Conference: The Social Practice of Human Rights

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Fostering Empathy through Visual Culture Art Intergration (abstract)

R. Darden Bradshaw
University of Dayton, dbradshaw1@udayton.edu

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Research Panel: Visualizing Rights

Presenter: Darden Bradshaw, University of Dayton

Title: Fostering Empathy through Visual Culture Art Integration

Abstract: Our lives are mediated through the visual (Mirzoeff, 1999; Freedman, 2002). This mediation informs, in multiple and conflicting ways, our views, our beliefs, attitudes and mores, our choices, and thereby our resulting actions. This barrage of the visual impacts the postmodern student encountered in K-12 education. Students readily gain access to information that was once the sole domain of adults (Kincheloe, 2004) yet the prevailing system of education has not adapted. Visual culture is seldom used as an engagement strategy in school despite its ubiquitous role as hidden curriculum and ever-present place in the world beyond the school. Learners are not necessarily critically aware of the messages conveyed through music, magazine advertisements, toys, and other forms of visual culture. This disconnect supports visual culture messages going unexamined, becoming internalized, and potentially exacerbating the pervasive culture of oppression, divisiveness, and exclusion within schools thereby creating a space where power-laden behaviors like bullying fester and occur.

Through a qualitative action research study, grounded in social justice art education, I examine ways integrating art and visual culture into the curriculum fosters safe spaces for students to find voice; to take risks in deconstructing and reconstructing their identities, beliefs, and understandings of others and their worlds and to develop empathy. The examination of visual culture inundating students' lives and the concept of social empathy serve as transgressive pedagogical practices bridging relationships in learning in the arts and learning in other curricular areas. Findings indicate students draw from visual culture to find commonalities among and with their peers becoming more accepting of one another; visual culture art integration empowers youth to critically question the visual culture messages they have accepted and, through art making, reconstruct and challenge those messages – to join others to work together for a more democratically just world through empathy.

Keywords: Art Education, Empathy, Visual Culture, Empowerment

Biography: Dr. Bradshaw is Assistant Professor of Art Education and Area Coordinator for Art Education at the University of Dayton. She holds both a PhD in Art History and Education and an MFA in Fiber Art from the University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ. Dr. Bradshaw is both a practicing artist and educator, having worked for six years as an Arts Integration Specialist within the K-12 system in the Southwestern United States. She facilitates Arts Integration trainings across the U.S. for the non-profit Arts Integration Solutions and speaks at regional and national conferences on the relationship of visual culture art integration and the development of empathy.