

Art Education for All:

In Solidarity to Raise Access and Equity in Art Education for Marginalized Students

Danette Marie Albino

University of Florida

Art Education for All:

In Solidarity to Raise Access and Equity in Art Education for Marginalized Students

While educational equity has been in our conscious as educators over the years, we still have ways to go to reach full equity in education, especially art education. Access to art education is a significant concern throughout all groups in the U.S., however, the lack of art education access has especially affected marginalized students. Marginalized students, particularly students of color, students with disabilities, poor students, and im/migrant and English Language Learner (ELL) students, have backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge that can both benefit the art education environment and benefit from it. As art educators, we must be critical about the lack of access and equity in our field and work to give our youth more opportunities to grow and develop in healthy means.

The Disservice of Marginalized Students

The history of modern art education shows an absence of marginalized students and has only recently expanded its records to include and benefit these students (Bolin, P.E., Blandy, D., & Congdon, K.G., 2000). At the time the Massachusetts Drawing Act required drawing to be taught in schools, in 1870 9.1% of Black children in the country attended school compared to 50% of white children (University of Michigan School of Education, 2007). When students of color did have access to art education, their cultures were far from affirmed, such as indigenous students being sent to boarding schools as a forced assimilation tactic starting in the middle of the 19th century, where students were vulnerable to abuse and were given an education, both in general and in the arts, that endorsed white and Christian cultures while trying to eliminate any connections to

indigenous cultures (American Indian Relief Council, n.d.). In 2008, nearly 58% of 18-24 year-old white young adults reported that they received an arts education growing up compared to 26% of Black and 28% of Latin@s young adults, the latter of which has an im/migrant and ELL population that is currently the largest and fastest growing of im/migrant and ELL populations (Americans for the Arts, 2013; Garcia, A., 2013). The general lack of art resources of im/migrant and ELL students sheds a light on their situation and a simple Google search will find art education present for these students mainly in few museum and community settings, with one arts organization in this country specifically created for the benefit of im/migrant and ELL populations, the Immigrant Movement International in Queens, NY.

Children with disabilities were noticeably absent from schools and art education; the eugenics movement beginning in the 1880s sought to rid the country of people with disabilities by passing laws to prevent them from migrating to the U.S., marrying, or having children, leading to institutionalization and forced sterilization (San Francisco State University, 1997). It wasn't until 1975 with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act did children with disabilities gained the right to a public school education, and, while placing students in the least restrictive environment has become significantly essential, students with disabilities, especially those with severe disabilities lack access to art education due to the lack of art teacher training and comfort level (San Francisco State University, 1997; Keifer-Boyd, K., & Kraft, L. M., 2003). Further, paraprofessionals can act as gatekeepers for their student's art education, either denying or granting the opportunity of art learning and creating and either enhancing or

derailing students but always taking students' self-advocacy opportunities away (Causton-Theoharis, J., & Burdick, C., 2008).

The national arts education decline has had an especially negative affect on poor students. In the 1999-2000 school year 93% of high-poverty secondary schools offered art education, but in the school year of 2008-2009 80% offered art education (Obrien, 2013). Further, homeless children lack more art education and general education resources than their non-homeless counterparts, with at least 20% unable to attend school, and 41% attending two different schools and 28% attending three or more schools within a year, setting them behind their peers (Inocente, n.d.). Where you will find a lack of art education access for marginalized students, you will also find a lack of other opportunities, resources, and support and a high presence of neglect, abuse, and inequity.

60 years after the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, segregation is still an issue, with integration progress declining in the past 20 years.

In 1972, due to strong federal enforcement, only about 25 percent of black students in the South attended intensely segregated schools in which at least nine out of 10 students were racial minorities. In districts released from desegregation orders between 1990 and 2011, 53 percent of black students now attend such schools, according to an analysis by ProPublica. (Hannah-Jones, 2014)

This current segregation has festered achievement gaps within marginalized students, especially Black and Latin@ students. For example, Black students were more than three times as likely to attend schools where less than 60% of teachers meet all state certification and licensure requirements, while Latin@ students were twice as likely (Hsieh, 2014). The lack of teacher training has also been detrimental to students with

disabilities and ELLs, with a national shortage on educators for exceptional student education and poor im/migrant students of color being placed disproportionately in low-ability groups (American Psychological Association [APA], 2014; McLeskey, J., Tyler, N., & Flippin, S., 2003). Through lacking resources and trained educators, these marginalized students often have few successes academically and are disproportionately affected by the school-to-prison pipeline. In these environments, students, especially poor students of color and with disabilities, are pushed out of their schools and into criminal justice systems. Almost one in four boys of color, excluding Latin@ and Asian American students, with disabilities and one in five girls of color with disabilities received an out-of-school suspension (Hsieh, 2014). Suspended or expelled students are denied education or are placed in disciplinary alternative schools and become more likely to end up in the juvenile/criminal justice systems (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2014). It has gone as far as schools encouraging these students to drop out in order to boost test scores that have become prioritized in the accountability movement (ACLU, 2014). Even further, queer and trans youth also become part of the school-to-prison pipeline by being more likely to lack support and resources, more vulnerable to homelessness and risky behavior, and more likely to drop out of school than their straight and cisgender counterparts (Lambda Legal, 2014). While the lack of art education access has no direct correlations to these issues, these issues provide context and as Americans for the Arts (2013) states:

Even though research proves the arts are a good investment for low socioeconomic status students – boosting academic performance and college attendance and decreasing dropout rates – schools are not utilizing the arts as a

tool to reach their neediest students. Those who could use the academic benefits of arts education the most are receiving it the least. (p. 21)

How Marginalized Students Can Benefit from Art Education

Aside from the general benefits, art education provides unique benefits to marginalized students. For students of color, an anti-racist art education can comprehensively affirm students' cultures and provide benefits similar to art education benefits for poor students. Poor students with access to art education more likely to finish high school, with 4% unable to graduate, compared to the 22% of poor students without access to art education unable to graduate, and more likely to attend and finish college, with 71% attending college, 24% receiving an associate's degree, and 18% receiving a bachelor's degree, compared to 48% attending college, the 10% receiving an associate's degree, and the 6% receiving a bachelor's degree that had no access to art education (Obrien, 2013). For im/migrant and ELL students, visual literacy is key to learning English and utilizing prior knowledge, and artistic creation can reduce the importance of verbalization, can provide a more comforting and safe situation of exploration, can affirm cultural identities, and can provide autonomy (Britsch, S., 2009; Marxen, E., 2003). For students with disabilities, self-advocacy is an important aspect of their education and through art education they can gain the tools to not only practice self-advocacy but also develop their cognitive skills (MacLean, J., 2008).

Raising Art Education Access and Equity

There are various ways to raise art education access and equity; the first being advocacy specifically for these marginalized students. Through informing the policymakers and the community, the first step towards educational equity has taken

place. Through it, you can also appeal to museums or cultural centers to expand on their outreach programs. For schools with art education but lacking in trained teachers working with ELL students or students with disabilities, for example, providing resources and workshops for both art educators and paraprofessionals that allow collaboration and understanding of these students will be beneficial. And while arts integration is not a substitute for art education, it can be a critical alternative for schools that heavily lack resources and support to implement an art education program. For schools and organization that service marginalized students, donating resources and time to provide art workshops are also beneficial. Solutions are not limited to these examples, however these examples can be critical first steps towards educational equity.

References

- American Civil Liberties Union. (2014). What is the school-to-prison pipeline. Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/racial-justice/what-school-prison-pipeline>
- Americans for the Arts. (2013). Facts and figures. Retrieved from <http://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/networks-and-councils/arts-education-network/tools-resources/arts-ed-navigator/facts>
- American Indian Relief Council. (n.d.). History and culture: Boarding schools. Retrieved from http://www.nrcprograms.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc_hist_boardingschools
- Au, W. (Ed.). (2009). *Rethinking multicultural education: Teaching for racial and cultural justice*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, Ltd.
- Britsch, S. (2009). ESOL educators and the experience of visual literacy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43(4), 710-721.
- Bolin, P.E., Blandy, D., & Congdon, K.G. (Eds.). (2000). *Remembering others: Making invisible histories of art education visible*. Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.
- Causton-Theoharis, J., & Burdick, C. (2008). Paraprofessionals: Gatekeepers of authentic art production. *Studies in Art Education*, 49 (3), 167-182.
- Chao, J., Olsen, L., & Schenkel, J. (2013). Educating English Language Learners: Grantmaking strategies for closing America's other achievement gap. Retrieved from http://edfunders.org/sites/default/files/Educating%20English%20Language%20Learners_April%202013.pdf

- Desai, D. (2000). Imaging difference: the politics of representation in multicultural art education. *Studies In Art Education*, 41(2), 114-129.
- Ellis, D. M. (2002). A broad brush: Access and arts education insights from school districts. Retrieved from http://www.kennedy-center.org/education/vsa/resources/Broad_Brush_10-03-1.pdf
- Garcia, A. (2013, August 14). The facts on immigration today. Retrieved from <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/report/2013/04/03/59040/the-facts-on-immigration-today-3/>
- Hannah-Jones, N. (2014, April 16). Segregation now. Retrieved from <http://www.propublica.org/article/segregation-now-full-text>
- Hsieh, St. (2014, March 21). 14 disturbing stats about racial inequality in American public schools. Retrieved from <http://www.thenation.com/blog/178958/14-disturbing-stats-about-racial-inequality-american-public-schools>
- Inocente. (n.d.). Homelessness for children in the US: Some startling statistics. Retrieved from <http://inocente.abacusdesign.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Fact-Sheet-Homeless-Children.pdf>
- Keifer-Boyd, K., & Kraft, L. M. (2003). Inclusion policy in practice. *Art Education*, 56(6), 46-53.
- Lambda Legal. (2014). LGBTQ youth risk data. Retrieved from http://data.lambdalegal.org/publications/downloads/gdtb_lgbtq-youth-risk-data.pdf
- MacLean, J. (2008). The art of inclusion. *Canadian Review of Art Education*, (35) 75-98.
- Marxen, E. (2003). The benefits of art therapy in the immigration field. Retrieved from <http://www.fhspereclaver.org/migra-salut-mental/catala/news/Art%20Therapy.htm>

McLeskey, J., Tyler, N., & Flippin, S. (2003). The supply of and demand for special education teachers: A review of research regarding the nature of the chronic shortage of special education. Retrieved from <http://copsse.education.ufl.edu/docs/RS-1/1/RS-1.pdf>

O'Brien, A. (2013, September 11). How to close the achievement gap: Arts education. Retrieved from <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/art-education-closing-achievement-gap-anne-obrien>

Riley, S. (2012, November 30). Use arts integration to enhance common core. Retrieved from <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/core-practices-arts-integration-susan-riley>

San Francisco State University. (1997). A chronology of the Disability Rights Movements. Retrieved from <http://www.sfsu.edu/~dprc/chronology/>

Spilka, G., & Long, M. (2011). Arts education for all: Lessons from the first half of the Ford Foundation's National Arts Education Initiative. Retrieved from http://www.omgcenter.org/sites/default/files/OMG_Ford_ArtsEd_6rev.pdf