TRANSFORMING ART EDUCATION PRACTICES: DESIGNING CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL ART EDUCATION CURRICULUM

By

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A CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS
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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how art educators can elevate lesson plans from liberal to critical multiculturalism. Through an examination of my own attempts at critical multicultural art education, and an investigation of resources provided by the Florida Department of Education, I delivered a set of best practices and a “how to” guide for art educators to identify opportunities to elevate art lessons. I used action-based research to collect data from preexisting lessons, from critical anecdotal notes of my own process, and experiences of unpacking previous attempts at multiculturalism in my art classroom. In my experience, even the most intentional art educators have struggled to provide authentic and meaningful art lessons that expand beyond a liberal approach to multiculturalism. To support fellow art educators in this endeavor, I created a self-published guide in the form of a digital or printable zine for how to recognize examples of liberal multicultural art education and elevate existing lessons to the level of critical multicultural art education. Additionally, I compiled a list of contemporary artists for art educators to explore.
This list is included in the zine and is meant to assist art educators in moving away from mimicry based, often tokenizing art lessons, and instead push toward exploring themes and concepts in the work of contemporary artists that support critical multiculturalism and its merits.
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Introduction

A few years into my career as an art educator, I had a student say “Mrs. Colado, you’re so woke.” At the time my classes had been studying artists who had expressed ideas about socio-economic issues in our studio art class, and I thought this was a compliment; an attestation to my ability to provide students with a progressive, meaningful, and relevant art education. But what does being “woke” really even mean? How was I really teaching my students to see and interpret the world? I took away from this brief conversation, a desire to push more culturally relevant and inclusive content into my classroom and lessons, but I didn’t really know what that meant, where to start, or how it could be realized.

I have often considered the culture and climate of my classroom but this conversation with my student encouraged me to question my positionality for the first time. How had I been uniquely positioned to expertly speak on issues related to my experiences, and how had I been mistakenly speaking on experiences that were not my own? How had my narrative as a white, assigned female at birth (AFAB), heterosexual, cis gender, married, lower middle class, educated, human being influenced the ways in which I presented culture to my students, which cultures I felt safe and comfortable teaching, and how my own knowledge of art had been constructed? How have I spoken with intention about LGBTQ issues because I am the daughter of a homosexual man, and the mother of a transgender son? How had I overlooked opportunities to teach about race issues, because I was afraid of appropriation or misrepresentation? How had my position and authority as the art teacher created or eliminated possibilities to build meaningful relationships with my students?
Statement of the Problem

The problem with my attempts at multicultural art education, was that while my intentions were in the right place, I just didn’t know enough about what multiculturalism meant as an approach to education in the general sense to apply meaningful strategies. I was treading water in a way that in my experience, leads to many art educators drowning. While I was promoting the study of art from diverse cultures, I was simultaneously, albeit unintentionally, overlooking the historical and political dimensions of power that can be stabilized when art educators approach cultures other than their own, and without concern for the culture students bring with them to the classroom.

I had a perception and practice of multiculturalism that meant very little, that didn’t critically question, and that didn’t dip very far beneath the surface of tokenization through mimicry-based art lessons. However, when reflecting on what is most valuable to me as an art educator, and in preparation for this research, I realized that I wanted to engage with students in a more intentional way. I wanted to work with students to destabilize structures of power that prioritize one style of art, or one group of artists over others. Like Banks (2016), I wanted to support students in the need for “knowledge of their social, political, and economic worlds; the skills to influence their environment; and humane values that will motivate them to participate in social change to help create a more just society and world” (p.183).

Through the preliminary research process, I became aware of the difference between liberal and critical multiculturalism and accepted that what I had been attempting to do in my art classroom was on par with what Banks (1988) describes as the Contributions Approach and Acuff (2018) explains as liberal multicultural art education. The Contributions Approach to content integration, is characterized by the “addition of ethnic heroes into the curriculum”
(Banks, 1988, p. 37) without significant and meaningful changes to the curriculum. Acuff states regarding liberal multicultural art education that it “abdicates recognition of unequal power relations that underpin equity” (Acuff, 2014, p. 306). I was scratching the surface of multiculturalism, but I wasn’t challenging my students to critically question why we were studying a specific culture or artworks, or how our individual cultures impact the way we view others.

Through conversation with other art educators, I have learned that many share this struggle. Some art educators lack the confidence to teach about culture other than their own, some feel critical approaches are not age or grade level appropriate, and some simply don’t know where to begin. Many art educators rely on readily accessible online resources to fill in gaps or some fail by assuming that adding content to existing curriculum is enough. Some art educators even feel that further implementations of multiculturalism benefit students of color and not the entirety of students. Art educators are concerned with the integration of critical multiculturalism, because we care about providing students with meaningful experiences.

This problem also made me consider the study of contemporary artists. How could the inclusion of authentic voices of underrepresented artists into the art classroom change how we perceive the canon of art history? Through a reprioritization of investigations into concepts and themes used by contemporary artists, art educators might encourage their students to construct knowledge that challenges structures of power. Students can move beyond mimicry and toward understanding how they too, as artists, can communicate meaningful ideas about their experiences through creation.
Goals of the Study

The goal for this capstone research study was to provide art educators with a starting point, and a usable resource that synthesizes what I have learned about critical multicultural art education but doesn’t require them to rewrite their entire curriculum in their attempts to integrate critical multicultural practices into their classrooms. This will guide art educators to restructure the curriculum that they already have access to. By training myself to critically analyze my own lessons, I hoped to model, and provide a set of best practices for art educators. If art educators had an accessible guide on how to elevate their current liberal multicultural art lessons to critical multicultural art lessons, many would, and some fears about the challenges of doing so would be put to rest.

Through documentation of the process of restructuring my lessons, and lessons I found online, I provided first-hand accounts on the difficulties, challenges and successes of the problems outlined above. Using the knowledge that I accumulated through research, I also provided art educators with new insights on how they can identify their own positionality and create meaningful opportunities for knowledge acquisition in their art classrooms. Through this process I also provided art educators with a comprehensive list of contemporary artists that are well suited for classroom exploration into critical multicultural art education.

Research Questions

The following questions have guided my research process:

1. How can I create lessons that address and elevate multicultural art education to critical multicultural art education?
2. How can critical multicultural art education be implemented at various grade levels?
3. How do I provide my students with opportunities to critically question the artwork?
they are exposed to in my classroom?

4. How do art educators acknowledge their own positionality in relation to the cultures they teach?

Significance

This research study is necessary now more than ever. Critical theories that address and challenge structures of power are being banned in states all over the United States. Tennessee and Florida have recently made it illegal to teach Critical Race Theory in public schools, with Georgia, Texas, and many other states pushing similar legislation that sanitizes historical events and facilitates injustices. While some see such theories as being isolated to how social studies and American history is taught, art educators must also recognize the potential impacts such politically motivated mandates could have on how we teach about and inspire the creation of art made in response to issues of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and human rights in our classrooms.

Assumptions

My first assumption was that the resources I have provided art educators were needed and will be accepted by most art educators as valuable. I believe that art educators have a unique platform to integrate critical multicultural art education into their classrooms because of the fundamental connections between art and culture. What I may have failed to consider, is that some art educators, for example in areas where mandates listed above are being politically enforced on public schools, might agree with such legislation. I chose instead to assume that art educators are like minded and believe in the importance of reforming schools in order to provide students with diverse racial, ethnic and social backgrounds with educational equality.

Another assumption is that art educators already recognize and accept the structures of
power that support the status quo canon of art, and art history. The geographic area where I live and teach carries a rich history of civil rights activism, and influential leaders in underserved communities, while simultaneously being embedded with racism, sexism, and discrimination. The area was recently in the national news due to public forums and elections, debating and subsequently approving the name changes of 6 local public middle and high schools from honoring leaders of the Confederate army. I assumed that art educators share a desire to address these systems in order to inspire real, lasting, and meaningful change in their schools. I assumed that art educators are like minded and wish to impart on their students a desire to participate in the world around them, because they already recognize that the current system is flawed.

**Definition of Terms**

**Multicultural education.** Multicultural education is rooted in an “anti-racist struggle over whose knowledge and experiences should be included in the curriculum” (Au, 2014, p. 89). According to Cahan and Kocur (2011), multicultural education is not “a style that came and went but a condition of social existence” (p. 5). Banks (2019) defines multicultural education as an educational reform movement whose major goal is to restructure curricula and educational institutions so that students from diverse social-class, racial, and ethnic groups— as well as men, women and LGBT students can experience equal educational opportunities.

**Liberal Multiculturalism.** Liberal multiculturalism is an approach to multicultural education that is synonymous with the Contributions Approach outlined by Banks (1988) where integration of ethnic content into curriculum is facilitated through celebrations of special days, weeks and months and highlight contributions of historical “heroes” to the curriculum (p. 37). This approach is easily adopted by educators, but often results in a trivialization, and exoticization of ethnic cultures, while reinforcing stereotypes and misconceptions of cultures.
Acuff (2014) states that “liberal multiculturalism abdicates recognition of the unequal power relations that underpin equity” (p. 306).

**Critical Multiculturalism.** Critical multiculturalism is defined by Acuff (2015) as a way to facilitate the major goals of multiculturalism presented by Banks, “to improve academic achievement and transform educational institutions through both curriculum and environment,” but updates multiculturalism to the state of *critical* by adding contemporary goals such as a “critiquing power and addressing cultural subjugation” (p.32). Acuff further states that “Critical multiculturalism can be identified as a pedagogical framework that questions power” (p.41).

**Knowledge construction.** The process that helps students understand how social, behavioral, and natural scientists create knowledge, and how their implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, cultural contexts, and biases influence the knowledge they construct. Knowledge construction teaching strategies involve students in activities that enable them to create their own interpretations of the past, present and future (Banks, 2019, p.166).

**Culture.** Culture is defined in many ways. Merriam-Webster defines culture as the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of racial, religious, or social groups (Merriam-Webster online dictionary). Banks (2019) expands on this traditional definition, adding that culture is the ideation, symbols, behaviors, values, and beliefs that are shared by a human group, and may also be defined as the symbols, institutions, or other components of human societies that are created by human groups to meet their survival needs (p.165).

**Positionality.** Positionality refers to the ways differences in social position and power shape our identity and access in society. Positionality asks that we acknowledge and identify our individual levels of privilege through considerations of race, class, educational achievement, financial stability, ability, and gender as ways of analyzing or acting from one’s social position.
**Authentic Voice.** For the purposes of this research, authentic voice represents the use of direct sources of a culture to educate students, rather than interpreting, reading, or synthesizing information as an educator and representing as an expert. Authentic voice allows for members of a culture to speak and teach about that culture themselves creating a direct line from people living an experience to the students learning about an experience.

**Literature Review**

Multicultural Art Education was a broad and vast subject to tackle. There are decades worth of research that provide valuable information regarding foundational approaches, but there are still many misconceptions and myths around what multicultural education, and multiculturalism is. To understand multiculturalism in the art classroom, one must first understand multiculturalism in the general sense. This literature review presented my understanding based on the writings of Banks, Acuff, Delacruz, and others of the concepts, varied approaches, and implementations that delineate liberal multiculturalism from critical multiculturalism. Explorations that inevitably lead me to a belief that multiculturalism isn’t a thing. It’s not a lesson, or a project, or a product. Multiculturalism is a state of being, an activated engagement with the culture you bring to the classroom, the culture your students bring to the classroom, and the overall culture of our society.

**What is multicultural education?**

Historically, multiculturalism or multicultural education evolved from the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s that sought to bring about social equity. Issues of education and access to equitable education became a divisive and contested issue. The Civil Rights movement advocated desegregation and bilingual education as entry points for equitable educational opportunities (Adejumo, 2002, p. 33). In the late 1980s James A. Banks wrote
extensively on the subject of multiculturalism, constructing a set of approaches to multicultural curriculum reform which outlines four levels: the Contributions Approach, the Ethnic Additive Approach, the Transformative Approach and the Decision-making and Social Action Approach (Banks, 1988). Understanding these formative approaches, created a foundation to understanding contemporary applications and evolutions of the multiculturalism concepts in the art classroom.

The Contributions Approach is what Banks (1988) described as an introductory method, and one that is frequently used. Banks called this “The Heroes and Holidays” approach and makes the point that during these types of lessons the class learns little “or nothing about the ethnic groups before or after the special event or occasion” (p. 37). I described this approach as a place where most educators, specifically art educators, settle and struggle to move on from. It has been my observation that the system of art education within most public schools is focused on products that can be sent home for parents to view as proof of the value of art education. This mentality promotes the Contributions Approach to multiculturalism because it requires art educators to lead students in creating cute tokens, instead of acquiring an in-depth knowledge of a culture. This tokenism can lead to trivialization and exoticization of those cultures, which harms the overall intent of multicultural art education as a practice.

The Ethnic Additive Approach allows for educators to insert ethnic content into the curriculum without restructuring it. While this approach is more radical than the Contributions Approach, it fails in that it “usually results in the viewing of ethnic content from the perspective of mainstream historians, writers, artists, and scientists because it does not involve a restructuring of the curriculum” (Banks, 1988, p. 38). I understood this to mean that without reframing and including diverse perspectives, the insertion of culture into the curriculum just continues tokenization and does nothing to assist students in authentic knowledge acquisition.
When the core foundation of a field of study (art, art history, history, science, etc.) remains Euro-Centric educators are not authentically creating space for alternate viewpoints. Without space for alternative viewpoints students cannot be expected to accurately frame their personal experiences or inquiries. The Ethnic Additive Approach presented students with ethnic content and goes a step further than simply acknowledging the contributions of a select few, but still failed to integrate critical thinking.

The Transformative Approach outlined by Banks, is fundamentally different from the aforementioned approaches. First, it changed the “basic assumptions of the curriculum and enables students to view concepts, issues, themes and problems from several ethnic perspectives and points of view” (Banks, 1988, p. 38). I would explain the Transformative Approach as a way to permeate curriculum with many frames of reference and perspectives from various groups, that contribute to a non-singular narrative of events. Additionally, this approach shifts the priority away from ways various ethnic groups are presented as contributors to the narrative, toward how contemporary societies have emerged from a synthesis of diverse cultures, racial and ethnic groups and religious groups.

Finally, to fully understand multiculturalism Banks presented The Decision-Making and Social Action Approach to multicultural curriculum reform. This approach included all aspects of the Transformative approach but elevates student involvement, by requiring them to “take actions related to the concept” being presented (Banks, 1988, p. 38). This approach encourages students to assert their own democratic authority and encourages student empowerment. In the art classroom this would translate to a student functioning at the highest level of creative development, where a student creates artwork that exemplifies a personal voice that is clearly identifiable in their imagery.
Understanding Banks’s fundamental approaches to multicultural education offers art educators a starting point to build and transform curriculum in the art classroom. Adejumo (2002) states, “art educators must challenge themselves to seek a deeper understanding about how to provide every student with a culturally and socially relevant experience in visual art.” (p. 38). If we do not understand the ways in which we are currently presenting art curriculum, we have no frame of reference to create a culturally and socially relevant experience for our students. Defining multicultural education was the first step in implementing it in art education. I posited that the process of creating a truly democratic classroom would begin with an honest and objective self-reflection on lessons taught in the past and the perspectives from which they were taught.

**Building Upon Banks: Critical vs. Liberal Multiculturalism**

Since Banks’ groundbreaking work, many scholars have written extensively within the realm of critical multicultural art education and outlined key differences between critical and liberal multiculturalism. Desai (2000) stated “One of the primary concerns of multicultural art education is to provide accurate and authentic representations of the art of racially and ethnically marginalized groups in the United States and of subordinate cultures around the world” (p. 114). This statement aligned with what Acuff (2014) described as a difference between critical multicultural art education and liberal art education. According to Acuff, liberal multiculturalism and liberal multicultural art education fail to recognize systems of unequal power dynamics, and “fails to identify power and privilege as chief concepts of interrogation” (p. 306). Like the initial approaches outlined by Banks, (i.e., The Contributions Approach), Acuff equated liberal multicultural art education with celebratory “activities (that) do not incite a critique of power,
nor do they recognize how racism, heterosexism and other discriminations” are embedded into our systems of education (p. 306).

Critical multiculturalism and critical multicultural art education would be more attuned with the Transformative and The Decision-Making and Social Action Approaches presented by Banks (1988). In critical multicultural art education students would be equipped to question who is controlling the narratives in the images they see, in the texts they read and the work that they create. Critical multicultural art education challenges students to move beyond the tolerance that liberal multicultural art education encourages, to a level that embraces and accepts difference.

The critical approach to multicultural art education requires more work, and more effort on the part of the educator to restructure the lessons, and I agreed with Acuff when she stated, “Many prospective and practicing art teachers lack foundational knowledge about the ideas and goals at the core of critical multicultural education that would facilitate the acquisition of knowledge about critical multicultural art education” (Acuff, 2014, p. 68). Through an action research study, which challenged participants to establish their own positionality to facilitate equitable educational experiences for their students, Acuff concluded that “future implementation of critical multicultural art education is more effective if art education students have a foundational understanding of critical multiculturalism” (Acuff, 2014, p. 69). To elaborate, I think most in-service art educators, not just pre-service art education students could benefit from understanding the basics of critical multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism: Criticisms and Misconceptions

The oppositional arguments to multiculturalism and multicultural art education haven’t changed much in the last 25 or so years, and although many authors touch on the criticisms, Delacruz (1995), seemed to tackle the challenges in the most comprehensive way that relates not
only to the general outline Banks presented, but also in relation to art education specifically. Delacruz set out to “discuss the manner in which myths about multiculturalism have permeated thinking in art education, to discuss alternatives to these myths and to reinforce the democratic principles upon which multiculturalism is based: equity, diversity and social justice” (Delacruz, 1995, p. 57). Delacruz expertly laid out four general misconceptions such as: (a) the belief that multicultural education is for victimized minorities, (b) the claim that multicultural education is against the West, (c) that multicultural education will divide the nation and (d) speculations that multicultural education is a passing fad. (Delacruz, 1995, p. 57).

These four general misconceptions reflected positions on contemporary multicultural art education. Delacruz (1995) stated that “multicultural education is in its infancy”, and it still seems to be. Delacruz, was right to state “Rather than a passing trend, it (multicultural education) is a reconceptualization of who we are and what kind of people we want to be” (Delacruz, 1995, p. 61), as I feel the current socio-political movements in the United States, such as the Black Lives Matter Movement and others, reposition multiculturalism as a contemporary issue, especially relating to inequities in public systems such as education.

As recently as 2002, Adejumo has stated that “proponents perceive multicultural art education as an instrument of school and social reform” (Adejumo, 2002, p. 34), which supported the foundational structure of Banks (1988). Additionally, Adejumo provided a broad list of scholarly authors who supported multicultural art education practices, while also posing some problematic areas, such as how individuals define culture, who is most qualified to teach “the contents of these cultural heritages?” and the difficulty of evaluating cultural appreciation (2002).
To further criticism of multiculturalism and its applications Acuff referred to the term as a “buzzword” that has been used so often that art educators have become indifferent to its potential. (Acuff, 2015, p. 32). Acuff shared “personal and authentic reflection on the status of multiculturalism in art education” and provided evidence for how art educators have generally failed to “operationalize continuous, contemporary multicultural classroom practices and pedagogy” (Acuff, 2015, p. 32). I interpreted Acuff as challenging art educators to move beyond what is comfortable, and to invest in the learning by reframing a personal approach to multicultural art education. By involving students in simple tasks such as choosing reading selections or encouraging students to use art making to explore issues they face at home, in their lives and their communities, educators can lead students in practices that critically analyze representations of their communities in local news, social media and national news sources.

Furthermore, Delacruz highlighted issues in the “many educational products” that appear to be supportive of multicultural art educational practices, but that actually may be “perpetuating stereotypical misconceptions, reinforcing monocultural myths and miseducating students about art and artists” (Delacruz, 1996, p. 86). What remained true about this statement is that there has been a continual and steady stream of products that promote cultural diversity, for sale to educators, and art educators that bolster the same old, same old idea that multiculturalism is a product, versus a mindset, an educational approach, and something bigger than a template for an African mask project that you can buy on Teachers Pay Teachers.

What can be done now?

As an in-service art educator for 8 years and counting, I was surprised at the extent of personal confusion I had about multiculturalism. There are many approaches in the field of art education that attempt to offer diversity, equity and inclusion but exploring multiculturalism
meant digging deeper than what may be superficially available. Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr (2001) stated that “Education is a part of cultural experience; therefore, it cannot be reduced to disciplinary parameters but should include issues of power, history and self-identity.” They further stated that multicultural art and visual culture education are processes not products (Stuhr, 2001, p. 6), a sentiment that encouraged the idea that art educators think “more comprehensively about multicultural art education” as Acuff (2014) recommended, and by being diligent about resources utilized in the art classroom. Recognizing that the structure of the lessons we teach may need comprehensive and foundational adjusting, how we choose to include multiculturalism into educational reform especially and specifically in the art classroom, must be continually evaluated.

**Conclusion: Bringing it Back to Banks**

Delacruz stated that “For Banks and many others, reform is based on the construction of more authentic knowledge and pedagogy of liberation and social responsibility” (Delacruz, 1995, p. 61). This statement supported what I interpreted to be the rationale behind the push toward critical multicultural art education, where students aren’t just being asked to create small, cute tokens of a diverse culture, but that they are encouraged and supported in questioning the systems in place within their educational institutions. Art educators have to challenge themselves, their colleagues and their students to not just attempt to invest in the culture of others, but deeply explore the culture we each carry with us every day. Banks laid the foundation for what all educators need to know about multiculturalism, including how applications can be made in the realm of art education.
Research Methods

The intention of this research was to develop tools to assist art educators in recognizing the differences between liberal and critical multicultural art education through a self-analysis of current lesson plans using curriculum-based action research. Action research was a logical approach because it can be defined as “A systemic approach to research inquiry aimed at understanding, changing, and/or improving pedagogical/professional practice” (Miraglia & Smilian, 2014, p.35). For my purposes, action research applied to curriculum development helped me advance the goals of multiculturalism by identifying ways in which liberal multiculturalism can be transformed into critical multiculturalism.

Subjects

Action research can be a form of self-reflective inquiry where art educators can “improve their rationality and justice of their practices, their understanding of these practices, and the setting in which the practices are carried out” (McKernan, 1987, p.8). In this case, a self-study of my own lessons was what McKernan refers to as “a systematic personal inquiry employing the scientific method to solve curriculum problems; participants have critical reflective ownership of both the process and the products of such inquiry” (McKernan, 1987, p.8). A self-study was a necessary starting point in creating new ways to see how and when critical multiculturalism can be applied to the art classroom. Since the intent of my research was to understand, and improve pedagogical practice, action research was the logical approach.

Research Focus

In order to understand how action research applied to curriculum design in this study, it is valuable to understand how I viewed curriculum design. Curriculum design referred to the ways in which educators deliver what needs to be known by our students. How do we package and
present the information students need to know? Curriculum design and development is a “planned, a purposeful, progressive and systematic process to create positive improvements in the educational system” (Mohanasundaram, 2018, p.4). Since I was applying critical multiculturalism to acquired lessons as well as my own, action research made sense because it “usually involves the study and enhancement of one’s own practice” (Buffington & McKay, 2013, p.38). Through the application of action research as a methodology to curriculum design, I was able to better understand ways to address instructional aims, learning experiences, realizations, and implementation of actions that need to be taken, that support the goal of elevating critical multiculturalism.

It is imperative that art educators as teacher-researchers do this work themselves, in their own classrooms with their own lessons, and share that research with other art educators. Stenhouse (1975) stated, “Each classroom should not be an island. Teachers working in such a tradition need to communicate with one another. They should report their work. Thus, a common vocabulary of concepts and syntax of theory need to be developed” (p.157). McKernan stated that Stenhouse linked teacher action research and a developmental approach to curriculum making by advocating for “teacher emancipation.” McKernan elaborated to say that Stenhouse prioritized a belief that teachers are researchers over the teacher role as the authority or expert, and that knowledge is “provisional and that research strengthens the teacher’s judgment and self-directed improvement of practice” (McKernan, 1987 p. 13). McKernan also highlighted that Stenhouse valued the focus of research on curriculum, because he identified it as the “medium through which knowledge is communicated” (1987).
Data Collection Procedures

The design of my research study was emergent and began with a plan to collect and analyze lessons available for free online as well as lessons I have authored. This informed how I was positioned as a curriculum writer in relation to the lessons and curriculum resources provided by the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE). Through this initial investigation, I determined next steps of the study where the results of the “early phases of data collection and analysis inform the later phases of the study” (Buffington & McKay, 2013 p. 51). I intended to combine methods of data collection through observation as a participant observer by collecting data from review of my own lesson plans, and as a nonparticipant observer by collecting data lesson plan resources provided by the FLDOE. Since I used an emergent design, I have documented findings consistently and thoughtfully to ensure the process of data collection reflects the action research methodology and the goal of providing a framework for art educators to apply to their implementations of their own or those provided to them.

Data Analysis Procedures

Action research is a “form of self-reflective problem solving which enables practitioners to better understand and solve pressing problems in social settings” (McKernan, 1987 p.6). Schools are social settings within which art educators have opportunities to implement critical multiculturalism concepts to address the pressing problems of society related to cultural misunderstandings. Through this action research study, I created a framework for art educators to identify and address areas in art education curriculum where critical multiculturalism can be applied.
Limitations

Multiculturalism, and associated topics are dense and vast. There are many concepts and theories that have emerged from similar studies that relate to ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity. Banks (2016) reinforced this plethora of concepts in this field of study by stating “Concepts such as multicultural education, critical multiculturalism, intercultural education, and antiracist education are sometimes used interchangeably and at other times used to describe different but interrelated programs and practices” (p. 71). I specifically focused my research on the ways in which I can implement strategies of critical multiculturalism through existing lessons. This is where I felt my work would the most helpful to art educators at large. I could have expanded my research to include Culturally Relevant Teaching, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy or Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, and Critical Race Theory, but those areas existed beyond my current scope of study.

The scope of my research is also limited to where action-based research can be applied specifically to curriculum design and lesson plans. The research conducted does not claim to be applicable to all types of learning environments or art classrooms but should be relevant to most.

Public Presentation of Research

To be realistic of my current ability to publicly present my research, I first intended to self-publish a printable single sheet, foldable zine for art educators to use that gives art educators real examples of how to review lesson plans with a critical lens and find opportunities to elevate liberal multiculturalism to critical multiculturalism. I subsequently decided that a fully digital version of the zine would also be useful to art educators. Additionally, the full finalized version of my research paper, digitally annotated lesson plans, the original version of the lesson plans,
instructions and recommendations for printing and folding the zine, were placed on my website for view.

With the organization of my findings, I felt confident presenting portions of the preliminary research in the form of a professional development session on August 4, 2020. The goal was to introduce other like-minded art educators in my district to the possibilities of critical multicultural art education, and ways to incorporate contemporary artists into multicultural art lessons. As a result of the first session, a follow up session of professional development was scheduled for next school year. Finally, I printed and delivered small batches of the zine to the art education departments of the two museums in my area in the hopes that they might be able to further share the research with art educators who visit the museum spaces.

Summary

My capstone research project set out to present the ways in which I documented the application of critical multiculturalism to existing lesson plans and lesson resources from the FLDOE. I expected to find areas where I failed to elevate the liberal multiculturalism, which did not engage students in critical analysis, to the more desirable realm of critical multiculturalism, where students begin to analyze positionality, historical frames of reference and social issues. By using my own lessons and being fully transparent in my own failures in multicultural curriculum writing, I illustrated the benefits of critical multicultural art education to art educators. Art educators could then analyze their own lessons, or lessons provided to them by their schools and/or school districts to elevate critical multicultural art education.

Utilizing what I have synthesized from scholars who have written on the topic of multiculturalism, such as Acuff, Banks, Delacruz, Desai, I was uniquely positioned as an in-service art educator to conduct this research effectively and provide pre-service and in-service art
educators with real examples of how critical multiculturalism can be applied to lessons to fundamentally alter their structure. This study highlighted the ways in which current curriculum and lessons fail to offer students opportunities to destabilize existing structures of power and authority through critical analysis of the cultures they bring with them, the positionality of the teachers who present cultures other than their own, and the status quo of historical frames of references in the study of art.

**Findings**

The starting point for this research was the Florida Department of Education website. Since my intention was to utilize accessible resources, I searched the public site fldoe.org for “art education resources.” This led me to a printable PDF document (see Figure 1) that was imbedded with 18 links for art educators to explore. Much of the preliminary research was consumed with searching each of these sites using the keyword “multicultural.” The goal for this search was to identify lesson plans for grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 that were labeled as multicultural, were a part of a curriculum guide identified as multicultural, or that I recognized as multicultural. Many of these links had great usable resources, for example _______, but did not include any reasonably structured lesson plans.

My exploration of the sites linked in the document provided by the FLDOE was useful in helping me understand my interest in examining structured lessons. While scholars such Elizabeth Manley Delacruz have reviewed websites that claim to provide art educators with multicultural art lessons my goal was not to review the sites, but to highlight and expose areas of opportunity to elevate critical multicultural art education in a selected set of lessons. The FLDOE page was embedded with a link to site The Art of Education University (theartofeducation.edu). Using the search bar on the homepage of this link I typed in
“multicultural.” There were 10 results from this simple search, with only one that seemed promising. This site was the only one from the FLDOE list that had lesson plans that fit the criteria of a structured lesson plan. Moving forward I realized I needed to broaden my search by casting a wider net, versus just utilizing the FLDOE links. Hoping that I wouldn’t become inundated with an impossible number of sites to research and dig through, I took my search to Google where I located two additional sites that provided me with suitable lesson plans for my
study. The sites were chosen based on accessibility. If the site charged fees or required a registration of any kind to obtain access to lessons, I moved on to the next site. It was important that I chose sites that provided lessons that were available to any art educator wanting to access them. I decided to search for my keyword “multicultural” on the site Kinder Art (kinderart.com) because the site seemed to cater to K-5 art educators. Subsequently, I chose the site Incredible Art Department (incredibleart.org), because it organized lessons by grade level, and included a section for high school multicultural art lessons. This enabled me to target lessons across all grade levels.

I then scoured my personal lesson plans. As an experienced art educator this process was humbling, and somewhat disappointing. The time I had spent researching the topic of critical multicultural art education had elevated my personal knowledge in a way that made me look back and feel I had missed the mark in previous lessons. Some of the lessons I had written were better than others and attempted to include positionality, authentic voice, and critical thinking but most were at best in the Ethnic Additive stage outlined by Banks (1988) which presented students with ethnic content but failed to integrate critical thinking.

In order to meet the objectives of my research questions, I limited my study to six lessons, one from each of the sites previously listed and three of my own lessons that I had written to examine for opportunities to elevate critical multiculturalism. From Kinder Art I chose a lesson titled “Kente Cloth Strips”, suitable for grades K-5. The search of the Art of Education University led me to a lesson titled “Aboriginal Art: Revisited, Researched and Revamped!”. Finally, from the Incredible Art Department site, I chose a lesson titled “Watercolor Chinese Lanterns.” My experience as an art educator has been dominated by teaching grades 6-8, but from my personal lesson plans I chose three lessons that I felt would coincide with various grade
levels. Considering a K-5 level, I chose a lesson I had written for students titled “Dia de los Muertos” a very popular theme for multicultural lessons on many of the websites and resources I searched. For grades 6-8 I chose a lesson from my archives titled “Martin Luther King” and a lesson I felt would be suitable for elevating for grades 9-12 was titled “Native American Heritage Unit”.

What I found after researching the six lesson plans, was that there are three fundamental actions that can be taken to elevate multicultural art lessons to critical multicultural art lessons. First, restructuring doesn’t mean completely rewriting your curriculum but instead requires art educators to purposefully reorganize content to improve effectiveness. Second, there should be an intentional shift in the objectives of multicultural lessons to prioritize mindset over mimicry. To explain, this would mean art educators focus less on students recreating cultural art or objects and instead focusing knowledge acquisition on the mindset and concepts of the art or art objects. Finally, emphasis in the art classroom should focus on the process of making, and idea generation versus the expectation of students creating an ideal product.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Restructure Doesn’t Mean Rewrite**

When I began teaching art, I made intentional efforts to create lessons I believed to be multicultural, and without a rigid district provided curriculum for K-12 art, I felt empowered to do so. Pouring over lessons throughout this research process was overwhelming and intimidating, and somewhat embarrassing. Looking back at some of the initial multicultural lessons I had written or altered from books, magazines, or online resources I felt like a failure. There were no attempts made that allowed students to question why they were looking at the art and art objects in my class. I selected the lessons that I felt were appropriate for the designated
grade levels that I wanted to review, and I began digitally annotating the lessons through a more critical lens. I asked myself, “If I were to teach or re-teach these lessons, how would I address and elevate multicultural art education to critical multicultural art education?”

Surprisingly, the lessons didn’t need complete rewrites, but precise and specific restructuring. Restructuring doesn’t mean rewrite. Restructure simply refers to a way to organize the information differently to strengthen its effectiveness, whereas a rewrite implies a need to scrap and start over. When art educators restructure lessons to include opportunities for students to critically question why they are studying a specific culture or artwork, then we are actively elevating liberal multiculturalism to critical multiculturalism.

**Opportunities to Elevate: Kente Cloth Strips**

But what did restructuring mean, and what could that look like? In the annotated version on the lesson Kente Cloth Strips (see Figure 2) I highlighted specific areas where the language of the lesson could be amended and restructured. For example, the lesson listed objectives under the categories of What, When, Why, and Where (see Figure 3). In each of these listed objectives the author refers to representation of African culture, heritage, and traditions. This is problematic for several reasons.

First, Africa is a continent with 54 separate countries, and several thousand distinct tribes with unique cultures. The homogenization of all these cultures into a singular African culture is misleading and inaccurate. The lesson briefly mentions Ghana and introduces the idea that Kente cloth is worn in America to denote African heritage, but the lesson never provokes critical thinking by asking whether and how the cloth might mean something different to the people of Ghana, versus people in the United States. Second, the lesson provides a limited and incomplete explanation of the symbolism of the cloth and doesn’t engage students to question how they
could include symbolic meaning in their artistic endeavors. The lesson focuses too much on the duplication of geometric patterns and colors, and not enough on the significance of the cloth to the people Ghana and fails to acknowledge distinct groups of people in Africa.

Figure 2. Page 1 of digitally annotated lesson plan retrieved from kinderart.com, written by Amy Shapley in May of 2012.

Opportunities to elevate this lesson could lie in the discussion component of the lesson as well as the art making and creating component. The discussion of the lesson is limited to highlighting the differences between geometric and organic shapes but could include simple thought-provoking questions that address symbolism. Older elementary students might engage in
a discussion about controversial issues surrounding the use or appropriation of Kente cloth, patterns, and designs. For example, Democratic congressmen and women were given Kente cloth to wear in a symbolic effort to promote legislation goals meant to improve equality for Black people in America. Younger elementary students can question how symbolic meaning changes when the cloth is worn by the people of Ghana, versus how Black communities in the United States have used the cloth to symbolize their own unique culture.
Students could also explore critical thinking through the art making portion of the lesson. Why not allow students to include creative expression and personal symbolism? This would provide students with a way to create a unique work of art inspired by the Kente cloth. Rather than intending to replicate a culture other than their own. The artwork could include colors, symbols, and designs that the students can interpret to be meaningful to their own culture, ethnicity, identity, race, gender, etc. This would allow a K-5 art educator to create exemplars that acknowledge their own positionality, vs. creating a project example that duplicates and represents a culture other than their own. By altering the discussion and artmaking portions of this lesson, students could question how a cloth from a country in Africa could come to symbolize a cultural movement in the United States, and incorporate personal symbolic meaning into an original work of art.

Restructuring for Discussion: Dia de los Muertos

In the K-5 lesson from my personal archives I looked for opportunities to restructure areas that failed to elevate to critical multiculturalism using the lesson on Dia de los Muertos (see Figure 4). Unfortunately, the celebration has become homogenized with annual celebrations in the United States of Halloween, and much of the cultural importance of the Mexican celebration has been lost in translation. With the release of the popular Disney film “Coco,” in 2017, many students have recently discovered a better understanding of the traditions associated with Dia de los Muertos, and almost every site I explored had some sort of lesson related to the topic.

I originally wrote the lesson in 2017, but the most recent version that I annotated was edited in 2019. While I can see an effort to create an engaging lesson that provided students with knowledge acquisition through a deeper process of understanding than the Kente Cloth Strips lesson, there were still opportunities to restructure. I included articles, videos, and activities on
Dia de los Muertos that introduced students to meaningful traditions of the celebration, and successfully allowed for authentic voices, people from Mexico, to speak and explain the importance of the holiday. I created a list of questions that provoked critical thinking and addressed homogenization by asking students to highlight key differences between Dia de los Muertos and Halloween, as well as asking students to elaborate on cultural traditions practiced during the Days of the Dead.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Art Lesson Plan</th>
<th>Date: August 22, 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Sarah Collins</td>
<td>School: Mandarin Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Name: Day of the Dead: Dia de los Muertos Ceramic Sugar Skulls</td>
<td>Grade(s): 6-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective: Students will be able to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will demonstrate an understanding of art history and culture by analyzing artistic styles, historical periods and a variety of cultures. The student develops an awareness and respect for the traditions and celebrations of diverse cultures. Students will learn about Mexican Folk Art and traditions through the study of the Day of the Dead holiday, and connect with the culture through learning about food, music, religion, art and craft.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Create a Dia de los Muertos mask using the slab and coil, hand building method.</td>
<td>1. Create a mask using the slab and coil, hand building method.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Use symmetry and other principles of design to develop a unique and balanced design.</td>
<td>2. Use symmetry and other principles of design to develop a unique and balanced design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Create a unique and individualized design utilizing learned principles, that resonates with each student.</td>
<td>3. Create a unique and individualized design utilizing learned principles, that resonates with each student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Use carving and stamping techniques to add a multimedia effect to the artwork.</td>
<td>4. Use carving and stamping techniques to add a multimedia effect to the artwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards:</td>
<td>Standards:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Education Goals &amp; Standards:</td>
<td>Art Education Goals &amp; Standards:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify historical and cultural influences on art and practice specific techniques to recognize ideas important to individual artists. Practice a specified skill, recognize similar ideas in other works of art.</td>
<td>Identify historical and cultural influences on art and practice specific techniques to recognize ideas important to individual artists. Practice a specified skill, recognize similar ideas in other works of art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE ESSENTIAL AND HIGHER ORDER QUESTIONS ACHIEVE HOMOGENIZATION OF DIA DE LOS MUERTOS &amp; HALLOWEEN, AND REQUIRE STUDENTS TO CONSTRUCT KNOWLEDGE THAT IS INFERRED</td>
<td>THE ESSENTIAL AND HIGHER ORDER QUESTIONS ACHIEVE HOMOGENIZATION OF DIA DE LOS MUERTOS &amp; HALLOWEEN, AND REQUIRE STUDENTS TO CONSTRUCT KNOWLEDGE THAT IS INFERRED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Annotated lesson plan suitable for K-5 written and annotated to elevate areas of opportunity to critical multiculturalism.
The opportunities for restructuring the lesson to elevate it to critical multiculturalism existed in the artmaking, and the lack of discussion. Although the questions were developed to provoke critical thinking, I had students respond to the questions in written form. I failed to realize how much more useful a moderated discussion would be to not only provide students with a deeper, more thorough acquisition of knowledge, but could have also allowed for students who were Mexican, or Mexican American an opportunity to discuss their culture in their words. I failed to include the authentic voices of the students in the classroom.

In the art making process students were asked to create tokens of Dia de los Muertos such as ceramic sugar skulls, paper Calavera masks, Nichos, and Papel Picados. All of which were very easy to display in the hallway, and very aesthetically pleasing. None of the art objects we made were unique or included personal meaning for the students. Most of the artworks for this lesson required the use of templates, which limited student creativity. The opportunity to elevate to critical multiculturalism would have included a way for students to acquire knowledge of the traditions of the celebration, while also creating a way to democratically construct meaning for themselves. Restructuring the questions into a discussion could have led to the students deciding what objects related to the holiday they felt connected to, and materials could have been more accessible in order to inspire creativity without mimicry.

**Mindset Over Mimicry**

Throughout my art education there were numerous occasions where I was instructed to copy other artists work as a way of learning and building my technique. What didn’t occur to me at the time was that I wasn’t really learning anything about the content of the work I was copying, just the way in which the work was made. My research of critical multicultural art lessons clarified my opinion that mimicry-based art lessons are not an ideal process of artmaking
when teaching specifically about culture.

Critical multicultural art lessons should allow students to question their mindset of the culture being presented. Mindset and mentality are related to how students build and acquire knowledge. If narratives are limited, student attitudes toward the culture being presented are likely to be limited as a result. If knowledge acquisition of a culture is done through an art lesson, the content should be explored through questioning and discussion, not by copying or duplicating art or art objects of a group of people. Copying and mimicry should not be prioritized over content integration of a culture and can often heighten misconceptions of a culture.

**Individual Artists and Interconnectedness: Aboriginal Art: Revisited, Researched, and Revamped**

The lesson Aboriginal Art: Revisited, Researched, and Revamped, was more of a guide to how to create an engaging experience with students than a traditional lesson plan but was structured enough to utilize. The author, Lindsey Moss, explained her process of unpacking Aboriginal art in a way that challenged western Eurocentric structures in the art world, as well as what she previously knew about the art of the Aboriginal people of Australia. In my opinion, this was an example of lesson planning that is elevating critical multiculturalism, without centering the art educator as expert on a culture other than their own.

Within the first few sections of the lesson the author provided some history of aboriginal art, acknowledged Eurocentric narratives, highlighted the value of historical accuracy, and stated that art educators should “deeply understand and correctly present both past and present to give our students the whole picture” (Moss, 2017). The lesson read more like a set of best practices and did not present step by step instructions for mimicry-based art projects (see Figure 5). This lesson built the readers knowledges of Aboriginal Art from a historical perspective, which
decentralized western narratives, and then provided the art educator with an ideal starting point that includes resources with authentic voices.

Figure 5. Annotated lesson plan written by Lindsey Moss, retrieved from The Art of Education website.

Important critical multicultural takeaways from this lesson were to strive to acknowledge individual artists, not just a cultural art form, and to explore ideas of interconnectedness.

The lesson provided entry points for presenting Aboriginal art to students and unpacked the “tendency to focus on the “other” as a whole group”, further stating “When we explore painting in the Western tradition, we honor makers as individual artists by name. Why shouldn’t this be true of Aboriginal artists as well?” (Moss, 2017). This would be an example of critical multiculturalism lesson planning, because it questions the power of the Eurocentric canon of art history, while simultaneously addressing cultural subjugation. This critical thinking develops a mindset with students that prioritizes cultural understanding of Aboriginal art and artists over
creating cute replicas of the style without a deeper knowledge of the culture, in other words mindset over mimicry. How we think about Aboriginal art and artists is curated without attempting to duplicate specific artworks.

Figure 6. Annotated excerpts from lesson plan displaying the sections explaining Aboriginal story lines, written by Lindsay Moss retrieved from The Art of Education website.

A portion of the lesson discussed the importance of Aboriginal song lines. In Aboriginal culture sacred stories are passed from one generation to the next as large “song cycles”. A specific group of Aboriginal people are custodians or caretakers of a particular area of land with a specific song line telling the creation story that relates to that area. Neighboring areas will have continuations of song lines that relate to the ancestors that served as custodians to their land. The author explained how paintings are made from this symbolic oral history. This concept related to interconnectedness and a mindset of cooperative learning that valued contributions of individuals
to the whole. The lesson concluded with a suggestion for how this could be realized and
translated into an art project that focuses on students creating an individual symbolic work of art.
The smaller artwork would become part of a larger whole where predetermined edges or borders
might connect to form a collaborative finished piece.

**Meaningful Artmaking: MLK Lesson**

Every year I have taught the same cultural lesson regarding Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. before or after the annual Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. I started this practice early on in my teaching career to highlight the importance of this prominent figure of the Civil Rights Movement in America. One of the more unexpected findings as a result of this research is connected to this lesson (see Figure 7) and how it existed at the most basic level of multiculturalism Banks described as the Contributions Approach and the Ethnic Additive Approach.

The most obvious area of opportunity to elevate critical multiculturalism in this lesson was within the insertion of the content into an otherwise unrelated area of study. There was no meaningful attempt to intentionally connect the work or Dr. King to the art curriculum. Without a deeper and broader understanding of the current events of the era in which Dr. King was alive and fighting for the rights of all Americans, the lesson failed to reach the level of critical multiculturalism. Too much of the content of this lesson expressed the values of the dominant culture, which in hindsight and as a result of my research I understand now, prevented me from teaching critical multiculturalism. Diverse voices and minority groups should not be represented only during specific months or designated holidays. Minority groups, artists, and creators should more appropriately be incorporated throughout the curriculum. The Martin Luther King holiday shouldn’t be used just to introduce his philosophies on freedom and equality, but also as an
opportunity to highlight the tokenization of individuals to be representatives for an entire culture or group of people.

The prioritization of the mindset of the lesson, such as the themes of equality and justice, the inclusion of authentic voice, and the presentation of the material was in fact somewhat successful. The lesson was not focused on recreating the art of a culture, but instead focused primarily on concepts and ideas presented by Dr. King that represented the experiences of a particular group of people at a particular time in history.

![Figure 7](image-url) Annotated lesson from personal archive, written initially to be complete annually before or after the MLK holiday.
First, the students and I read aloud together the Dr. King speech titled “What is your Life’s Blueprint.” After reading the abbreviated version together, students watched Dr. King deliver the speech in its entirety to a group of middle school aged students at Barratt Junior High in Philadelphia on October 26, 1967, less than six months before his assassination. The inclusion of both versions of the speech in the lesson, highlighted the ways in which text can be altered, and how sources can be unreliable. For example, the written version is much shorter, did not mention that the students Dr. King was addressing were all black, and it excluded entire sections that specifically referenced the Black experience in America including the following passage.

Now that means that you should not be ashamed of your color. You know it’s very unfortunate that it in so many instances, our society has placed a stigma on the Negros color. You know that some Negros who are ashamed of themselves. But, don’t be ashamed of your color. Don’t be ashamed of your biological features. Somehow you must be able to say in your own lives and really believe it, I am black but beautiful. And, believe it… And, therefore you need not be lured into purchasing cosmetics advertised to make you lighter. Neither do you need to process your hair to make it appear straight. I have good hair and it’s as good as anybody else’s hair in the world. And, we gotta believe that.

In the written speech the authenticity of Dr. King’s words is challenged and misrepresented. Eliminating evidence of who the speech was intended for is troublesome. In order understand the mindset of the speech, it is critical be aware of who he was speaking to. It is imperative that students know that the speech was intended for and delivered to Black students, and the written version, although very powerful, omitted that very critical detail.
The art making portion of this lesson didn’t focus on mimicry of the art or art objects of a particular culture, but it also didn’t allow for students to be expressive. The lesson didn’t present the Pop Art Movement in detail or connect the art world to the social justice movement. Instead, it just required students to use a prefabricated color by number template (see Figure 8) that I made of Dr. King’s image to create MLK Pop Art style portraits. A more meaningful art making activity, might have been to allow students to create a work of art inspired by how the speech made them feel or students could have been prompted to create a visual artwork that illustrated their personal life’s blueprint, or their plan for their future.

Figure 8. Color by number Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. template used as the artmaking aspect of MLK lesson from personal archives.
Process Over Product: Producing Ideas not Ideals

In my experience art departments and art educators are often tasked with beautifying the school through the display of student artwork. The products of multicultural art lessons can be aesthetically pleasing to put on display, but the appropriation through recreation of art and art objects that represent a culture can be damaging to the student experience. When art educators prioritize the product of artmaking over the processes of artmaking and interpretation, the valuable concepts of the content become secondary to the creation of an object that effectively mimics the culture presented to students. The process of working out ideas generated from discussions that critique and question power, are more effective in elevating critical multiculturalism, than creating tokenizing, possibly culturally appropriated objects that look nice decorating school hallways.

The learning environment of a classroom that is actively engaged in critical multiculturalism should be focused more on the production of ideas and not the production of an ideal. The type of art or art objects produced from liberal multicultural art lessons, that focus on duplicating a culture or one object or art type to represent an entire group of people, can typically be very pleasing to look at, but without questioning and critical thinking they will never achieve the mission of critical multiculturalism. Concentrating more on the process of art making over the product students create, elevates critical thinking in general through the process of making mistakes, troubleshooting and then self-correcting. In my experience this leads to a more meaningful acquisition of knowledge for students.

Harmful Homogenization: Watercolor Chinese Lanterns

The lesson on Watercolor Chinese Lanterns immediately appeared to be poorly researched, too focused on the product and limited the process to set materials that overly
prioritizes an ideal. After dissecting each section of this lesson, it was hard for me to believe that the author was representing her own culture or acknowledging her positionality in relation to any Asian culture. This lesson was woefully misrepresenting and homogenizing multiple, distinct cultures. The objectives of a lesson plan are meant to explain the intent of the lesson, and this lesson immediately failed to acknowledge or mention any connection between lanterns and Chinese culture (see Figure 9). The lesson almost immediately interchanged the terms Asian with Chinese which was highly problematic. Asia is a continent that includes Russia, India, Pakistan, Japan and over forty other countries. How do lanterns connect to all those different cultures? And even if lanterns did connect to all the cultures in Asia, why is the lesson titled Watercolor Chinese Lanterns?
Figure 9. Annotated lesson highlighting many problematic areas of a lesson pulled from the Incredible Art Department website.

The process section of the lesson was dominated with instructions that were meant to guide students into producing the exact same form, without any emphasis on critical thinking or creative expression. The technical aspects of constructing the lanterns could have just as much symbolic meaning as the imagery, but that also is not addressed. Is the process for constructing the lanterns related to the symbolism of the lanterns?

The resources section of the lesson (see Figure 10) only further the homogenization and confusion of which culture was actually being presented to the students. The lesson continued to interchange Asian with Chinese but then also introduced resources relating to Japanese and Hawaiian culture. Although there are historical and cultural connections between China and...
Japan, there is no questioning, and no opportunity for students to think critically about how the two separate countries may have had intertwined histories. These resources were listed under the heading Project Requirements, but there are no prompts or instructions on how or why the references might have been useful.

**The Process of Engaging: Native American Heritage Unit**

In November of 2018 I wrote a lesson meant to promote awareness of November being designated Native American Heritage month. I searched the internet looking for interesting lessons and art projects that focused on indigenous people in the United States. Although this lesson was written for grades 6-8, the content would be well suited to grades 9-12. Upon initial review of the lesson, it seemed incomplete at best, and was indicative of what I think good intentions and bad execution look like (see Figure 11). The heart of the lesson was sincere in its attempt to acknowledge positionality by using the authentic voice of the Alutiiq people from the Pacific Northwest region of America and the film posed questions that engaged critical thinking. It neglected, however, to engage students in discussion and placed emphasis on the creation of a single product to represent multiple cultures. A truly democratic classroom would have facilitated and encouraged classroom discussion to share and challenge ideas amongst peers and a critical multicultural art making experience would not tokenize a group of unique and varied cultures.

The most obvious and embarrassing failure was in the lack of connection between the Alutiiq people and the totem pole art project (see Figure 12). This was clearly a homogenization of separate Indigenous cultures. There was no connection made nor is there one to be made, between the Alutiiq people of the Pacific Northwest presented to students in the film “Keep
Talking,” and the tribes in the Pacific Northwest that create Totem Poles. The film was focused on the culture surrounding language and the connections between generations who still speak native languages and the ones who are trying to preserve it. A much more appropriate and process driven activity might have been for students to engage with parents, grandparents or guardians about the differences in language between the generations. Students could then translate those conversations into artworks that utilize text and imagery to express these
differences. The process of engaging in an art making experience with ancestors would create deeper meaning in the artwork produced by students.

Figure 12. Totem Pole activity template. Retrieved from and printed from unknown source in 2018.

Recommendations

My initial research question was, “How do the lessons I create, address and elevate multicultural art education to critical multicultural art education?” The response, unfortunately,
was that they didn’t. It was with that sentiment in mind that I constructed recommendations to think more critically about the content presented to students. Ask yourself meaningful and thoughtful questions on how the aspects of the lessons that you write, or use are representing a culture other than your own. Some questions to consider might be 1) How do I provide my students with opportunities to critically question the artwork they are exposed to in my classroom? 2) How can critical multiculturalism be implemented at my grade level? 3) How do I allow students to experience culture in my classroom, and are the narrative I present singular or diverse?

Look for lessons that have culturally rich content, rather than cute cookie cutter art projects. Educate yourself and your colleagues on areas in curriculum that need to be restructured. Create a classroom environment that values mindset and concept over mimicry when teaching critical multicultural art lessons. Avoid homogenizing unique cultures by lumping them into one category because it is Black History Month or Native American Heritage Month. Make a genuine effort to show diversity within a culture and avoid tokenizing an individual or an object.

Out of the six lessons presented in this research, only Aboriginal Art Revisited suggested incorporating individual artists into lessons when teaching about a culture, especially when teaching a culture other than your own. I recommend art educators consistently include individual artists associated with the culture throughout the curriculum or lesson. This counteracts homogenization by showing unique experiences within a designated culture. Allow for students to approach the art making process that synthesizes symbolism and ideas without constructing strict parameters for an ideal outcome. Looking at artists work in lieu of looking at exemplars can help prioritize process over product.
Conclusion

Critical multiculturalism needs the support of art educators to analyze curriculum and lessons for areas of opportunity to elevate. My review of lessons I designed demonstrates how even the most intentional art educators struggle to present students with meaningful and engaging multicultural art lessons that encourage critical thinking. Through the process of analyzing lesson plans I have presented art educators with three key points to elevating liberal multiculturalism to critical multiculturalism; restructuring doesn’t mean rewriting, mindset over mimicry, and process over product.

Restructuring a lesson does not mean completely starting over from scratch. Art educators should never be teaching the same exact multicultural lesson every year, because we should be constantly evolving and expanding our knowledge of what critical multiculturalism is. Restructuring means consistently analyzing previously taught lessons in order to identify areas of opportunity to elevate. Reprioritizing discussions over written responses provides students with a platform to work out ideas that critically analyze the content they are being presented with.

Critical multiculturalism includes connections to the concepts in the artwork of individual artists and a mindset of interconnectedness to avoid mimicry and tokenization. Art educators should reconsider art projects that are focused on making copies of objects from a culture. In place of such project’s art educators should allow for meaningful artmaking practices that encourage students to construct knowledge through critical thinking and creative expression. Mimicry can be useful when teaching technical skills, but mindset, attitudes, and perspectives are more valuable to a student’s knowledge acquisition and construction when teaching a specific culture.
The process of artmaking should always be preferred over the creation of a specific product when teaching critical multicultural art lessons. When an outcome is predetermined student creativity and expression is limited. Ideas are more valuable in the art classroom that reproducing ideal examples of an artwork or art object. Art educators should be extremely critical of lessons that focus on the creation of an ideal product and homogenize several cultures into one. The process of artmaking should engage students in exploration of ideas, critical questions, problem solving and ultimately creation through inspiration.

Critical multiculturalism can be a difficult subject to tackle. Art educators must rethink, reanalyze, and revaluate lessons every time they introduce a culture other than their own to students. This process of elevating critical multiculturalism includes a lot of self-analyzation and is an ongoing practice that should not be viewed as a one size fits all approach to teaching culture. The content taught in the art classroom is deeply embedded with culture, there is no way to avoid teaching it. If art educators acknowledge positionality and allow for authentic voices the challenges of restructuring lessons, and the processes of reprioritizing mindset and process may be less intimidating.
References


List of Figures with Figure Captions

Figure 1. The Florida Department of Education list of resources for art educators available as a PDF document with embedded links.

Figure 2. Page 1 of digitally annotated lesson plan retrieved from kinderart.com, written by Amy Shapley in May of 2012.

Figure 3. Page 2 of digitally annotated lesson plan retrieved from kinderart.com, written by Amy Shapley in May of 2012.

Figure 4. Annotated lesson plan suitable for K-5 written and annotated to elevate areas of opportunity to critical multiculturalism.

Figure 5. Annotated lesson plan written by Lindsey Moss, retrieved from The Art of Education website.

Figure 6. Annotated excerpts from lesson plan displaying the sections explaining Aboriginal story lines, written by Lindsay Moss retrieved from The Art of Education website.

Figure 7. Annotated lesson from personal archive, written initially to be complete annually before or after the MLK holiday.

Figure 8. Color by number Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. template used as the artmaking aspect of MLK lesson from personal archives.

Figure 9. Annotated lesson highlighting many problematic areas of a lesson pulled from the Incredible Art Department website.

Figure 10. Page two of the lesson Watercolor Chinese Lanterns, annotated to highlight opportunities to elevate to critical multiculturalism.

Figure 11. Annotated lesson plan from personal archives.
Author Biography

Sarah Colado (She/Her) is an artist and educator living in Jacksonville, Florida. She obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Painting, Drawing and Printmaking with a minor in Art History from the University of North Florida in 2014. In October 2014, Sarah began her career as an art educator at Mandarin Middle School in Jacksonville, Florida and transitioned to Atlantic Coast High School in 2021. Her experience in the classroom has focused on teaching fundamentals of drawing and painting with students in 2-dimensional art courses including development of imagery from observations and from references. She has also taught 3-Dimensional art with a focus on the four sculpture techniques of carving, casting, modeling, and assembling. Her students are provided with an art education that combines a structured learning environment, and creative expression with self and peer critiques. Her strong background in art history directs her educational philosophy and practice through implementation of studio focused lessons reinforced with culturally relevant and historical perspectives.

In 2017 Sarah began work as an art educator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville, teaching courses in sculpture, ceramics, fibers, and textiles, drawing and painting as well as printmaking during the summer art programs. Sarah has explored adult education at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in 2018 as an assistant educator, teaching fundamental techniques in drawing. Sarah also completed the artist residency Pentaculum, at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in January of 2019. Sarah has participated in group shows nationally and regionally, had solo exhibitions of her work and maintains a studio practice at CoRK Arts District in Jacksonville, Florida. Her work as an artist marries the use of collage, paint, printmaking and digital illustration techniques that focus on perceptions of identity and gender-based roles in society, symbolic objects and personal narrative.