

Title: Exploring Processes of Artmaking to Enhance Understandings of Identity and Culture

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ARE 6641 Independent Project

Overview

Play and imagination were very important to my childhood and led to my abilities to creatively problem solve in my daily life. Just as life is a process, all learned abilities at all developmental ages have processes. Where I am now as a forty-year old college student, I am still working through processes in life to understand my own identity. I am aware that I need to investigate my own heritage and culture to better understand the many diverse cultures in our world. I know that I will never fully understand each culture, but finding appreciation within them can directly affect who I am on a moral level with respect to all humanity. I am finding that although I was born and have remained in America my entire life without ever leaving the country, I have been influenced by my parents' culture experiences that directly affected their beliefs and values which have directly influenced my life and have helped shaped me into the person I am today. There is a knowing that I have not nurtured my understandings and appreciation which concerns me. And so the process of culture appreciation and becoming culturally responsive must begin with self appreciation and understanding.

This project is the beginning of my process in investigating a critical action unit plan I created to find identity while exploring self culture and other cultures through researching an artist, their story and meanings within their work. Most of my research involves story telling so my final work will be in respect with storytelling as a narrative. In tapping into the gift of memories, I reflect on my own childhood through adolescence to better connect with my

students. A child learning to explore the world can feel unfamiliar and isolating. My hope is that through this process of connecting with my memories and stories to better understand my own beliefs and values, I can use my personal experiences to re-think and enhance the unit plan to create more meaningful experiences and encourage play and imagination for my students while providing them the tools to welcome unfamiliar territories and use art as a meaningful way to navigate and explore the world around them.

It is of professional and personal interest to investigate the processes of artmaking especially storytelling in relation to identity and culture so that I can develop necessary skills to educate students in a diverse classroom to promote awareness of self and others with the intention of teaching students the skills to be sensitive and compassionate members in society in hopes to create change in humanity. Art is a perfect platform to address many societal, national and global issues and can promote awareness to help students be expressive and form thoughts on what the issues mean to them through the process of artmaking. Issues related to race, ethnicity and culture are still very apparent today on a global scale. Using artmaking to address these issues within communities can begin to form change at the societal level. My investigation to exploring self and others contains personal reflection, researching scholarly articles with knowledge on these issues through lesson plans, experiences, examining classrooms, training pre-service teachers, museum and community collaborations and exploring artist processes.

Key Methods & Understandings

My article research began with examining ideas on culturally responsive teaching and examining student's life experiences in relation to the role of culture and race and how they may be different from our own experiences. Lee (2012) explained "that race is socially constructed-a phenomenon invented by our society distinguished between race, ethnicity, and culture" (p.49).

Lee (2012) defines ethnicity as “shared common cultural traits, such as language, religion, and dress” and culture is “a set of learned beliefs, values, and behaviors, a way of life shaped by members of society” (p.49). The differences in these can sometimes be difficult to discuss in classrooms and not acknowledging them can be seen as a color-blind socialization process. Lee (2012) stated that “Critical discussion about race, racism, and color-blindness can help teachers bridge the cultural divide between themselves and their diverse students” (p.40). In considering my thoughts on discussing race, I have found that I do feel uncomfortable because I am not completely cultural proficient. In acknowledging my lack of cultural proficiencies and possibly the students, I am understanding the importance of utilizing class dialogue in a thoughtful way to welcome discussion on these areas to build my knowledge as well as the students. Skillfully finding appropriate approaches to promote these discussions will later result in visual work that communicates our understandings, connections and meaning of the world which is incredibly important in fostering transformative learning.

Ballengue-Morris & Stuhr (2001) stated that “Individual’s varied experiences within the history, heritage, tradition, and culture of the social groups of which they are part are what produce diversity” (p.7). In researching ways to promote conversations in the classroom, we learn of an approach called Multicultural Education Approach which Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr (2001) stated that this approach “is the most popular term used by educators to describe working with students who are different because of age, gender or sexuality, social and economic class, exceptionality, geographic location, religion, political status, language, ethnicity, and race” (p.8). It is a student interest driven approach with curriculum examples geared toward key concepts and essential questions relevant for students on issues facilitated by teachers through shared discussions and investigating a topic related to the student’s cultural identity level.

Exploring approaches to promote a welcoming and non-judgmental classroom discussion can then lead into visual artmaking lessons and processes that further enrich student's views of identity and culture appreciation. Song (2009) stated "the arts are a core component of multicultural education because throughout the history of human existence, culture and experience have remained alive in "the bosom' of the arts" (p.20). Visual art lessons in the classroom can help students of all cultures and of dual cultural affiliations to find self-understanding and expression in investigation processes. In Pellish (2012) we learn of using memory and experiences to connect with their present and future in the classroom through narrative artmaking as a way for students to form their identities at an early age. Using a timeline of the history of art is a great example of how to construct one's own timeline and explore the different events that helped shape who we are. Classroom participation in identity lessons and sharing among students helps create connections and understandings of one another and their cultures. Beyersdorf (2014) stated that "understanding and accepting who we are, we are able to develop sensitivity to others and become non-judgmental and compassionate to others".

Reflecting on lesson examples that incorporate cultural identities and improving my approaches, my focus is shifting towards what students are interested in throughout my research. Ward (2010) shared that meaning and substance are what students are thirsty for and that students deserve more than learning technical skill based instruction but focusing on big ideas for students to communicate their self-identities (p.48). Ideas of student interests moves me toward popular media culture and how these interests shape students identities. If I am planning a unit on identities and cultures, I need to consider the sources that students will turn to in developing their artwork. Perkins & Andaloro (2008) provided examples on photography as a narrative by use of storytelling and ways that students can examine and investigate their perspectives on

popular culture images and how to interpret hidden messages. It is vital as an art educator to help students become critical thinkers of what images mean. Becoming culturally responsive in teaching practices is essential. Powell (2012) explained that “aesthetic production and experiences of cultural groups can be studied by focusing on the maker of art as well as the socio-cultural context in which it was produced” (p.35).

Artmaking Process

Focusing on an artist is one aspect of the critical action plan I created that my investigations will help me in revising. In keeping an artist in my thoughts as I researched, I came across Pablo Cano. One aspect by Sickler-Voigt (2011) was the use of appropriation in Cano’s work. Cano’s work is influenced by stories his mother told him about a boy that was at a museum viewing master works of art and wanted to hang his artwork up on the wall as well. He creates puppets for marionette production made from recycled found objects which are inspired by 10 master artists. He completely altered the appearance and original artworks function so as not to engage in copyright infringements. This article showed examples of art appropriation and essential questions to ask students in discussion on the topic. Cano’s storytelling of his homeland in Cuba through artmaking prompted me to use him as an artist to research for my unit plan to share with students my own personal experiences.

Reflection

Through my research on culturally responsive teaching related to identity and culture, the processes of artmaking, I have further understandings on race, ethnicity and culture, my identity and the role I play in art education, recognized biases and learning to remove color-blind lenses to become culturally proficient, ways to promote a healthy and safe class dialogue atmosphere, the importance of student-interest based lessons, resources on different classroom

approaches to better create personal experiences, ways to address popular culture resources, appropriation, and enhanced essential questions for lessons. All of these new or re-newed understandings are processes that will help me grow on a professional and personal level which will guide me into a better, more culturally responsive art educator. I am often reminded in humble ways that students and teachers can learn these processes together and by doing so we are creating unintentional and sometimes profound life- long meaningful experiences in the moment.

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