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## Art and Art Education in the Multicultural Society of South Korea

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Today's societies are becoming ever more culturally diverse. In South Korea, a traditionally homogenous society, remarkably rapid changes have made cultural diversity a new reality and a widely discussed topic in education. Even as late as 2004, the year I moved to the United States, multicultural issues were not a topic of public conversation in South Korea—even though the country had become relatively globalized and native South Koreans had become familiar with many foreign cultures. At that time, the experience of diverse cultures was regarded as a component of an upscale lifestyle and a matter of personal taste. When I returned to South Korea in 2010, however, I realized that multicultural issues had become a great concern for governmental and educational leaders. More immigrants in South Korea meant that multicultural issues involved many challenges in daily life for most residents. Because I had lived in the culture of the United States for several years and gained experience with life as an outsider in a dominant culture, I approached the challenges associated with greater cultural diversity in South Korea with new insights. My dual experiences as an insider and outsider helped me to see that although all human beings may be different from one another, all deserve to be accepted no matter what their cultural circumstances or perceived value by others.

This realization made me view cultural diversity issues in South Korea, and in the South Korean education system, with a more critical eye. I saw the importance of multicultural understandings in the lives of students in South Korea (and many countries in the world), and came to believe that educators must help students look critically at multicultural issues and develop their own ways of negotiating differences based on a broader understanding of the perspectives of others. I noted that South Korea has adopted some aspects of other countries' approaches to cultural diversity, but observed that the treatment of multicultural realities in South Korea has been too limited, superficial, and narrow. The profound shift to a multicultural society in South Korea makes this the right time to examine problems in multicultural education in order to generate ideas about how to develop multicultural art education curricula geared specifically to the challenges of cultural diversity.

### **Multicultural Education in South Korea**

Multiculturalism has been adopted as a national project in South Korea, and many educators, in various fields, have studied practical ways of furthering students' thinking about cultural diversity. Even so, much multicultural education in South Korea reflects a narrow understanding about cultural diversity that may fail to help students avoid prejudice and intolerance. In order to highlight such problems I first will explore the general idea of multicultural education and then explore its implementation in South Korean schools.

#### **The Notion of Multicultural Education**

The notion of multiculturalism has been said to have its roots in the United States of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the phrase *the melting pot* came to represent the ideal of social harmony in a time of massive immigration (Gerstle, 2001). In this era, however, both public and private organizations sought less to foster acceptance of cultural differences than to promote assimilation into the dominant culture through the "Americanization" (Bogardus, 1920, p. 13) of newcomers to the United States (Barrett, 1992). By the 1960s, the U.S. civil rights movement made the unequal treatment of African-American citizens a prominent issue, albeit a divisive one,

particularly within the American education system (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). Gradually, the disproportionate attention and respect accorded the mainstream white culture over non-white co-cultures in the U.S. (e.g., Native-American, African-American) became a controversial issue in education and society. This disparity began to be seen as contributing to prejudice and oppression. Thus began a shift in the country away from the goal of assimilation toward greater recognition and acceptance of cultural diversity. In schools, this movement came to be known as multicultural education.

Banks (2008), an early proponent of multicultural education, saw it as “a reform movement designed to make some major changes in the education of students” (p. 1). According to Banks, one of the key goals of multicultural education is to help individuals gain greater self-understanding and understanding of others by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures. From the start, he believed that multicultural education should “empower all students to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens in a deeply troubled and ethnically polarized nation and world” (Banks, 2008, p. 8). Leistyna (2002) echoed this goal and emphasized the interpersonal potential of multicultural education, that is, to “promote positive relations among groups in schools by eradicating stereotypes and encouraging tolerance and unity...[and bringing] about the realization that all people share the universal human experiences” (p.10).

Though the modern multicultural education movement in the United States began as an effort to expand cultural appreciation and understanding, the challenge of multicultural education has been to move beyond superficial treatments of cultural differences and provide “opportunities for various groups to maintain aspects of their community cultures while building a nation in which these groups are structurally included and to which they feel allegiance” (Banks, 2008, p. 20). Multicultural educators must simultaneously help students develop an individual identity that balances cultural, regional, national, and global identifications, and encourages global citizenship, while at the same time acknowledges and challenges the structural inequalities within society. As Zirkel and Cantor (2004) observed, “true integration and multicultural education requires changing institutions—at a deep level—to better meet the needs, expectations, and desires of all students” (p. 7). In South Korea, as in many countries without a pluralistic tradition, this task is complicated by the longstanding cultural mores about inclusion and exclusion.

### **The Context for Multicultural Education in South Korea**

In South Korea, as in all countries, any discussion of multicultural education must be contextualized. In recent years, developments in technology, increased immigration, and social changes connected to globalization have changed South Korea from a mainly mono-cultural, homogenous society to a relatively multicultural, heterogeneous one (Chang, 2012), largely through the sharp increase in the number of foreign male workers, foreign female brides, and their children (Choi, 2010; Watson, 2012; Yun & Park, 2011). As of 2010, the foreign population in South Korea was over 1,130,000, and at the current rate of immigration, 10% of the population will be foreign-born by 2050 (Yun & Park, 2011). These realities have caused the phenomenon of cultural diversity to be one of the primary concerns of the South Korean government in recent years.

The government’s efforts to address the newly multicultural nature of South Korean society have focused on its educational institutions, where cultural diversity instruction has become mandated in the national standard curriculum (Kim, 2014). In addition, the government has announced policies, built centers for multicultural education, and broadcast public

campaigns on TV. In 2006 the South Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development introduced the Education Act for Children from a Multicultural Family (Choi, 2010).

**Current approaches to multiculturalism in South Korea.** In spite of the South Korean government's awareness of the need to address cultural diversity and its attempts to enlighten citizens and promote multicultural understanding, current approaches have been steeped in narrow assumptions about multiculturalism. Educational efforts to address the issue have been similarly inadequate (Ahn, 2011; Chang, 2012; Choi, 2010; Kim, 2014; Watson, 2012; Yun & Park, 2011). This limited scope of understanding about multiculturalism is exemplified by a related advertising campaign on South Korea television. By the time the South Korean government began to speak to the public about multiculturalism, one TV campaign sponsored by a South Korean bank already had become popular. In fact, it was this campaign that actually first stimulated my interest in the topic for this study. One of the advertisements in the campaign depicted the child of a culturally mixed couple going about his day while a narrator said:

He has a mother from Vietnam, but he is Korean too, just like you. He can't eat a meal without Kimchi [preserved cabbage regarded as the most representative food of Korea], and he respects King Sejong the Great [who created Korea]. He thinks of Dokdo Island as our territory [Japan insists on ownership of it]. He shouts in Korean when he watches soccer games and he will join the military when he turns 20... he will pay taxes and vote for the country...just like you. Supporting multicultural families will bring future happiness. Add more happiness to our society. (Hana Bank, 2008)

In 2008, this campaign often appeared on TV at prime time, and it generated greater awareness of cultural diversity in South Korean society, and just as importantly, the need to educate citizens about cultural diversity there. At the same time, the advertisement contains some unacknowledged assumptions about the relationship of immigrants to the dominant culture and about what it means to be South Korean.

**Problems with current approaches to multiculturalism in S. Korea.** If we look deeply into the content of the advertisement described above we see another side to what seems to be just simple public education. Who takes the major role in this advertisement? What is the dominant culture into which this child must assimilate? What must the child do to find an accepted place in this dominant culture? This advertisement asks the public to accept a child from a multicultural family for one reason: because he does all the same things South Korean citizens do. These are the grounds on which society should accept him as a South Korean.

South Koreans have long valued the homogeneous nature of the nation, and have placed a high value on pure blood, or pure-lineage. This ethnocentric belief is so much a part of the national identity that it often goes unquestioned, as in the advertisement described above. Yet, as Kim (2014) has noted, it is a belief that brings about "nativist attitudes toward other cultures, which fundamentally feature exclusion" (p. 18).

Thus, although such advertisements represent an effort to help citizens adjust to the rapid transformation occurring in their country, they hold a message that adheres to South Korea's culturally homogenous status quo rather than challenging the public to see the benefits of heterogeneity. Proponents of this brand of cultural diversity have found an apt metaphor in the concept of the melting pot. The message of the advertisement is not that South Koreans must change their ideas about the value of diversity, but that "mixed" individuals must jump into the giant pot named "South Korean" in order to be valued.

**Assumptions that work against multiculturalism.** The division of South Korean society into two groups—those who are pureblooded, or mainstream, and those who are not—means that the nots may join the mainstream only by adopting all the traditions and trappings of South Korean culture. It is in this way that South Korean society has come to understand the concept of multiculturalism, and the limited scope and narrow assumptions of this approach have influenced multicultural education as well. The word for multiculturalism in Korean is *damunhwa*, a term indicating a multicultural family, especially one including native Koreans and foreign-born workers. Yet, as Yun and Park (2011) point out, there are other ways of looking at multiculturalism: “What matters is that the multicultural-society phenomenon may be interpreted and projected in a different manner depending on who plays a major role therein” (p. 141).

Though the term *multicultural* has been assumed to refer only to race or nationality, this is not necessarily the case. Within any dominant culture, cultural diversity may include co-cultures based on region, religion, occupation, personal taste, social level, economic situation, and so on. When asked how teachers can teach multiculturalism in a classroom that is not culturally diverse, Banks made the similar point that all classrooms can be seen as culturally diverse when one considers all the co-cultures to which a student may belong (Banks & Tucker, 1998). If this is the case, rather than disregard cultural differences the teacher must learn to uncover diversity. If South Koreans are to accept all co-cultures as having equal value and significance, then, they must use a different metaphor than the melting pot (Kim, 2014).

### **An Alternative Approach to Multicultural Education in South Korea**

As applied to multicultural education in South Korea, the salad bowl metaphor provides an apt alternative. The salad bowl represents a mixture of diverse elements that combine to create a harmonious whole. The notion requires a more pluralistic interpretation of multiculturalism than has been evident in South Korea and implies that cultural diversity is not about accepting foreign mothers or children from multicultural families as Korean, but instead recognizing and accepting the value of *difference* in itself. This alternative to current understandings about multiculturalism in South Korea has another implication as well. It requires an acknowledgement of the reality that all South Koreans actually are members of co-cultures (perhaps based on region, economic background, gender, religion, and so on) within the dominant culture. In a 1998 interview (Banks & Tucker, 1998) Banks asserted this idea when asked how teachers can incorporate multiculturalism in classrooms that are not culturally diverse. He argued:

All classrooms are culturally diverse...we need to uncover that diversity...Whites are themselves very diverse, but I think we've concealed those differences. Social class diversity, kids who are different in views and perspectives—there's diversity there. (p. 6)

Understanding and acceptance of cultural differences cannot be accomplished simply through narrow interpretations of multiculturalism based on the giant melting pot or adherence to the concept of “pure” Korean. Instead, effective multicultural education must teach us to value people as individuals whose differences are worthy of respect.

### **Multicultural Education and Art**

In order to promote a more pluralistic and wide-ranging type of multicultural education, art educators can play an important role using the natural functions of art (Kang, 2014). Among the benefits of art is its ability to convey peoples' life stories—who we are, where we live, and who we live with (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). Because the content of art derives from life

experiences, it can be shared metaphorically with viewers since it is all about what happens around us. This idea also can be applied to students in the classroom. Teachers can help students recognize the complexities inherent in a multicultural society and the issues that such societies must deal with, and art can function as a good resource for this purpose. In fact, art can function as a barometer of a multicultural society in South Korea as elsewhere (Kang, 2014).

### **Art as a Barometer of a Multicultural Society**

In commenting on the nature of art, Anderson (2004) noted, “art is culturally significant meaning, skillfully encoded in an affecting, sensuous medium” (p. 27). This way of looking at art leads us away from defining its quality in any fixed way. To the contrary, it leads us towards the discovery of the culturally significant meanings it conveys with respect to religion, beautification, and social values, as well as its relationship to truth—features that can compel one to action. The perspective that sees art as a cultural metaphor and reflection of accumulated life experiences also perceives artists, the makers of art, as sensitive observers and presenters of the realities of their social/cultural environments.

Humans naturally are born to be creators of products that reflect what they experience in their particular circumstances (Dewey, 1934). Thus, everything experienced can be reflected as a production that communicates with others. Yet, though we might say that all human beings are born to be creators and have the potential for creative endeavors, as Dewey (1934) and Golblatt (2006) asserted, artists do more, than non-artists do as, they create. Artists skillfully make art based on their sensibilities, and in the process, reflect their emotions, cognitions, and experiences using particular methods and materials to achieve a particular quality that we recognize as art.

Jackson (1998) described how Dewey highlighted the ability of the arts to present “exemplary instances of an experience” (p. 4). Yet, artists are not just a group of creators presenting art only within their personal contexts. Rather, they reflect the experienced world in a social/cultural context and deliver meanings to the public, thus encouraging the public to think. As Fehr (1994) noted, “The postmodern construct views the artist as cultural producer, and the work of art as a dialectical catalyst, a beginning rather than a monument” (p. 210). Although all human beings can create, the level of critical reflection engendered by the experience of art makes it and the artist unique. Thus, art is a reflection of the artist’s experienced world in which we are able to participate due to the nature of art and the communicative characteristics of human beings. In this sense, art has great cultural and social significance as an unwritten language.

Chin (2013) asserted, “artworks become the sites of knowledge, the texts for deconstruction” (p.12). From an educational perspective, teachers who use artworks to share meanings about how others experience the world may also help their students gain a deeper understanding about the world that they are directly and indirectly experiencing. Eisner (2002) described the role that art may take in awakening us: “One cognitive function the arts perform is to help us learn to notice the world... Art provides the conditions for awakening to the world around us. In this sense, the arts provide a way of knowing” (p. 10). Thus, art has its own distinct power as a visual statement that communicates artists’ cognitive and emotional perceptions of their culture and society. In elaborating on the power of art, Eisner concluded, “Through the arts we learn to see what we had not noticed, to feel what we had not felt, and to employ forms of thinking that are indigenous to the arts” (p. 12).

### **Art Education for a Multicultural Society**

If art can serve as a barometer of the social and cultural climate of a multicultural society, the art classroom can be regarded as a most appropriate place for students to have an opportunity to experience cultural diversity in direct and indirect ways and enhance their understandings about their own culture in relation to others. Given that challenges related to cultural diversity have increased notably in South Korea in the last decade this potentiality, inherent in the art classroom, requires greater attention (Kang, 2014).

### **Approaches to Multicultural Art Education**

Along with the need to address multicultural concerns in education generally, the need for art educators to incorporate multicultural approaches has come to be seen as highly important in contemporary art education. A number of mostly American scholars have argued that art educators must address their students' awareness about their increasingly multicultural societies and globalized world by helping them to interpret and create art in a way that connects their experiences to the larger life-world (Cahan & Kocur, 2011; Clark, 1996; Delacruz, 2009; Garber, 2004; Stuhr, 1994).

Sleeter & Grant (1988) proposed a number of approaches to multicultural education that Stuhr (1994), in turn, applied to the art classroom. Of these, the idea of teaching *human relations* through art is based on the idea that "the major purpose of schooling is helping students of different backgrounds to get along better in a world made continually smaller by modern technology and media" (p. 173). Delacruz (1995) described teaching about *cultural heritage* as a means of promoting cultural understanding by enhancing students' understanding and appreciation of the art emerging from diverse cultures. Other approaches to multicultural art education identified by Delacruz include ethnic tourism, design and media literacy, and social issues (p. 90).

Schools, teachers, and art education teachers particularly, can guide their students to respect the "otherness" of others, regardless of race, nationality, economic status, or gender. One way to do this is to encourage students to examine the many facets of their identity as a means of reducing the misunderstandings that arise from an immature consciousness of one's place in relation to others. In the same vein, Stout (1997) advised that teachers must earnestly consider using art to help students realize that differences are a natural part of life. One of the many strategies teachers can use to help students accept the differences between people, as well as give them a fuller awareness of others within their own multicultural society, is to increase the proportion of materials they use from subcultures outside the dominant culture in order to reverse longstanding inequities (Banks & Banks, 2010).

Delacruz (1995) asserted that the objectives of multicultural art education from a social perspective are to raise students' social consciousness and motivate social action. In approaching art education as a path to social reconstruction, teachers can emphasize students' critical ability to interpret social issues within visual cultures such as fine art and popular art (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). Yet, the range of approaches to cultural diversity that art education offers is wide. As Garber (2004) noted, social issues in art education may touch on "feminist studies, race and multicultural studies, disability rights, identity studies, environmentalism, community-based, critical pedagogy, performance pedagogy, social reconstruction, visual culture and other areas" (p. 4). These possibilities are grounded in the social function of art. In fact, all art is social since individuals create art to communicate with others about what they have experienced and discovered (Dewey, 1934; Lord & Lord, 2010). As Stuhr (1994) observed, "Art is taught as it is experienced in life, as part of a social and cultural context" (p. 176).

Greene (1995) pointed out the importance of teaching students about pluralistic values through art education. Since artworks represent the environments where we live and the lived experiences of artists, they provide numerous opportunities for initiating classroom discussions on global and individual social issues. Eisner (2002) noted that children bring to school a wide variety of experiences that originate in the homes and communities in which they live. Contextualized art education curricula offer many options for discussing life-related issues through art. As McFee (1995) emphasized:

Art education can help students gain broader perspectives for reflecting on their own culture's art, thus giving them more latitude for their own aesthetic responses and creations. They can become more aware of their own and other cultures' impact on themselves as individuals and thus be able to change or modify that impact. (p. 189)

Further, McFee suggested that teachers and curriculum developers consider designing curricula that cultivate a "diversity of responses according to students' background and cultural adaptations" (p. 190). Ballenge-Morris and Stuhr (2001) recommended cooperative work between students that is best described as an interdisciplinary approach to the practice of multicultural art education. They argue that despite the difficulty, art teachers must pay more attention to social reconstruction when teaching art for the future of their students.

Students can share their thoughts, artistic skills, and interests through appreciating and making art, in turn broadening their conception of the world. From a constructivist perspective, teachers are not the only ones responsible for bringing materials to the table for learning; students also can contribute to the structure of the class and enhance each other's knowledge. Accordingly, teachers should design lessons that set up the classroom as a place for students to share their own and others' experiences. Designing a curriculum based upon students' interests is a good way to encourage them to have meaningful learning experiences.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, art education scholars have begun to envision how multicultural art education can help students to address hegemonic ideas and practices that perpetuate social inequality. Chin (2013) described how the five key dimensions of multicultural art education proposed by Banks (2004)—content integration, equity pedagogy, knowledge construction and transformation, empowering school culture and social structure, and prejudice reduction—may be implemented in the classroom for more substantive multicultural art education. In terms of approaches to curricula, multicultural art educators would generate activities designed to maximize self-reflexivity by teacher and students while highlighting identity, voice, learning style, real life experience, and the structure the school environment.

### **Multicultural Art Education in South Korea**

As South Korean society has become more multicultural, educators and educational policymakers have addressed the issue of how to help students understand cultural diversity. This is especially the case among South Korean art educators, since art is a powerful tool for self-expression, for understanding others, and for communicating about our experiences in society. The South Korean national curriculum for education has been updated more than seven times during the last 80 years, and the last revision for K-12 schools was in 2009.

The government's awareness of the multicultural nature of South Korean society and cultural diversity concerns are especially evident in the 2009 national curriculum for middle school visual arts, which reflects an awareness of the value and function of art as a means of educating students about socio-cultural issues. Multicultural goals were apparent, to some extent, in the inclusion of cultural and social concerns in the content of the government's revised art



textbooks, even though the treatment of such concerns did not address some of the more challenging aspects of cultural diversity in South Korea. For example, the content might concern the fashion, architecture, or artifacts of different countries, but focus on a variety of cultures or a culture's superficial characteristics. Further, though the concept of multiculturalism suggests the need to address the many different co-cultures that exist in South Korean society, most of the current content of multicultural art education in South Korea is geared either towards showing more artworks from other countries in art appreciation activities (with simple background information) or learning about traditional South Korean art so as to reinforce the national South Korean identity. What the textbooks lack is information about the art of other cultures in their authentic contexts, contemporary art, and even more important, art within Korea that expresses issues emerging from the position of co-cultures on the social inclusion/exclusion continuum (Hwang, 2010; Kim 2014).

For these reasons, many art education scholars have raised self-reflective voices to critique current multicultural art education in South Korea and argue for the need to expand the concept and practice of multicultural education there (Ahn, 2011; Kang, 2014; Kim, 2014; Son, 2012). Despite these calls for change, however, successful multicultural art education in South Korea will require a great many more voices, perspectives, and research in order to identify effective practices that address the specific nature of South Korean society.

Banks (2008) spoke to the importance of helping students learn multicultural perspectives: Individuals who know the world only from their own cultural perspectives are denied important parts of the human experience and are culturally and ethnically encapsulated. These individuals are also unable to know their own cultures fully because of their cultural blinders. (p. 1)

Banks' notion of cultural blinders speaks to the need to help students expand their cultural horizons, an objective that can be facilitated well via art education. For South Korean art educators, this idea involves more than just superficial teaching about artworks from other countries out of the contexts of history and current events, or narrow treatments of traditional Korean art, but rather the challenging work of addressing cultural diversity and art in South Korean society, especially contemporary art, from a broad view that also takes into account the current realities of multicultural concerns.

A recent exhibit of contemporary art by the Seoul Museum of Art (2013), entitled *Good Morning Stranger!* reflected the convergence and coexistence of diverse cultures in South Korea. The show included artworks about the uniqueness of a particular co-culture, isolation caused by of the sense of not belonging, and the experience of being a stranger in South Korean society. This exhibition was significant in that it revealed the social changes taking place in South Korean society, where a long history of homogeneity is rapidly being challenged by an increasingly culturally diverse society.

That South Korean artists have begun to address cultural diversity in their work may represent an opportunity to reshape multicultural art education so that it is specifically related to the unique status of co-cultures in the dominant culture of South Korea (Kang, 2014). In the classroom, art teachers can shift from activities that subtly reinforce assimilation or exclusion and instead seek to create learning experiences that provide outlets for the expression of multicultural issues from teachers and students, especially those from marginalized communities. Bode (2005), for example, described a project in the United States in which art teachers helped highlight the role of art that spoke to cultural hegemony. Ballangee-Morris and Stuhr (2001) describe an art education project that centers on the concept of violence to explore culture at the

personal, national, and global levels. Since South Korean students have lived in an openly multicultural society for several years, they might find it easier to understand and accept differences by looking at their experiences of co-cultures within South Korea in daily life. Art teachers could encourage students to recognize the actual similarities and differences in their personal cultural identities and share them in the classroom. Then, they can move on to bigger categories, such as family, nation, and globalization. For art appreciation or art criticism, they could actively use the artworks of artists from different countries or of those who have had cross-cultural life experiences that they express through their artwork. Images of popular visual culture also can bring up issues related to cultural differences, prejudice, and misunderstanding that students can discuss from a critical viewpoint. These are just some of the many ways that art teachers can begin to bring in cultural diversity issues to the art classroom.

### **Conclusion**

I have discussed the changes in South Korea that have brought multicultural issues to the forefront of society and education, and the role of art as a barometer in a multicultural society. This discussion serves to support several propositions about the ways multicultural art education in South Korea can be enriched for teachers and students alike.

Currently, South Korea is struggling with many issues of prejudice, isolation, discrimination, and lack of personal communication—all related to its shift to a more culturally diverse society. It is time to more fully address the cultural complexity of South Korean society and rethink the role of education—and art education especially—in building cross-cultural understanding and tolerance. Educators must prepare South Korean students to live in a multicultural society by helping them to have a greater awareness of diversity, an attitude of acceptance of difference and “otherness,” and more knowledge about themselves as members of their culture.

Even though multicultural art education in South Korea exists, this examination of current approaches suggests that educators face the challenge of expanding and deepening these efforts. One approach can be in regarding art as an effective tool to broaden our understandings of the social circumstances surrounding the influx of immigrants to South Korea. As a visual representation of life, art can be seen as a tool with infinite potential for understanding others and as well as our selves as beings in society. Because artists are both self-reflectors and communicators of life experiences, their work can be a barometer of success in the multicultural society of South Korea, and art educators have an essential role to play in this success (Kang, 2014). Their influence, however, must begin with their own transformation (Banks & Tucker, 1998), with their understanding of the hegemony of a dominant society and the dynamic of inclusion/exclusion in their increasingly multicultural society (Kim, 2014). Because art is a powerful resource for delivering life stories and understanding our experiences and the experiences of others, art educators must deeply consider their role in guiding students who live in a multicultural society.

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