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Art teachers can work toward changing the power dynamics in their classrooms by using a student-centered approach, as demonstrated by an example lesson about contemporary painter Kehinde Wiley.

Power Play: Rethinking Roles in the Art Classroom

MELANIE L. BUFFINGTON

As I watched the student teacher's lesson unfold, I was quite proud of his lesson introduction. He chose the contemporary artist Kehinde Wiley as the focus artist for the unit and began the lesson with an insightful student-centered discussion of Wiley's work that involved and intrigued the middle school students. As the class unpacked the idea of power prevalent in Wiley's portraits, the students gave relevant examples of how power was evident and exhibited in Wiley's works, their lives, school, and the media they enjoyed. The students related examples germane to their cultures, and readily made connections between Wiley's work and the older source images. The students were excited, engaged, and enthusiastically learning about Kehinde Wiley's work and the notion of power. The student teacher engaged the middle-schoolers in this student-centered activity through the use of open-ended questions, and he acted as a facilitator rather than an authority figure. He led the students in identifying aspects of the figures in Wiley's paintings that showed their power, including their clothing and accessories, their stances, their gestures, and their facial expressions. This discussion exemplified what Hesser (2009) discussed as a form of shared responsibility between the teacher and the students and relates to Andrews' (2010) discussion of student-centered learning.



Kehinde Wiley, *Judith and Holofernes*, 2012, oil on linen, 120 x 90 in. © Kehinde Wiley. Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly, New York, NY.

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When it came time for the artmaking portion of the lesson, the student teacher focused on the technical skill of portraiture and the students were assigned to take a magazine, find an image of a face, divide it in half, and copy it realistically. Here the student teacher chose to implement a conventional teacher-centered lesson with a traditional exercise. It was as if the discussion of power never happened and seemed to be a bait-and-switch moment. In the first portion of the lesson, many students eagerly participated, responding to questions and asking questions of their own. This went from being a student-centered lesson to being a teacher-centered lesson with the student teacher acting as an authority figure and little or no opportunity for the middle school students to offer input or make meaning.

In thinking about this student teacher's lesson, he essentially added a contemporary introduction, what I call a "big idea Band-Aid," to a traditional teacher-centered artmaking lesson that was designed to elicit school art (Efland, 1976). Thus, he taught the middle-schoolers in a way that was likely similar to how he learned. This perpetuates traditional notions and continues to reinforce the teacher as the authority figure and students as passive receptors of knowledge. While his introduction was student-centered, highly motivating, insightful, and culturally relevant, the artmaking portion of the lesson was not. It seemed as if the goal of making art in this instance was to teach students a technical skill and create a product in one class period, with the teacher remaining in the most powerful role. By adding a contemporary artist and a discussion of power at the beginning of the lesson, the student teacher did not fundamentally change the lesson to be student-centered. Further, the student teacher seemed unaware of the many disconnects occurring in the classroom. For instance, most of the middle-schoolers were students of color and the magazines that he brought contained few images of people of color. This situation could have been noted by the student teacher, leading to a discussion of power and stereotyping in advertising imagery (Martinez, 2012)—or he could have chosen magazines that had a wider range of images. The students who were highly engaged at the beginning of the lesson seemed to be merely following

directions and to grow less interested in the artmaking portion of this class.

As art educators we have made strides in expanding our knowledge of artists of a variety of cultural backgrounds. Many universities now require, or at least encourage, preservice art teachers to take non-Western art history or contemporary art courses. Discussions of multicultural teaching are common in art education and multicultural topics frequently appear in this journal and others (Ballengee-Morris & Taylor, 2005; Delacruz, 2009; Kuster, 2006; Lai, 2012; Lee, 2012; Martinez, 2012; Millman, 2010; Powell, 2012; Song, 2009). Because of the diversity present in the United States, this is an important topic that we need to continue to explore in increasing depth. The purpose of this article is to describe ideas related to curriculum and pedagogy and explore what culturally relevant pedagogy might look like in art education. This article concludes with some ideas and resources for art teachers to begin adding more culturally relevant teaching practices to their pedagogical methods. I offer suggestions of how teachers can work to change the power relationships in their classrooms, using Kehinde Wiley's work—in which power is a strong theme—as an example. Throughout this article, my references to power relate to the power in the classroom and the shift from teacher-centered classrooms in which the teacher holds all the power and knowledge to student-centered classrooms in which teachers and students share power (Andrews, 2010). This shift may also help in moving toward a culturally responsive pedagogy.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

In my teaching, college students often focus on the curriculum rather than how they will teach their students. Art teachers frequently have in-service days or attend museum workshops or conferences where they learn about new artists or new lessons. In general terms, curriculum refers to what we teach—the content of our lessons and units—and is usually guided by curriculum standards at the district, state, or national level. Pedagogy refers to how we teach—the teaching strategies that we choose. If you are introducing students to a new artmaking technique, do you lecture on this new skill, show students a video, give a demonstration, have them

explore the technique on their own and find ways that it might be useful, or have students research the technique? Or do you combine multiple ways to help them learn? Just as there are countless curriculum topics within art education, there are also countless ways to teach and a wide range of pedagogical methods embraced by different art educators. It is the combination of the *what* (curriculum) and the *how* (pedagogy) of teaching that is crucial to culturally relevant teaching.

Art Teaching and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

According to Banks (2008), the multicultural education movement grew out of the Civil Rights Movement as a way to help students of color learn about their heritage and be represented in the curriculum. Over the last 50 years, the concept has expanded and Banks characterizes its goals with the following:

A major goal of multicultural education is to provide all students with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed to function within their community cultures, within the mainstream culture, and within and across other cultures.... Another major goal of multicultural education is to reduce the pain and discrimination that members of some ethnic and racial groups experience because of their unique racial, physical, and cultural characteristics. (p. 3)

In one of his earlier articles on multicultural education, Banks (1991) explains the dimensions of multicultural education as including content integration, knowledge construction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture. Later, Banks (2008) added another dimension: prejudice reduction. It is the combination of these areas that form multicultural education. What he referred to as "an equity pedagogy" (p. 4) is what Ladson-Billings (1995, 2006) and others call culturally relevant pedagogy. Both terms refer to practices teachers can utilize to promote the achievement of all students. Banks is also careful to point out that multicultural education is not opposed to teaching about the dominant group. Multicultural advocates believe there are many important stories that students need to learn, including the stories of the variety of



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Kehinde Wiley, *The Tribute Money II*, 2012, oil on canvas, 96 x 72 in.
©Kehinde Wiley. Courtesy of the
artist and Sean Kelly, New York, NY.

peoples in the US. Nieto and Bode (2012) write that multicultural education does more than affirm identities; it also challenges the ways that power and privilege circulate in various cultures.

Ladson-Billings is frequently cited as one of the originators of the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy. This outgrowth of multiculturalism relates to “pedagogy that [empowered] students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp. 17-18). Specifically, Ladson-Billings (1995) elaborates that culturally relevant teaching is “committed to

collective, not merely individual, empowerment” (p. 160). She writes that,

Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (p. 160)

Ideas in Practice

In the above example of the student teacher’s lesson, I argue that his lesson achieved the goal that he set; students

created realistic drawings that matched the images from the magazines. This points to another area where his lesson could have been improved: clear objectives. If the student teacher had clearly articulated objectives and followed them, he may have been better able to intertwine the learning about power and the technical skill of portraiture. While his lesson was a way to have students learn facial proportions, an exercise like this as an end result does not represent many contemporary goals for artmaking in K-12 schools (Gude, 2013). Walker (2001) clearly explicates the idea of artmaking as meaning making and how teachers can guide students through understanding a big idea. This student

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teacher did a nice job of guiding them through the big idea, but the connection to the artmaking was where the objectives went awry. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) describe big ideas as overarching concepts central to a unit that help learners connect their knowledge in meaningful ways. Further, Wiggins and McTighe espouse the idea of backward design, or curriculum planning with the end learning in mind. When teachers utilize these curriculum concepts, it can help prevent the fragmentation of knowledge. In the above example, it does not appear that the student teacher considered what the students would be learning and did not engage in planning with the end goal in mind. Later, Stewart and Walker (2005) explain the need to combine both technical and conceptual skills in artmaking. I believe all these contemporary ideas work well within the context of culturally relevant pedagogy, as they require that a teacher relinquish some of the power in a classroom and create assignments that allow for more

student agency and student-centered learning. Helping students to use big ideas and make meaningful connections with their learning promotes deeper engagement with concepts. Rather than merely adding a new introduction to a traditional school art style lesson, art teachers could reevaluate the ways they teach, rethink their own ideas about their students, and create new assignments that utilize different pedagogical methods and allow students more power with regard to their artmaking choices. These ideas may lead art teachers to consider Ladson-Billings' three main criteria: experiencing academic success, building cultural competence, and developing sociopolitical consciousness.

Experiencing Academic Success

Helping students to experience academic success in the art classroom could come from a variety of techniques, depending upon the ages of the students. Starting with student interests is a way to engage learners and build upon their knowledge to increase the chances of their academic success. Perhaps teachers could conduct a short questionnaire at the start of each semester, gauging student interest in certain topics and using the results as part of their curriculum planning. Allowing students choice in their artmaking can promote their interest in learning and increase their engagement with the topic. In the above example, the student teacher could have presented the magazine image step as an exercise to develop a skill and then allowed students to create an individual work of art that showed where they experience power in their lives. This artwork could have showcased the new technical skills they learned as well as some of their thoughts about how and where power circulates in their lives. The teacher could have pushed this idea more and allowed for students to bring in art forms relevant to their lives and cultures (Lai, 2012). Further, pairing students to work together may also enable more students to be academically successful as they are jointly responsible for a project. Culturally relevant art teachers need to consider why their students need to know certain techniques or artistic ideas. It is not enough to teach something as it has always been taught; there should be a specific reason, guided by student learning goals (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Rather than focusing merely on what students will do on a certain day or within a time

frame, culturally relevant teachers plan student learning in a long-term manner with different aspects of learning building upon on one another, leading to students' academic success.

Cultural Competence

Building students' cultural competence is an ongoing task that requires the teacher to have a significant degree of cultural competence, as well. Instead of teaching about a variety of cultures and having students create replicas of other people's cultural objects, a teacher working from a culturally relevant pedagogy perspective would utilize a different approach. Perhaps after learning about a culture or objects from a culture, the teacher would ask students questions about the meaning of the objects and their functions within the culture being studied. After learning about various possible meanings, students could reflect upon their own culture(s) and how those meanings might be relevant to their world. This could lead to an artmaking project in which students are able to seek out unique approaches and create works that respond to their own cultures. These ideas require that teachers reposition their own views about cultural competence and refrain from the defeatist attitude exemplified by the notion that: "There are so many cultures, how could I possibly be an expert on all of them?" When teachers view their students as cultural experts and see all the cultures in their classrooms as assets, this can be a step toward building the cultural competence of everyone in the art room and positioning the teacher as a co-learner (Au, 2009). Further, by building classroom experiences around the lives of students, teachers can value student experiences and identities in ways that are more difficult in a teacher-centered classroom (Au, 2009). Again, this idea promotes a power shift in recognizing the expertise of students—and routinely including them, their ideas, and their cultures in creating lessons.

Sociopolitical Consciousness

Developing a sense of sociopolitical consciousness in students is an ongoing task that may require the recognition of the complex interconnected systems relating to schooling. At a time when the notion of "meritocracy" still reigns with many narratives about how certain people are successful, it can be difficult to recognize that some well-intentioned institutions—including school districts—function in

Recommended Resources for Information on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

EdChange

www.edchange.org/index.html

Online organization led by professional educators. Provides professional development, consulting, and workshop opportunities; projects, resources, and information on multicultural education to teachers with the hope of realizing equity and diversity in schools. Contain links to online resources, handouts, and projects.

Educators for Social Responsibility

<http://esrnational.org>

Organization works directly with educators to implement positive change in schools surrounding issues of equity and social justice. Website features an online Teacher's Center that provides related resources and lesson plans for teachers (it appears that you have to be a member to gain access to this portion of the site). Also has a link to a blog, which is an open-forum format for discussion on education.

Electronic Magazine of Multicultural Education (Eastern University)

www.eastern.edu/publications/emme/current.html

Online publication; current and past issues available online. Each issue addresses a specific theme within multicultural education. Includes reviews of related books, art, and multimedia resources, as well as links to related websites.

National Association for Multicultural Education

<http://nameorg.org>

Advocates equity and social justice through education. Website provides information and material related to the organization (current and past conference dates and info, leadership and membership info, etc.) as well as links to student and teacher resources.

Project Children LEAD (Point Park University)

www.pointpark.edu/Academics/Schools/SchoolofArtsandSciences/Departments/Education/ProjectChildrenLEAD

Project website dedicated to providing multicultural education resources to students and teachers. Website features workshop scheduling options, information on the Children LEAD curriculum, lesson plans, book recommendations, and links to other helpful resources.

Rethinking Schools

www.rethinkingschools.org/index.shtml

Online organization; publisher of education materials. Most recent years of magazine are available in their online archive. Includes "activist" articles for and by parents, teachers, and students. Addresses issues of theory, practice, and policy.

Teaching Tolerance

www.tolerance.org

Affiliated with the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Teaching Tolerance website features a variety of materials appropriate for different levels and subject areas. They publish a magazine full of teaching ideas and maintain a robust Facebook presence.

University of Washington's Center for Multicultural Education

<http://education.washington.edu/cme/index.html>

Features a short article that gives an overview of multicultural education, information on the center's conferences and book talks, recent publications, links to current successful multicultural education programs, and links to other online centers and resources.

ways that benefit some and may bring harm to others (Golnick & Chinn, 2013). Recognizing and acknowledging difference and inequities is a step toward becoming more sociopolitically aware. In the example at the beginning of this article, the student teacher did not seem to notice how his choice of magazines reflected a trend that the majority of people featured in widely circulated magazines are Caucasian. Though the geographic area of the school where he was student teaching is primarily African American and the majority of the students in the class were African American or Latino/a, the student teacher did not acknowledge this. Discussing where he bought the magazines and perhaps the need to seek out targeted publications to find numerous images of people of color would be one way to address the sociopolitical context of the setting. Further, in his introduction, the student teacher addressed the issue of power prevalent in Wiley's

work, but he did not address Wiley's point that African Americans are largely absent from the history of portraiture. This important point seemed repeated in the lack of people of color in the magazine images the student teacher chose. Yet, when we—as art teachers—do not notice or make the time to address these issues, we are missing important opportunities to help our students grow in terms of their sociopolitical awareness and may be missing opportunities for our own personal growth. These opportunities to notice inequities may further lead to impassioned artmaking on the part of our students, especially middle school and high school students.

Conclusion

Ladson-Billings (2006) writes that culturally relevant pedagogy is more of an ethical position than a "thing" with a road map or preplanned lessons. To become a culturally relevant teacher takes

time and requires openness to new ideas. Rather than striving to have a file cabinet full of lessons to pull out and use on any given day, a culturally relevant teacher's view of education is more about growth and change over time, both personal and within one's teaching practice. Thus, as art teachers, we can work toward changing the power dynamics in our classrooms and develop practices that will help us be more successful teachers of all of our students through making our classrooms more student-centered. For those of us who teach at the college level, modeling this type of teaching may help our students become teachers who utilize culturally relevant pedagogy in their own classrooms. This includes addressing the sociopolitical context of artworks and attuning to what contemporary artists say about their work. Further, those of us who work with preservice teachers should address Gude's point that we need new art projects (2013).

We should model this behavior for the preservice teachers in our classes by developing ideas and sharing them with our students. We can also encourage preservice teachers to articulate why some traditional art projects may not be useful today and to develop ideas for new art projects. Many of the reasons that Gude (2013) suggests for why we need to rethink school art projects relate to culturally relevant pedagogy. Since we have made strides in expanding the canon of artists included in the curriculum, we also need to work to expand the canon of pedagogical methods that we model and overtly teach to preservice teachers in student-centered ways.

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AUTHOR NOTE

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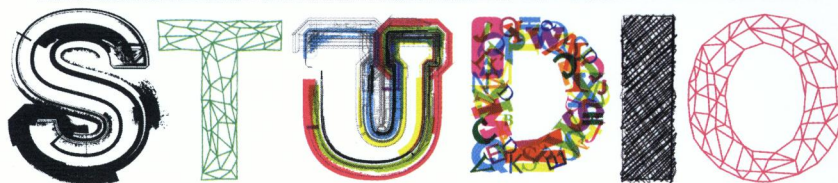
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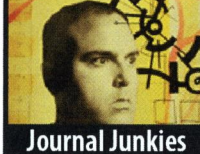


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