is to make sure that what is being taught matters and isn't just memorization of details that are irrelevant in the larger idea. For example, when teaching about sculpture it is important to know general dates or time periods of various art movements, but it is not important to know exact dates of each and every piece within the movement. From those big ideas that educators want students to know the lesson plan is designed in essentially three stages. Stage one is to identify the desired results or find the big idea; what should students know and be able to do once the lesson is complete. Stage two is to determine the acceptable evidence, or how an educator can determine the students have learned the big ideas. Stage three is the learning experiences and resources the educator is planning to employ so the students will achieve the goals set for them (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) There is a template design to help educators follow the ideals of a UbD lesson that is provided in appendix a. The template also employs the four Banks' levels of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is also vital to include in this template as the pedagogy within the framework of UbD.

Gloria Ladson-Billing and James A. Banks will be the two guiding pedagogies for this site. Ladson-billings advocated for believing in the ability and excellence capable of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Banks developed four levels for multiculturalism that have been applied to an arts education setting. On the template there are the four levels of multiculturalism that will be addressed with the art lesson. The adaptation for a multicultural arts classroom is on the template as well. There are six positions that remind the educator to focus on ways to make art lessons more inclusive. One of the ways is to focus on local artists and local art culture as well as reflect the

community (Stuhr et al., 1992). The Minnesota State Art Standards only nod toward inclusivity is to teach about Minnesota Native American tribes (MN Dept. of Education, 2020). The Stuhr positions of multiculturalism will inform an entire section of the website to reflect local Minnesota Native communities and artists. The other opportunity with this site is to fill in for all of the other gaps in the state art standards. There are no standards to include women, LGBTQIA+, Latin/x, Black, Somali, Hmong, or any other minority, or ethnicity or combination thereof; this website will help educators fill those gaps in inclusivity. Each lesson will have a Banks level with a prompt that level three and four are the aim of each lesson, but levels one and two might need to be the starting places for schools that are reluctant to teach about non-white artists. The levels are Contributions or “Heroes and Holidays”, Addition, where curriculum is added without context, Transformation, where curriculum includes context and perspective, and finally Social Action that advocates for change and equity. The framework will be designed into a Backward design lesson and be listed and cross referenced for other subjects in the k-12 curriculum as well as designated connections to artists listed by sexuality, gender, color, and ethnicity. The artists will be shown along with the lessons and their biography. It is important that artists and their biographies be intentional. I want the educators to practice what I call “intentional inclusion”. Do not just show a picture of the artist, include that they are gay, or trans, or married, or have children or are asexual or whatever it is about them that makes them who they are; I do not want to leave the educators guessing. Cultural relevance must be intentional in order to be successful.

### **Timeline and assessments**

The website building will begin by September 1, 2022. I am enrolled in my capstone project class this fall and will finish the entire project by December 10, 2022. In September and October I will focus on lesson plans and lists of local artists and resources Minnesota and Wisconsin art educators can utilize. I will present this website at the COLLABORATE conference in late October in Red Wing, MN. This conference is made up of art educators from Wisconsin and Minnesota. I will present the website and ask for feedback and ideas. I will collect emails from all of the educators that look at and use the website and send out a questionnaire in November 2022 to gauge their usage and how the website changed or informed their teaching. The website company that I use will also offer reports so that I can track site visits, page visits and which search engine is being used to find the site. I will also present the site to Rochester Public Schools to be posted on their website and research how to be included on the Minnesota Virtual Academy website. There is also a homeschoolers site on the Minnesota Department of Education website and I am reaching out to Forecast Public Art to see if there is a way for me to share the website nationally or internationally through their platform. All of these arenas will allow me to interface with users. On the website I will include a way to contact me to change, update or add other ideas to the site. Like any other curriculum, the lessons will change and grow as the art world changes and grows and reflects what is happening in the world or history is reevaluated and updated.

### **Conclusion**

This website will be a continuous work in progress that will be part of the way that I engage with the community as an artist. As the feedback comes in I will adjust the

site and make it more adaptable and reflective of the multicultural goals that I have established. I plan to update the site regularly and keep adding to the curriculum. Chapter four will be about the nuances of how each lesson was made and adopted to the framework I put into place for this project. There will be any changes listed that need to happen in order to make this plan work. The design and interface of the website will be explained and the actual website will be up and running to allow an interactive assessment of the project. This entire project is a way to honor all the people that have been left out of the art world conversations, history books and lesson plans. This website will be a way to educate and uplift a whole new set of students and encourage them to think with a new perspective and express themselves in ways that honors their culture and heritage.

## Chapter Four

### Introduction

This project is about getting a diverse list of artists and art lessons to art educators. Art is fundamental to a well-rounded education and is a tool to use for good mental health. Students respond to a curriculum that looks like them and supports their culture and heritage (Landsman, 2009). My question is, *How can art be taught with cultural relevance in a financially and physically accessible way for all educators?* I began with the website design, the artist index and moved into planning and writing lessons for art educators.

### Website Design

Luckily, I have designed a few websites before making the website for this project. The platform that I use to run my professional art site and my public art site is Weebly. Because I have an account there and I understand the system used to make the website I decided to keep it simple and keep them all together. There were a few names that I considered for the site, but I knew that the name needed to be informative. One website I run isn't clear enough as to what it is and that has not worked as well as I would have liked. When I explained this project to other people I kept saying I wanted to build a site with "all" of the artists. The working title was "all the artists" and I tried to come up with something more clear but it fit. It was soon obvious that with the addition of "of", I should continue with it. It was positive, left room for growth and nodded towards what would be on the site. On Weebly I searched for the domain name, [alloftheartists.com](http://alloftheartists.com) and it was not taken so I bought the domain and went with that title. Once I got the domain secured and the website named I searched through the various platform choices Weebly

had available. This is my one complaint with this company as the templates for the site are simple and once the building of the site has begun it is impossible to change or add elements outside of the template design, unless you start all over. The template I chose had a menu but no drop downs in the menu, so the viewer is forced to scroll rather than jump to a category. Scrolling for too long can become tedious, but I hoped that it might also force viewers to skim through a different area of artists they might not have otherwise viewed. In the future if I expand the website, I will need a more sophisticated drop down menu so the website will be more efficient. Per the web article I read about web design, I kept the colors simple and cohesive. (Prabhu, 2020) The colors of each page relate to one another and the font is simple and readable. The artist index on the laptop setting looks a bit sparse but when viewed on a mobile phone it works very well. Prabhu also reminded designers that the majority of traffic to their website will be through a mobile device. The artists also get a picture of themselves next to a link that connects to their website or museum or gallery information. At first I used their work but wanted the students and educators to be able to put the work with a face. After the index of artists was finished I emailed or direct messaged the artists. Many artists responded positively and many artists did not respond at all. One artist was upset to be included and asked to be removed and I immediately honored that request. Based on his harsh rejection I consulted with a lawyer that specializes in art and copyright laws to be sure I was not doing anything illegal. She felt that I had done my due diligence by emailing the artists, only linking information that was on the web and instructed me to email them one more time as final proof of due diligence. She emphasized that I was not reproducing their work and advised me to remind educators and students of that on the site; artwork is



automatically copyrighted by an artist. Finally I am not profiting from this website financially now or ever in any way and made it clear to all artists that my intentions were for educational only purposes. The strong reaction caused me some alarm but helped me spend more time on understanding copyright laws and to be better informed as to how to make sure the laws are not broken.

Since it is a site about art I filled it with images that promote the design and hopefully intrigue the viewer that there is more to see. In a cursory look at lessons offered online, they are often short on images and there is a lot of text so I tried to err on the side of a visual design. Finally, the lesson plans are set up so that they are easily downloaded and used. I tried many ways to make it look better but unfortunately that part of the design on the site looks less professional. The lessons were added and I focused on making samples for educators to look at to help it be more visually pleasing. In the future with a more sophisticated template or a grant for a web designer I hope to make that section look sleeker and better designed.

### **Lesson Plans**

The beginning unit is based on color and composition. This unit is designed to be a foundation for students to understand composition and color, as well as the beginnings of an art vocabulary. The Minnesota state standards listed in this unit are for grades Kindergarten through 5th grade but I encourage educators to use this as a refresher for older students. After the six lesson unit on color and composition I offer lessons on collages, assemblage sculptures, textiles, reductive sculpture, beads and clay. There is a separate lesson that is designed to inform an educator as to how a juried gallery show works in the art world and ways to replicate this idea with their students of any age.

The lessons were more difficult than I anticipated. The new art standards were difficult to read and I reached out to my content editor for help. The new standards had some interesting anchors and benchmarks but were confusing and repetitive in ways that made it difficult to use. Eventually I felt I had a good command of the process and began reading about history standards expecting them to be laid out the same way; I was wrong. The history standards in this state are in social studies standards. Those standards are set up entirely differently than art standards and my original intention to include them in the art lessons was abandoned. It makes more sense for me to look through those standards and point out where art can be made to support an idea, rather than adding social studies standards to an already complicated set of art standards.

### **Feedback**

On October 22nd, in Red Wing Minnesota I presented at the Minnesota, Wisconsin COLLABORATE art educators conference. The Saturday I was to present the host set me up with five chairs; I ended up with more than twenty people. Many expressed their lack of knowledge on where to go to find the artists I gathered and they were also interested in the information about the grants available in their regions. My content editor shared that she thought this website would be well received and she was correct. Some teachers have reached out to me and I am setting up meetings to help them to understand how to write grants and some have asked to work directly with me. This success buoyed me and I am making a more comprehensive plan for how to get this website into more classrooms. The Rochester Public Schools (RPS) has a new executive director of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). The school board mandated a whole department be created to support students and staff as they learn to integrate more DEI in

their lesson plans. I reached out to the new director Will Ruffin II and shared my project and goal to provide a professional development day to art educators at RPS; I have a meeting set with his department to further discuss my idea and see how it can be implemented into schools. February 20th, 2023 I have a professional day(PD) set with RPS. Once this PD is completed I will package my idea in a similar way and approach other school districts in Minnesota. Appendix C is the attached Google Slide presentation I prepared for art educators.

### **Future research**

Once the website and lessons are launched into the schools and community centers I hope to gather data on how the student bodies respond to the Minnesota artists. There is a google form I attached to the lesson portion of the website where I can receive feedback. There is an email section in the front designed for artists and educators to contact me. At this point I have some anecdotes from an educator that attended my lecture in Red Wing and she shared that her students were inspired and surprised by the abundance of talent in Minnesota. Future research would be focused on what parts are most valuable on the website and how the students react to a more diverse, inclusive art education. It would be interesting to know if it affected white students more, less or the same as students of color. Recently I combed back through some research and found that in populations with white Americans that strongly identify with being white, a multicultural curriculum can be threatening to their beliefs and core values (Rios, et.al., 2010) As I speak with educators I encouraged them to get a read on their classes before going straight to a Banks' Level 4 and alienating a population that is very much in need of some cultural literacy. It would also help to know if the educator learned from the

exposure to the resources; were they previously aware of these artists and ways to incorporate cultural relevance into their teaching practices? How can I best update the site so that it is helpful for educators and students?

### **Future plans**

Originally I thought that I would include Wisconsin on this list but after I started listing Minnesota artists I realized that would be too large of an undertaking. The decision to make this list about living artists was also for that reason. If I were to include all Minnesota artists dead and alive I would have to plunge deeply into Minnesota art history and that didn't feel relevant. If there was ever a section on the website devoted to that topic I feel it would be better written by an art historian rather than myself. As much as it is important to include art in other areas of school, I quickly realized that I didn't have enough information to build lesson plans that made sense. Once I present to art educators, I hope to move on to general education and social studies teachers. Interviewing them and better understanding their needs would help me make art lessons that they can utilize more effectively. Minnesota state history and Native Art are woven together and have a huge potential for integration but I need a better understanding of where exactly they intersect. My continued work with grants in the art world makes me think that the expansion of this website could be supported with grant funds. It would be incredible to offer a multilingual, multi subject version of this website along with a better, more sophisticated search system for educators to find what they are looking for more quickly. If there were multiple languages it could encourage more art projects through the English as a Second Language Department and perhaps inspire students to share with families in homes where English is not their first language. Many of the artists on the index were

born in other places and emigrated to the United States, their stories would be relatable and perhaps inspirational. There is much potential for this website but I will need further research and time to complete the sections that relate art to other subjects.

### **Conclusion**

This journey really started for me in college. My art department was nearly entirely male and white. The art history classes were filled with the work made by men and very few women were taught to the students. This theme followed me through my professional art career and into the educator realm; white cis-gender men were still the most taught and discussed. My position as a professional artist and educator gives me a unique view into how this overrepresentation can and should be reversed. There is power in representation. My theory long ago was that art and culturally relevant art mattered; I can now say with authority that it does. The feedback from art educators is that they need better resources to help them teach in a culturally relevant way. This website is a step in that direction. When work from different cultures, genders, backgrounds, and ethnicities is shared it allows a glimpse into a perspective of how those artists think and feel. For many students, it is empowering to see their perspective of navigating a white culture or a new country. The white students can better understand the mindset and outlooks of artists that do not look like them or share their white culture. All students and educators are better for knowing about all of the artists, not just some of the artists.

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## APPENDIX A

Project Website: [www.alloftheartists.com](http://www.alloftheartists.com)

## APPENDIX B

## UbD/DI Template with DBAE Principles

### Stage 1 - Desired Results

Established Goal(s): Students will be able to name the primary, secondary and tertiary colors.
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<b>Understanding(s):</b> <i>Students will understand that . . .</i>	<b>Essential Question(s):</b>
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<b>Knowledge</b> <i>Students will know . . .</i>	<b>Skill</b> <i>Students will be able to . . .</i>
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### Stage 2 - Assessment Evidence

<b>Performance Task(s):</b>	<b>Other Evidence:</b>
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### Stage 3 - Learning Plan

<b>Learning Activities:</b>
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*Discipline Based Art Education Principles:*

**Oral Assessment:**

**Vocabulary:**

**History:**

**Materials:**

**Production:**

**Critique:**

**Aesthetics:**

**APPENDIX C**

[All of the Artists Google Slide Presentation](#)