PACE

COMMENTARY

No Child Left with Crayons

The Imperative of Arts-based Education and Research with Language "Minority" and Other Minoritized Communities

AUTHORS

Sharon Chappell | California State University, Fullerton

Melisa (Misha) Cahnmann-Taylor | University of Georgia

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In this study, we observe that since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, public discourse on "failing schools" as measured by high-stakes standardized tests has disproportionately affected students from minoritized communities (such as language, race, class, dis/ability. This discourse emphasizes climates of assessment at the expense of broader, more democratic, and creative visions of education. As advocates of the arts in education and multicultural-multilingual learning for all, we express concern about the ways in which the "crayons" (synecdoche for all the "arts") have started to disappear from public school learning and/or are solely included as handmaidens to improved academic achievement. Likewise, we are concerned about the ways "diversity education" in California, as well as throughout the U.S., has been strictly targeted at those "Other" students who "lack" the cultural capital expected for academic success in English-only schools.

Woodworth and colleagues studied California's arts programming, finding that 89% of K–12 schools failed to offer a standard course of study with consistent scope and sequence based on California Arts Standards in the four arts disciplines. Limited access to arts in schools tends to disproportionately impact minoritized youth, who are often hyper-segregated in schools with more limited budgets, less culturally- and linguistically-responsive practices, and highly controlled curriculum based on discrete skill development. Thus, these students are more likely to be deprived of the benefits inherent in art-making, such as qualitative problem-solving, a process with distinct phases of reflective practice. When students engage in arts processes they also develop distinct and complementary social practices: developing craft, engaging and persisting, envisioning, expressing, observing, reflecting, stretching and exploring, and understanding art worlds.

We examine how the areas of arts education/diversity education and research with majoritized/ minoritized communities intersect in new visions for preK–12 teacher preparation, curriculum design, and education policy. We argue that we need to disallow statements such as "I don't sing" and "I don't dance," just as we disallow any K–12 teacher to state "I don't read" and "I don't do math." We also need to question the assumption of only considering the experiences of minoritized youth if we have them in our classes or if they don't bring a lunch to our school. The studies we reviewed demonstrate that being creative, critical and publicly engaged are skills we all share and experiences we all crave. We ask educational researchers, teacher educators, and education policy makers: what reforms are necessary so that *all* students and their teachers have opportunities to realize their creative, multilingual, and multicultural potential?

Research suggests that schools would benefit from drawing on the successes of out-of-school initiatives, led by artists, researchers and youth themselves. The arts can become a tool of minoritized school reform that centers its processes in human

dilemmas and agency, that speak from the perspectives of those communities most impacted by policies and cultures of oppression. These arts practices specifically relate to the lives of minoritized youth, utilize their primary languages and dialects as well as other funds of knowledge, and develop personal and academic knowledge, social critique and local, direct action. Further, the arts in education can assist majoritized student populations in de-centering their privileged positionality, in seeing the world from different California perspectives.

As we question the constructed marginalization of the arts in education, we also wish to deconstruct perspectives on the term "minority" and programs that were developed to serve so-called "minority needs." The term "minority" often conflates population size with issues of status and power in society. According to the most recent Census data, minoritized citizens make up 33% of the United States population. By 2025, they will constitute 42% and by 2042, the nation will be a majority-"minority" at 54%.

There are many parallels between the marginalized and devalued positioning of the arts in schools and the disenfranchised placement of curriculum and services for minoritized youth (e.g. language services such as bilingual education, American Sign Language interpretation, Black English Vernacular programs, culturally- and linguistically-enhanced curriculum design for indigenous populations). We ask policy reformers to help schools consider multicultural education services as a form of "universal design"—which proposes that curriculum, like physical space, should be designed at the outset to meet the needs of all communities.

Finally, we argue that the arts are also valuable as research tools to help us understand more pointedly the experiences of the young people in classrooms and their families in school communities. By redefining the purposes and roles of research through arts-based practices, we can "walk the talk"—redefining literacies and their values in K-12 classrooms, as well as envisioning new modes of arts-based research and spaces for public interaction.

As to pedagogy, we are not espousing that full artistic competencies or multilingual-multicultural proficiencies are possible for every educator in every school setting, but leaving the arts to "experts only" and isolating multicultural education as exclusively relevant to minority community learning robs teachers and students of significant opportunities for critical, creative, cross-cultural engagement. Scholarship and schooling practices need to build critical, dialogic processes with minoritized *and* majoritized youth. More public display of these processes and their impacts will compel school reformers to see the power of the arts as research, curriculum and pedagogy for and with minoritzed youth. Yet, these practices cannot be contained easily, into a packaged or scripted curriculum. They are dynamic, emergent methodologies that respond to the local challenges of each community while attending to documented, historical trajectories of oppression that impact all people in the United States and the world.

When we commit to a broader application of diversity and arts education with questions of equity, power and the impact of social dominance at the core, then we must begin again to ask, what and who constitute the "minority"? Such a commitment serves as an invitation into ambiguity and complexity, questioning and challenging dichotomous thinking as far as such dualities (e.g. majority-minority; creative-scientific; academic-arts) undermine aesthetic and equity objectives that lead to more hopeful futures for all.

The full study is in Chappell, S. V. & Cahnmann-Taylor, M. (2013). No child left with crayons: The imperative of arts-based education and research with language "minority" and other minoritized communities. Review of Research in Education, 37: 243-268.

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PACE
Policy Analysis for California Education

Stanford Graduate School of Education
520 Galvez Mall, Suite 444
Stanford, CA 94305
Phone: 650.576.8484

edpolicyinca.org