Varieties of Multicultural Art Education: Some Policy Issues

H. Gene Blocker
Ohio University

This paper reviews the wide-ranging debate concerning multicultural art education since its inception just over a decade ago. Various senses of multicultural art education are reviewed, along with different measures of the extent to which minority art and culture need to be integrated into and separated from the dominant culture; and, finally, competing conceptions of the emphasis needed in multicultural art education of political engagement and aesthetic detachment. In the process, some suggestions are offered for future policy decisions.

INTRODUCTION

In order to see multicultural art education in its proper perspective, we need to step back for a moment and consider why we offer art education in the first place. First of all, we should have to admit that in all education there is an inevitable measure of tradition and inertia; we do it like this because this is how we have always done it (or as far back as we can collectively remember), not because we have good reasons for doing so. This is not necessarily or entirely wrong; what has worked in the past surely contains some value. Nonetheless, it is always useful, from time to time, to take a long, hard, critical look at what precisely we are trying to accomplish (and whether we are succeeding).

Art education practice is partly an effort to give children a chance to express themselves, to explore their talents in drawing, painting, and so forth. This is what we might call the “practical” side of art education. But we are also trying to help youngsters become more informed and appreciative of the artworld, and that involves knowledge of artists, styles of art, history of art, and so on. This represents the more “theoretical” side of art education—the sort of thing encouraged by advocates of discipline-based art education (DBAE).

But why engage in the latter? What are we trying to accomplish on the more theoretical side of art education? We do this partly out of a sense of promoting the “liberal arts”—the idea that this sort of informed appreciation and taste “liberates” an individual, hopefully enabling
individuals to better enjoy paintings, music, theater, and so forth, and thereby enrich their lives. This is an old but still very good reason, and one we might see as the more “private” side of art appreciation.

But we also want to help young people assimilate into their own culture, and this is the more “public” side of art education. This is why students in Korea will learn more of the history of Korean art than that of, say, North Africa. In China today there is a considerable effort to introduce Chinese aesthetic education as a means of developing a sense of national solidarity.

And this brings us to the question, why then multicultural art education? Because our (North American) culture is multicultural, meaning that it cannot be narrowly specified religiously or ethnically or racially (in the sense in which the virtually monolithic cultures of Japan or Kuwait, e.g., very nearly can). And this is for two reasons: The first is that our culture is the product of many different ethnic groups settling in North America over several centuries, and the second is due to the amazing “shrinking world” phenomenon. Every child needs to have some sense of Arabic, Japanese, Chinese, and African contemporary cultures as part of the world with which they, as Americans, must interact. Even if we did not have millions of Islamic students in our classes in America, the events of September 11 make clear our need to learn more about and to teach our students more about Islam. Of course, this involves more than art education, but it certainly includes art, and art is a good place to begin with young children.

We sometimes lose sight of the fact that we have already constructed two enormous multicultural integrations. First were the many European ethnic groups into one “Western” or “European,” albeit English-speaking, culture; and second were the many perceived racial groups of the late 19th and early 20th centuries into one “white,” mainly “European” group.

In the early years of American settlement, our culture was predominantly British, of course; but long before independence American culture had become heavily influenced by Dutch, German, French, and other European nationalities; and through territorial conquest, what we now call “Hispanic” (itself a cultural mix of Spanish and Native American); and still later, Russian Jews, Mediterranean, and Slavic peoples. Imagine if Ben Franklin (who in the 18th century worried about Germanic influence) were alive today, he would see a broadly “Europeanized” American culture vastly transcending British culture.

We need to reflect on this long and remarkable process of assimilation that has been racially as well as culturally integrative. At one point in the nation’s history, Anglo-Saxon was regarded as a superior “race,” in competition, not with Asian or African races, but with Celtic (Irish), Italian, Slavic, Jewish peoples. As late as the early 20th century, these were considered separate races. One obvious sign of assimilation is that all these are now seen as one white race, embodying, more or less, one European culture. Before Hispanic became an accepted term for classifying Americans, Spanish-speaking citizens of that part of the United States which had formerly been part of Mexico, successfully petitioned American census authorities to classify them as white—similarly for people from the Indian subcontinent (on the grounds that they are, after all, of “Aryan” descent). In other words, there has already been an enormous assimilative construction. After the Second World War, many American young people felt the need to see Europe and not just Scotland or Poland from whence their ancestors hailed, but Europe. In short, the primary cultural roots of white Americans are European.

And that cultural construction (from British to European) remains the biggest part of America’s cultural roots—not only in terms of population but also in terms of contribution to American culture. It would be a serious mistake to discount that. But because that is not the whole story of American cultural history, the process of assimilation and integration must continue. Specifically, the study of European art and culture must now be complemented with that of non-European art and culture which has significantly contributed to North American culture—Native American, African, Hispanic, Chinese, Indian, Jewish, and Arabic. The contribution of Africa to American culture is obvious and overwhelming. Less pronounced has
been the integration into American culture of various Native American roots, early Chinese immigrants; and later, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, and Indian, not to mention millions of immigrants from various Islamic countries. There are now more Muslims in the United States than there are Jews, and if this should strike us as surprising, it is only because Muslims have not yet become as well assimilated into mainstream American culture as have the Jews. Most non-Jewish school children will know a little something about Chanukah, for example; but most will either know nothing about Ramadan or think of it as something practiced in countries outside the United States.

Today, although many Americans find a comforting sense of identity in their supposed racial origins, race continues to decline as a concept of any serious scientific import at the same time as more and more Americans choose to identify their racial designation as “Mixed.” The task of constructing a still greater cultural integration beyond the broadly white European American culture must therefore continue. The question is, how to accomplish this?

MULTICULTURALISM AS DIVERSITY, EQUALITY, AND A RELATIVISED AESTHETICS

Now after more than a decade of multicultural art education, it is time to take a careful look at what multicultural art education has become. The first thing to note is that it is still far from clear what “multicultural art education” means; a review of the recent literature reveals many quite different objectives under this one umbrella. As Elizabeth Manley Delacruz writes (1996), “Multiculturalism, by definition, refuses to be just one thing” (p. 92).

Of course, it means primarily increasing diversity instead of concentrating exclusively or almost exclusively on European “high art” since the Renaissance (and art before and after which influenced and was influenced by that). The objective is to consider non-European art—the art of Asians, Africans, Arabic/Islamic, and Native Americans. But this goal of increased diversity can itself lead to at least two quite different goals, as Anita Silvers notes (1999, p. 95), either to exclude supposedly racist or sexist Western artworks (e.g., *Huckleberry Finn*, *Venus de Milo*) or to include more non-European artworks (and, of course, with a limited curricular timetable, to do the latter inevitably involves the former). This is especially important, as Silvers points out, in countries such as the United States and Canada whose population is increasingly diverse and which therefore requires a pedagogy that is “responsive to the growing diversity of the population” (p. 95). As Peter Smith (1994) puts it, “Sooner or later, practices of the schools must reflect the will of a changing population” (p. 13). And as Bob Milgrom said in an informal discussion, “American culture is Multicultural.”

But that apparently innocuous first move immediately introduces vexed theoretical considerations as to why European art has been privileged all these centuries, involving as it does the presumed status of the art critical standards by which European art is considered superior (and why high European art is considered better than European folk art). Otherwise it is not easy to explain why we would want to expand our art curriculum to include art that was inferior. If we have a good standard, which has been used to establish a canon of the best art in the world, why would we possibly want to change that?

The need for this shift in attention is clearly shown in John A. Stinespring’s (1996) “Moving from First-stage to Second-stage Multiculturalism in the Art Classroom.” The first stage is simply including many non-European artworks and art traditions previously excluded (and excluding some from the European canon to make room for the new additions). But as Stinespring notes, “those admitted must endure comparison in terms of criteria upon which the previously admitted had been recognized. . . . As a result, they may seem to be second-rate. . . . As a result, negative stereotypes might be reinforced rather than dispelled” (p. 50). In the second stage, we
have to reexamine (and alter) our criteria, “examining our own unacknowledged assumptions and biases,” as Joanna Frueh (1991) writes of feminist art criticism, “developing ways to write about art that will serve as new models for art critical discourse” (p. 50).

Thus, we come to the second common objective of most multiculturalists, which is that of introducing a diversity of non-European art as equal in value to European art. As Silvers (1999) puts it, “doing so means embracing the idea that the beliefs, values, and practices of all cultures are equally important” (p. 95). But if so, then we cannot avoid the vexing theoretical question of whether there are multicultural art critical standards for distinguishing good from mediocre art as opposed to a single universal set of standards which privilege European art. If we are committed to the objective of presenting diverse art of diverse cultures as having equal aesthetic worth, then we may have to embrace a relativized notion of artistic excellence—different art from different cultures being equally valuable for different cultural reasons.

**DOES MULTICULTURAL ART REQUIRE A MULTICULTURAL AESTHETICS?**

Clearly, if we are to encourage both diversity and the notion of relative equality, then we have to be more open to diverse standards of artistic excellence. As Delacruz (1995) argues, this does not mean aesthetic anarchy or nihilism, but a new more expansive aesthetics: “What multicultural art education teaches is that there is no single universal aesthetic” (p. 58). K. A. Hamblen (1991) makes a similar point. Paulette Spruill-Flemming (1990, 1991) and Graeme Sullivan (1993) also emphasize the need to get away from the Eurocentric notion of judging the value of artworks by autonomous aesthetic standards (art for art’s sake, aesthetically detached or distanced from other, nonaesthetic everyday considerations—the romantic idea of the lonely artist struggling outside of and often contrary to the larger society). Instead, they argue, we must begin to look at art in its larger sociopolitical–economic context, not just by adding a few non-European artworks but by looking at all art in this broader social context in terms of which art, including non-European art, will be judged by its role in the larger social context. As Delacruz (1995) says, “Multicultural art education is a reconceptualization of the nature of art itself and our manner of interacting with it” (p. 59) (also see Ambush, 1993; Collins & Sandell, 1992; Hart, 1991; Sullivan, 1993).

Doug Blandy and Kristin Congdon (1987) also argue that art criticism must “recognize the cultural, political, sociological, ecological and economic aspects of art” (p. 15). Adrienne Hoard (1990) stresses the culturally relative development of different standards of appreciation and assessment. Christine Ballengee-Morris and Patricia L. Stuhr (2001) argue that art education must be based on a politically engaged social reconstructionist multicultural approach. Deborah Ambush (1993) thinks the emphasis should be on the student’s development of a sense of self. Mary-Michael Billings (1995) proposes a twofold approach to multicultural art education, including both a more politically motivated “issues” orientation and a “thematic” approach that seeks to relate art to individual student’s own life experiences. But in either case the move is away from an exclusive or predominant formalist focus on the art object, whether toward the social context or toward the inner self of the viewer (i.e., the student’s sense of self).

On the other hand, some commentators have argued that multicultural art education does not necessitate a new aesthetic theory, but can be reconciled within a revised Western aesthetics. In particular, F. Graeme Chalmer’s (1987) *Celebrating Pluralism: Art, Education, and Cultural Diversity* argues for the compatibility of the political standpoint of multicultural art education with the more traditional aesthetic detachment of DBAE. Silvers (1999) finds Chalmer’s approach ultimately “futile,” though she agrees with him that “multiculturalism’s quintessential enabling ideas are central to, and therefore available within, the practice of the disciplines.
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of aesthetics, art criticism and art history” (p. 102). The problem she finds with Chalmers is that he finds it necessary to achieve the desired integration of multicultural art education with traditional aesthetics (especially DBAE) by reducing aesthetics to sociology (thereby denying to aesthetics the relative autonomy which it traditionally enjoyed), which Silvers claims is neither necessary nor advisable. Nonetheless, both Silvers and Chalmers agree that traditional Western aesthetics, in one or more of its various forms, is adequate to deal with multicultural art.

My own sympathies lie with this last group of writers. As I have argued for many years (Blocker, 1993, 2000, 2001), there is no qualitative evolution (or “progress”) of art and no major international kind of art that can in general be said to be intrinsically better than any other. As an enthusiastic admirer of traditional African, pre-Columbian meso-American, and ancient Chinese tomb art, I have argued and would maintain that, although we need to examine non-Western systems of aesthetics (for precisely the same reasons we need to be open to non-Western art and systems of thought generally), there is no reason to think that evaluating non-Western art by Western aesthetics standards will systematically show the inferiority of all non-Western art. The best of traditional African, Chinese, Indian, Native American art (especially that of Middle America) can hold its own against the best of Western art, even when judged by Western standards.

On the other hand, I have been criticized over the years for embracing the idea of a general cultural evolution. I do see an evolution from Old Stone Age hunting and gathering to New Stone Age agricultural to Bronze and Iron Age large-scale literate to industrialized and modern cultures. But I do not see modern culture as exclusively Western, though much of it originated there (witness Japan), any more than I can see Bronze and Iron Age culture be exclusively tied to the Middle East where it originated. Wherever they begin, world cultural movements sooner or later become multicultural and international.

Admittedly a delicate balancing act perhaps, nonetheless I think it is a mistake first to identify all Modernism with European culture; and second, either to denigrate European culture as the origin of the worst aspects of Modernism or to praise the superiority of European culture for the more positive aspects of Modernism.

It is also a mistake to think of all Western aesthetics as the formalist, New Criticism, art for art’s sake sort which postmodern critics attack for its lack of social contextual relevance. Western aesthetics has been concerned with the issues of social and political engagement for at least a hundred years. We need to remind ourselves that Marxist and neo-Marxist aesthetics is not, after all, non-Western or anti-Western, but is itself a part of Western aesthetics. The precise degree of aesthetic autonomy and social relevance is a debate within Western aesthetics. When we introduce our students to any art, we should try to place it within its social and historical context, but this is no less true of Greek temple art than it is of Mayan ceremonial art. Nor should we think that any art that serves a nonaesthetic, utilitarian function cannot also serve an aesthetic function. This has also been long debated within Western aesthetics. Otherwise, insisting on the most narrow, purist formalist (New Criticism, art for art’s sake) notion of “fine art” would exclude Greek, Roman, medieval Christian art, and indeed all Western art prior to the modern period (beginning roughly in the 16th century). And by the same token it is only through ignorance of non-Western aesthetics traditions that we assume there is no aesthetic tradition (of a relatively detached appreciation of art for art’s sake) in certain periods of China and India.

Some investigators attempt to fill in the information gap that exists in our knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of non-European art. But this knowledge of roots must be accurate. All Americans, including African Americans, need to learn more about Africa (and so for Chinese, Jewish, Indian Americans). But we must never assume we know the essentials of European art and culture just because we are white; African art and culture, just because we
are black; and so on; this realization must be carefully understood and our schools can and should help. Fortunately some art educators are working to improve this situation: Norman DePillars (1990), by showing how Native Americans and Africans have been misunderstood, and Jacqueline Chanda (1992, 1993), by admirably filling a large hole in our knowledge of African art and society. As both DePillars and Chanda argue, part of our misunderstanding is based on simplistic and inadequate stereotypes which reduce a wide variety of cultures and art styles within Native American groups and among various African tribal groups to one monolithic—and largely mistaken—cliché.

On the other hand, Dipti Desai (2000) argues that so-called attempts to achieve “accurate” and “authentic” representations of culture, of the sort we see in Chanda, and those of DePillars, may be just as Western-biased as those more obviously stereotyped and marginalized accounts they are meant to correct, especially where these more “accurate and authentic” accounts are associated with the display of non-Western art in metropolitan art museums. This position is strongly resisted by Renee Sandell and Cherry Schroeder (1994) and by Karen Branen and Kristin Congdon (1994), who support the role of the museum in promoting multiculturalism as a positive hopeful move. Because of my own experience in the Cleveland area, I would have to agree with this last group of writers. Surely one of the best ways to awaken the interests of Cleveland inner-city minority students in their cultural heritage is to show them in the most accurate way possible the arts and crafts of their African, Chinese, Indian, Native American, Arabic, and so forth, ancestors through various outreach programs of the Cleveland Museum of Art (including both visits to the museum and classroom visits by museum personnel). To complain that this approach presents the art of minority cultures through the European slant of the “art museum,” however true, overlooks the larger point that this is surely the best, and in many cases the only, way to bring actual art works and trained experts to explain them to minority students. It is also a hopeful way to interest minority students (who will one day become adults) in the support of the museum that they can now see as a source of non-Western as well as Western art.

MULTICULTURALISM AS ANTI-WESTERN

If what was stated in the previous section is so, then several questions arise. First, why hasn’t this been done before; and second, why is it being so vigorously resisted in some circles today? This leads many commentators to adopt a radical political and ideological stance that claims ignoring non-European art or treating it as inferior is part of the larger neocolonial agenda of Europeans to dominate non-Europeans. This is the neo-Marxist (or neo–neo-Marxist) view that the agenda of international economic interests is to exploit and oppress not only developing countries but also the poor and underprivileged in their own countries. This is the anti-Western side of multicultural education. Sometimes multiculturalism appears as a kind of self-hatred focused on European culture, including art, as though all the violence, greed, and selfishness in the world springs from that source and should now be overcome or at least ignored. Despite the fact that this geopolitical position is often assumed and taken for granted in discussions of multicultural art education, it should be seriously questioned. Insofar as Western culture tends to be identified with modern world culture, it is surely a mistake to encourage in our children a blanket hatred and rejection of Modernism in all its forms (from human rights and democracy to individualism and freedom), an ideal toward which the rest of the world aspires. Our approach must be more balanced and emphasize both positive (democratic) values and negative aspects (the legacy of slavery, colonialism, and other forms of economic exploitation).

Apart from its one-sidedness, the contrast usually drawn between European culture and other cultures is really an ancient contrast within a schizophrenic European culture, between
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the more rationalist, analytic aspect and the more romantic, holistic, intuitive, and poetic side of Western culture going back at least as far as Plato’s reference to the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy. Whenever we (Westerners) become tired or disgusted with the more rationalist, analytic side of our own collective culture, we turn to other cultures for a confirmation of the romantic side of our own culture. It is questionable why, in our quest for diversity, we need to deny the contribution of Europeans in art, literature, philosophy, music, architecture, and so forth, to world culture.

Nonetheless this radical geopolitical agenda leads other writers to emphasize the need of art educators to demonstrate the role of art in combating contemporary social injustice in their own societies. Elizabeth Sacca (1993) urges art teachers to develop their students’ understanding of the political role of the artist that often opposes and is opposed by society. Vincent Lanier (1987) and Jan Jagodzinski (1982) stress the role of art as promoting a program of radical social change. For example, Jagodzinski (1996) argued on Lacanian grounds that the multicultural program of the Getty Center for Education in the Arts (which has supported DBAE) was essentially racist. Arthur Einland (1997) points out, however, that Jagodzinski’s comments were based on a single Getty advertisement and seemed more designed to capitalize quixotically on the stereotypical differences between big business (i.e., Getty, and therefore right-wing fascist) and himself as a left-wing liberal espousing radical ideas. Elliot W. Eisner (1998) also defends the Getty program, especially in its response to critics through the work of outgoing director Lielani Lattin Duke. We do need to stress the social and political character of art and artists (as Western aestheticians have been doing for at least 100 years), but we should acknowledge that much of this social-protest art is directed against antimodernist cultures (e.g., against restrictions on both women’s rights and child slavery).

Without incorporating some sociological, anthropological, and political theories, as suggested earlier, with aesthetic theory, the presentation of a smorgasbord of bits and pieces of art objects from around the world—especially where this is an add-on to the main course of European art since the Renaissance—will only succeed in producing what Ralph Smith (1983) calls “ethnic tourism.” Considered interesting but strange, exotic other art will inevitably take its place in student’s minds as inferior to European art (which is after all the main thing). This is the distinction Keith Swanwick (1994) and others draw between “multicultural” and “intercultural.” Multicultural often becomes, according to Swanwick, in reference to musical multiculturalism, a sort of “musical tribalism” in which those in one musical tradition observe from the outside bits and pieces of other musical traditions as interesting and exotic oddities without absorbing or entering into those other musical traditions. This, according to Swanwick, is very different from what some call “intercultural,” which involves transcending one’s own musical tradition in order to absorb elements of other musical traditions, making them, or at least parts of them, one’s own, a view defended by Wayne Bowman (1994).

The problem here is the old problem of how to simultaneously achieve sufficient depth and breadth? How can art educators be expected to learn enough and spend enough class time teaching non-Western art forms without spreading themselves and their content too thin? For this reason Estelle R. Jorgensen (1988) urges Stanwick to “retreat to a less radical position and go along with the framers of the National Standards for Arts Education in suggesting that a few contrasting musical traditions be studied” (p. 81). Clearly, whatever approach one adopts, the project of multicultural art education is going to be much more involved and difficult than many have imagined. As Grant and Sleeter (1998) point out, “Many of those who embrace the concept [of multicultural art education] tend to oversimplify or understate the degree of change called for and are content with merely injecting a few folk customs and ethnic heroes into the curriculum” (p. 9). This is made even worse when these artworks are taken out of cultural context and reproduced in class projects, using empty milk cartons, for example; or students making Halloween-style African-like masks out of construction paper.
This raises yet another sensitive issue. Many minorities do not want to assimilate into the majority culture which is their right which we should all respect. Many come to North America to earn some money or escape persecution and then return home; and while here, they maintain as high a degree of ethnic purity as possible. Although this is their right, it is not the bigger picture, not the longer, mainstream history of America, which is the story of assimilation. Generally, as soon as their children are born in America, they become part of the assimilative process. The new talk about multicultural diversity should not blind us to the historical fact that it took generations for other groups of Americans to assimilate, for example, the Greek, Polish, and Italian ethnic groups. The idea that ethnic groups used to assimilate quickly but now demand more cultural separation is historically questionable. German communities in Texas continued to speak German for over a hundred years. At various points in America’s history there were factories in which Italian or Croatian was exclusively spoken. However, eventually these groups did assimilate and it is no less true today. More likely, the “melting pot” has never melted quickly, but melt it did and continues to do so today. Perhaps the main difference is that ethnic groups today may seek a different balance between integration and cultural separation. They seek to teach their children the languages and customs from their countries of origin, for example, and thereby enrich American culture.

For this reason many minority cultures do not perceive and do not want to perceive their own art as a relativised segment of international diversity to be taken up by art students in a playful Disneyland-type construction program. Sometimes on pain of death or dismemberment, African masks were not to be seen by anyone, even of the same tribal society, who was not a member of that secret society. They were sacred objects whose power needed to be respected. Is it fair, some writers ask, to require these societies to “give up” their objects for the casual, playful, entertaining role of diversity education?

Ironically, or paradoxically, as Taylor, Gutmann, Rockefeller, Walzer, and Wolf (1992) point out in Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition,” the whole conception and ideal of diversity and equality (with the relativistic notions these ideas imply) are European, liberal, democratic ideals. James Banks (1993) has also argued that multicultural education is based on and is a logical extension of modern Western ideals of democracy and equality. Delacruz (1995) discusses “the democratic principles upon which multiculturalism is based: equity, diversity, and social justice” (p. 57). As Peter Smith (1994) puts it:

The United States was founded during the so-called Age of Enlightenment, and white Americans in general have internalized certain enlightenment notions. Among these is the idea that persons can somehow stand outside their own life experiences. Is this in itself a Western imperialist notion?

If it is, then certain strands in multiculturalistic thinking are a priori tainted. (p.140)

This is the positive side of Modernism discussed earlier.

Another irony is that in order to avoid Eurocentric hegemony, we are forcing a European ideal on non-European cultures fighting for their collective lives, that is, aborigines of Australia, Maoris of New Zealand, African traditionalists, and Native Americans in North, Central, and South America. As Ronald N. MacGregor (1994) writes:

At what point does talk about we, the family, or we, the tribe, become talk about we, the people? How does one reconcile the egalitarian tradition of liberal democracy implied in “we the people” with the arguments of interest groups who insist that their survival as a group depends on their being accorded special status? (pp. 4–5)
The same problem affects the multicultural treatment of Islamic art and culture whose adherents may be opposed to the modern liberal, enlightenment idea that all religions and cultures are equal. Indeed, Stuart Richmond (1995) argues that the democratic Western liberal perspective of American public schools is probably not a good way to present multicultural art education, especially as it tends to emphasize sociopolitical concerns at the expense of artistic and aesthetic concerns. This liberal tradition is but one of many world traditions, and because non-Western art arises within these other world traditions, it should be interpreted according to these other world traditions and not be biased from a Western point of view.

Nonetheless, despite the need to be sensitive to perceptions of various minority communities, we cannot and should not abandon, but embrace, the Modernist foundations of multiculturalism, for the entire agenda of multicultural art education is based on the liberal, democratic ideal of the integration of diverse cultures treated as equals.

MULTICULTURALISM AS CULTURAL SEPARATION OR INTEGRATION

In schools of mainly minority students, multiculturalism has come to mean an emphasis on Black or Hispanic art and culture as a way to restore the damaged self-esteem of these students outside the dominant culture. Here African American students learn about African culture; Native American students study Native American art; and so on. As Sandra C. Dilger (1994) points out:

For the child with non-Western parents, the impact of a Western curriculum on that student’s self-concept, sense of pride, and cultural knowledge can be adverse.... Unfortunately, instead of combining to form a new people in a new land, most of the immigrant and ethnic groups that have come to America ‘stick to the bottom’ of the proverbial melting pot. (p. 50)

Although, as Anna M. Kindler (1994) points out, such an approach actually “limits the ability of a child exposed to cultural variety from birth, to select, define, and construct a personal cultural heritage from all that is available in a culturally diversified environment” (p. 54). She mentions her personal experience with her son who became very involved with Haida images when the family moved to Canada.

One sense of multiculturalism is therefore to let children and their families select the art and culture of their own supposed heritage. If they are African American they will concentrate on African art; if they are Jewish Americans, Jewish art and culture; and so on. I would join those authors who challenge this conception, arguing that children need to learn and assimilate the art and culture of their respective countries (and art and culture of the United States contains more than African and Jewish elements, though it includes these ingredients), and also because in most cases students have a mixed heritage. How many African Americans have no non-African ancestors? How many Jewish Americans have zero non-Semitic ancestors? I am not referring only to blood lines, for many African American and Jewish American families lived for centuries in North America and Europe. Not all pride in one’s heritage is bad, of course, and Jewish Americans and African Americans and Chinese Americans have a right to know about and feel some pride in the artistic culture of their ancestors. But this should not be limited to their remote pre-American ancestors but should also include the contributions to American culture of their American-born ancestors, including, for example, 100 years of Chinese opera in San Francisco; a wealth of Jewish American comedy, entertainment, and literature; and African American jazz, blues, and gospel music.
As Aristotle said of becoming virtuous, it is a matter of striking the right balance—it takes practice and continuous readjustment. Currently many Jewish Americans are turning more to their Jewish roots, whereas many African Americans are turning away from a narrow Afrocentrism. How much written and spoken Chinese language should Chinese Americans learn? The main point is that there is room for both the attempt to cling to cultural roots and the attempt to contribute to an enlarging American culture. This can be done by bringing new meaning to these newer designations: “Jewish American,” “African American,” and “Chinese American.” Hernandez (1993), Marantz (1993), and Feinstein (1989) also object that an exclusivist notion of cultural pluralism is divisive and will balkanize the nation. As Peter Smith (1994) points out, one problem with this approach to multicultural art education is that it is not only divisive, pitting minority against dominant culture, but also frustrating for African Americans who have little real knowledge or sense of African culture and thus find it difficult if not impossible to identify with Africa beyond simplistic stereotypes. Surely better, as Smith suggests, would be a study of the contributions of African Americans to mainstream American culture. “In the case of African American heritage, accessible identification might be more feasible through the study of great musicians and visual artists who grew up in American culture” (p. 17). This would have the added benefit of integrating African American students into the larger American culture where they must, after all, sink or swim in their individual struggles for success in life.

These writers urge an alternative (to which I would add my voice): Give all American students a sense of the diversity of their American cultural roots. The emphasis here should be not only to give each student a sense of the cultural contributions of all ethnic groups which have made a significant contribution to American art and culture but also to show how these different ethnic groups made that contribution through assimilation within the broader American culture. Jazz and blues are good examples, and although they have African roots, they are also played on European, not African, instruments (e.g., cornet, clarinet, banjo, guitar, and piano) and incorporate European musical scales and harmonies. Consider the example of American gospel music. At first it might seem that this is a distinctively African contribution to American religion, but we must also consider the evangelical movement in 17th-century Britain as various Protestant groups broke with the Church of England, encouraging “enthusiasm,” speaking in tongues of the Quakers, Shakers, and others, emphasizing the Holy Spirit entering the heart of the individual believer, producing spontaneous emotional expressions of religiosity, traditions which are still alive and well in America today, not only in Black churches but also in Southern and Appalachian white churches.

CONCLUSION

As many art educators have thus recognized, there are many quite different goals grouped together under the general heading of multiculturalism. Collins and Sandell (1992) mention four such goals that provide us with a good summary of what we have been saying. These are the goals of “attack multiculturalism” in which the dominant culture is criticized for its neocolonial hegemony; “escape multiculturalism” in which the malevolent dominant culture is simply ignored in favor of more friendly cultures; “transformative multiculturalism,” which selects the best parts of different cultures and tries to blend them together into a kinder and more gentle culture; and “repair multiculturalism,” which seeks to improve the self-image of minority students damaged by the dominant culture.

No wonder, then, says Delacruz (1995), that so many “myths, misconceptions, misdirections” surround multicultural art education. In Banks’s (1993) discussion, four such myths stand out: that multicultural education is only for victimized minorities, that all multicultural education is opposed to Western culture, that all multicultural education is opposed to Western culture, that all multicultural education is divisive, and that
in any event multicultural education is a fad that will pass. After a decade of intense debate and experimental educational practice, we can see that this is certainly not a fad that will soon pass. Rather we have entered a time of sober reflection and consolidation, and above all a time to seek consensus, balance, and good sense.

In my review of the work of many contributors to multicultural art education over the past decade, I have tried to articulate what I see as the “logic,” or “argument,” which seems to lead from the need for diversity to an anti-Western ideology. In my view, for reasons I have stressed here, the need for diversity is undeniable; and this need does indeed lead “logically” to the respecting of diverse artistic cultures as being of equal value. But I have argued that this does not reasonably lead, as many have supposed, to a rejection of Western aesthetics, Western art, or Western values. Above all, I have argued, this should not lead us to interpret multicultural art education as an attempt to segregate students by their supposed minority cultural roots, that is, African art for African-American students, Hispanic art for Hispanic students, and so on. Instead, we should continue to move in the direction of exploring the diverse cultural roots of American culture, especially of American art, for example the African roots of American music which are of vital interest for all our students to know. I have also stressed the need for genuine, “authentic” knowledge of non-Western art and culture and the important role that metropolitan museums can play in providing that knowledge base. In the process, I would hope that we would recover a better understanding not only of non-Western aesthetics standards but also of the breadth and diversity within Western aesthetics.

AUTHOR NOTE
As a philosopher specializing in aesthetics, two things have brought me into the thick of the debate surrounding multicultural and cross-cultural art and art education. The first was Ralph Smith’s invitation to join with Michael Parsons in writing the aesthetics “discipline” book, Aesthetics and Education (University of Illinois Press, 1993) for the Discipline-Based Art Education series. The second was my long-standing interest in non-Western art, especially that of West Africa and Pre-Columbian Central America, and the ancient art of China (The Aesthetics of Primitive Art, University Press of America, 1994), which, in turn, led to my interest in non-Western aesthetics (Contemporary Chinese Aesthetics, coedited with Zhu Liyuan, Peter Lang, 1995), and the symposium which I organized and to which I contributed, “Non-Western Aesthetics” The Journal of Aesthetic Education, 35(4), 2001 (which included African, Chinese, and Native American aesthetics). As a result of all this I am often asked to teach a required course in philosophy of art for art education majors. In all these ways I have been very happily drawn into the contentious fray of multicultural and cross-cultural art education.

REFERENCES


