

## Social/Ecological Caring with Multicultural Picture Books: Placing Pleasure in Art Education

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This study explores the concept of finding pleasure in social and ecological caring from the *a/r*/tographic stance of the author as artist, researcher, and teacher. I combine place-based and visual culture art education with multicultural children's picture books to promote more connection and pleasure in the teaching and learning process. The article also provides an exploratory model for art education reform, encouraging art teachers to participate in pleasurable forms of social and ecological caring by becoming art educator activists.

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We live in a fragmented and disconnected global culture, alienating us from each other and our environment (Bowers, 2005; McLaren & Houston, 2004a, 2004b; Orr, 1992). The American model of education reinforces this fragmentation with the discrete parceling of subject matter and students as separate from each other and their environments (Dewey, 1891/1980, 1921; Gruenewald, 2006; Reisberg, Brander & Gruenewald, 2006). While changes in art education have been initiated by visual culture and by social reconstructionist art educators specifically addressing diverse disjunctions (Blandy & Hoffman, 1993; Freedman, 2000a, 2000b, 2003; jagodzinski, 1997; Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, and Knight, 2007), quality multicultural picture books have rarely been explored in depth as a powerful means for promoting interconnections between social and ecological caring. In addition, the problems and possibilities of pleasure as a pedagogical approach warrant further exploration within art education literature. Consequently, this article adds to the discourse in current art education literature by focusing on pleasure and social and ecological interconnections, offering a practical method for their incorporation into art education curricula.

The article begins with a brief description of prior scholarship on social and ecological connections in cultural theory. I provide some key definitions to clarify the meaning and use of various concepts describing my contextualized placing of "pleasure" as a pedagogical tool for art education. I call this approach a "place-based pedagogy of pleasure" (PBPoP). I then provide my underlying theoretical and pedagogical perspectives. Because the "personal is political," I also reflect on my own *a/r*/tographic experiences as an artist/researcher/teacher (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005), leading me to introduce a hybrid pedagogy facilitating more connection and caring in art education. This approach integrates visual culture, place-based education, and intercultural art education ideas with multicultural picture books as a pleasurable means to effect positive changes. Finally, because art educators need more resources to utilize methods of

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teaching that promote social and ecological caring, I provide an exploratory model for art education reform to engender this support.

### Re:Unity: The False Fragmentation of Race, Class, and Environment

Kozol's books (1991, 1996, 2005, 2007) effectively document the interconnections between class, economics, race, and environment. He provides example after example of racially segregated neighborhoods and districts with disadvantaged people living in impoverished, polluted, and ecologically compromised areas. Haas and Nachtigal (1998), McLaren and Farahmandpur (2001), and Schlosser (2001) also point out that impoverished minorities, along with lower- and working-class European-Americans, live and work in ecologically damaged rural and urban areas where out of economic necessity they are forced to participate in ecologically degrading practices.

However, as noted by scholars such as Bowers (1997, 2005), Gruenewald (2003a, 2003b, 2006), and McLaren and Houston (2004a, 2004b), multicultural educational literature and practice have largely ignored the importance of ecological conditions, presenting "racial diversity and inequality" as the primary focus of critical pedagogy's "multiculturalism"—to the detriment of both our environment and those who live in it.<sup>1</sup>

Having conducted an ethnographic study of the lives and work of six award-winning multicultural picture book artists, including myself (Reisberg, 2006b), I know that some of us consciously embed messages into our images to promote social and ecological caring. Nevertheless, when researching art education literature on the relationships between race, class, and place in the art of multicultural picture books, I realized my lens was one of absence rather than presence. And, despite the valuable work of the authors noted, and others, such as Ken Marantz and Sylvia Marantz (K. Marantz, 1994, 2001; S. Marantz & K. Marantz, 2005) who champion the use of picture books in art education, the scholarship remains largely devoid of pedagogical approaches that connect students with their lived environments, diverse cultures, and visual culture as pleasurable forms of learning through quality multicultural picture books.<sup>2</sup>

#### Definitions and Contextualizations

For the purposes of this article, I define the following:

*Culture*: a group of people with common, socially-accepted behaviors and mores;

*Environment*: both the natural world and the humanly-made world where nature also exists;

*Quality multicultural picture books*: books that are place-specific, culturally sensitive, well written, and visually appealing. (See the section titled "Enacting a Place-Based Pedagogy of Pleasure" for an evaluative guide to assist in selecting quality books.)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Because it is beyond the scope of this article to provide an in-depth analysis of social and ecological relationships in critical theory, I refer the reader to the authors cited above as well as to authors such as K. Marantz and S. Marantz, (2005), J. H. Schwarcz and C. Schwarcz, (1991), Kriesberg (1999), whose work engages with social and ecological relationships in children's picture books, and Platt (2004), whose work more centrally addresses cultural/environmental relationships.

<sup>2</sup>It is important to note that K. Marantz and S. Marantz (K. Marantz, 1994, 2001; S. Marantz & K. Marantz, 2005), and Nodelman and Reimer (2003) have all written about the pleasures of children's book art. In addition, while Kriesberg's (1999) book *A Sense of Place: Teaching Children about the Environment with Picture Books* does not include much discussion on pleasure or critical multicultural education beyond Native American cultures and his own Jewish background, it is nevertheless an outstanding book to use for connecting children through picture books with the places where they live.

*Pleasure*: deriving from one's sense of connection to self, community, and environment through playful, sensual, aesthetic, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual means.

The notion of pleasure is a complex construct, theorized by many authors including Jagodzinski (2004), who correctly problematizes aspects of pleasure within the paradigm of capitalist exhortations to "enjoy now!" as hyper-narcissistic consumption, and by Giroux and Simon (2005), who take a different approach. While noting similar problematic concerns, they write about "[p]opular culture as a pedagogy of pleasure and meaning" in both hegemonic and resistance terms. In this article, I utilize the idea of pleasure as a motivating force for resistance as supported by this statement: "Guided by a concern with producing knowledge that is ideologically correct, radical theorists have revealed little or no understanding of how a teacher can be politically correct and pedagogically wrong" (Giroux & Simon, 2005, p. 158). And while I do not propose teaching and learning should be all fun, all the time, I believe that engaging preservice students in pleasurable learning and expression (for example, through the pleasures of deconstructing multicultural children's picture books) can help deepen accessibility to difficult content areas.

## Theoretical and Pedagogical Perspectives

### Place-Based Education

Like many meaningful pedagogies, place-based education is founded on Dewey's (1891/1980) ideas of experiential learning, connecting students with their communities. It grounds teaching and learning in the local, bringing the community into the school and taking the students out into the community—working from the known to the unknown, the local to the global. In this way, students both learn from and benefit their communities and natural environments (Gruenewald, 2003a, 2003b; Reisberg, 2006a; Smith, 2002; Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000).

Dewey (1891/1980) describes how the traditional mathematics curriculum is not connected to the local "Piggly Wiggly" supermarket, nor is history or art. He was a great supporter of the arts, advocating meaningful democratic participation in students' home communities.<sup>4</sup> This is the genius of Dewey's work—connecting students' learning in an art-filled, holistic, and integrated manner. Place-based art education generates inherently pleasurable, locally-based art projects connecting students' understanding and love for specific knowable places that serve not only to educate but also to beautify, celebrate, and bring attention to what needs conserving, restoring, or eradicating (Blandy, Congdon, & Krug, 1998; Graham, 2007; Lai & Ball, 2002).

### Visual Culture

Visual culture foregrounds the ways our notions of race, class, and environment are culturally constructed by providing images that reify or contest dominant ideologies either through absence or presence. Through visual

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<sup>3</sup>I have no substantive evidence as yet; however, I believe the images and texts in these books can help foster caring, empathy, and activism with, and for, diverse cultural groups, animals, and environments, while engendering respect and appreciation for students' various home cultures. I am conducting an ongoing study of my students to see if there is validity in this approach. As this is a new method, in development and practice for only 4 years, it warrants further implementation by others and further research into its effectiveness. Consequently, apart from my own use, this pedagogy exists only as a theoretical model, but I welcome further suggestions or engagement.

<sup>4</sup>My use of the term "democratic participation" follows Blandy and Congdon's (1987) definition of democracy as "a conceptual and philosophical view ... [that includes] popular self-government, free speech ... [and] citizenry prepared for self-determination through active involvement in a community" (1987, p. xvi).

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media, such as television and advertising, children are bombarded with representations of an endlessly-renewable, disposable, consumer culture. These, and all other visual culture images, inform and influence children (and society) in frequently unattended and unacknowledged ways.

Having illustrated children's picture books, I understand how children learn unconsciously from images, so I am mindful of this in my own work. I know this is also true for other children's book artists who embed positive and critical social and ecological messages in their images (Reisberg, 2006b). These messages can be highlighted through visual culture education by teaching students how to deconstruct the visual aspects of culture. Students learn to explore not only the surface of the images but also the rationale (philosophies and interests) behind their creation (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Darts, 2004; Duncum, 2000; Freedman, 2000b, 2003).

### **Intercultural Art Education**

In contrast to mainstream multiculturalism's focus on non-dominant cultures as "other" cultures, intercultural education dispenses with such cultural hierarchies and normative notions to promote equal exchanges between diverse groups and individuals (Gundara & Fyfe, 1999; Hernandez, 1999). Consequently, visual culture's broadening of art education possibilities have challenged class-based Anglo-European canons of fine art as the only "true" art experience. Thus, visual culture *also* investigates the full range of relevant visual experiences that inform, influence, and represent culture, including fine art, indigenous art, popular art, and design art (Freedman, 2003). Therefore, quality multicultural picture books can serve as significant examples of visual culture within an intercultural art curriculum to explore social and ecological themes in students' own communities.

These multicultural picture books powerfully represent the intersections of art, place, and culture, in inspirational artwork using various techniques, materials, and culturally sensitive forms of artmaking. Additionally, they represent images of many diverse cultures found in contemporary classrooms by creating an intercultural learning environment. It is important also to include quality Anglo-European-American books as part of an intercultural agenda. Because these books are usually omitted from multicultural education, they reinforce an invisible norm of "other" cultures and Anglo-European-Americans as "cultureless" (Newling, 2001). Furthermore, focusing on the art of quality picture books from a wide range of cultures can clarify positive cultural values, serving to promote an "asset" view of "difference," rather than the more frequently seen deficit model. It is also important to acknowledge the problems of "essentializing culture," given the multiplicity and changing nature of cultures in each individual and the prevalence of bi- and multi-racial heritages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

The following a/r/tographic reflection contextualizes my argument for connecting place-based and visual culture art education with multicultural picture books to promote pleasurable forms of social and ecological caring.

### **At Home in a Transient World**

When I first moved from San Francisco to a small rural community in the Pacific Northwest, I experienced tremendous culture shock. While most of the faculty at this Research 1 University shared my social reconstructionist views, the students did not. I witnessed the students' views in their choice of conservatives such as George W. Bush for their "role-model activist currency" designs (Reisberg, in preparation).

Because I had moved with a radical activist agenda, intending to teach social and ecological justice through art, when I encountered extreme resistance, I was shocked, responding with anger and judgment. This attitude was highly unproductive for all concerned, and I realized I had to completely rethink my teaching. Rather than preaching at my students about the injustices plaguing our society and environment, I wanted to promote social and ecological caring through connection and pleasure. Consequently, I began developing a "place-based pedagogy of pleasure" inspired by some of Kit Grauer's teaching methods (Galbraith, 2004). I also discovered that multicultural picture books provided an ideal visual means to engage students in playful, yet critical, ways, which I will discuss later in this article.

Like many people, I have a complex relationship with class, race, and place. As a "multicentered" (Lippard, 1997) person in a transient world, I am constantly negotiating the notion of home. In the working-class suburb of Australia where I grew up, anyone with any get up and go got up and went; I was one of the ones who kept on going. Having lived in many places, I realized that the only constant has been my practice of artmaking, which changed according to where I lived. When I lived in New Mexico, I painted my girlfriends and myself playing in the Rio Grande. I painted the mesas and plains full of piñon, sage, and other native plants, dotting the landscape in patterned excess. In San Francisco, I painted the Victorian buildings in the Mission District where I lived. These buildings also appeared in the children's books I illustrated. Now that I have moved to Northern Illinois, genetically modified corn, barbed wire, and bright red Cardinal birds are appearing in my paintings. The making of art, as Carl Angel (Reisberg, 2006b) said, "both grounded and set me free," while the making of antiracist and anticlassist children's picture books helped me heal the scars of growing up the daughter of Holocaust survivors in an ugly, industrial, anti-Semitic neighborhood.

Reflecting on my relationship with place, I realized that through the practice of making art, I have learned about every place I have lived. I have studied each of these places' architecture, native animals, plants, and landforms. Through this visual learning, I have developed an intense love and respect for these environments, as well as a desire to protect them.

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As an art educator, I now try to inspire in my students this same love and respect for others and the natural world. I encourage them to pay visual, emotional, and critical attention to where they live—to engage with place on aesthetic-activist levels through visual culture, intercultural, and place-based art education. I want my students to learn to care for where they are, passing this ethic of caring on to their students—teaching through a sense of pleasure, leading from the front rather than kicking from behind. Finally, as a researcher, I seek to integrate these areas of social and ecological caring with my love for art and quality multicultural picture books. This integration forms the foundation of a cohesive research agenda that promotes interconnection, caring, and enjoyment in life.

### **Developing a Place-Based Pedagogy of Pleasure: Some Difficulties**

While authors such as Noddings (1984, 1992) and Gilligan (1982) write about caring within feminine and feminist perspectives, I propose a simplified definition of caring based on awareness of the interrelatedness of people with each other and the “more-than-human” world (Abram, 1996). This definition is similar to Stout’s (1999) advocacy for “develop[ing] ... critical intelligence and the nurturance of the human capacity to care. Caring not only for self, but for others and community, for animals and the physical environment ... [where] caring to know and to make sense of the world should be primary goals for schooling” (p. 23). This concept of caring contrasts with the current “dominator” (Gablik, 1991) model of “success” that favors competition and the accumulation of individual wealth with little or no concern for, connection with, or responsibility to others or our environment.

Unfortunately, our educational system has been built upon this second worldview. In emotionally healthy families, a sense of connection and responsibility is developed from caring engagement with each other (Walsh, 2003), leading me to wonder how we can apply this to make our world healthier. While I believe most art educators are caring people, they have an uphill battle. With historically focused institutionalized, factory-style learning in American education (Tozer, Violas, & Senese, 2002), certain kinds of knowledge and skills (often referred to as the “basics”) are privileged at the expense of the arts (Fowler, 1996). From my student supervision visits, I have seen that many art teachers work in extremely difficult conditions with large class sizes, art-on-a-cart facilities, under-equipped programs in substandard classrooms, short class periods (sometimes as little as 45 minutes every other week), and the threat of unemployment with never-ending budget cuts in art education. These conditions make it very difficult to teach the required techniques, concepts, and history of many different kinds of art, and create meaningful art projects engaging children on emotive and aesthetic levels while addressing issues of social and ecological caring. It is also difficult for art



teachers to change the system of education (and our society) that continues to fragment and disconnect education and life. One approach that I believe holds promise for enacting positive change is a “place-based pedagogy of pleasure” (PBPop).

### Developing a Place-Based Pedagogy of Pleasure: Some Possibilities

A PBPop is not a “one-size-fits-all” approach to art education. Instead it is one possibility that can be used with others. By using pleasure as a pedagogical tool, art educators can potentially help students enjoy learning more, avoiding the “preachiness” that can be one of the difficulties of focusing on social justice and ecological responsibility. Teachers may also find this approach makes teaching more pleasurable.<sup>5</sup>

In the PBPop classroom, pleasure manifests in the form of seductive and deconstructive art-viewing and making practices. The goal of this approach is to produce counter-narratives of caring and interconnection grounded in place. These counter-narratives challenge a system privileging wealth at the expense of everything else—happiness, health, caring, community, environment, and possibly the survival of our planet. Like Giroux and Simon (2005), I believe “the production of meaning and the production of pleasure are mutually constitutive of who students are, the view they have of themselves, and how they construct a particular version of their future” (p. 159). Thus, while instant gratification of “designer capitalist pleasures” has effectively been used to maintain the dominant order (jagodzinski, 2007), critical creative pleasures have also effectively challenged this order (e.g. The Guerrilla Girls, The Yes Men, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, etc.).<sup>6</sup>

Engagement and connection are important facets of happiness. Freedman (2000b) comments on *Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness in the Constitution*: “If we view art and art education as aids to making life meaningful, as reflections of liberty, and as means through which people might pursue constructive forms of happiness, *art education is a sociopolitical act*” (p. 315). Similarly, a place-based pedagogy of pleasure is a sociopolitical act.

Conceptually, a PBPop is founded on the three pedagogical approaches described earlier that highlight the sensual, aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, and pleasurable aspects of connecting students with their own communities and natural environments through multicultural picture books. A PBPop uses quality multicultural picture books for a variety of reasons. Children’s books provide important formative impressions of the world (Higgins, 2002). Because most American children have access to picture books (K. Marantz, 1994; S. Marantz & K. Marantz, 2005), art educators can provide an enjoyable way to investigate issues of social and ecological caring by facilitating deep explorations of the book’s art, while also modeling how to do deep readings of other forms of “taken-for-granted” visual media. In addition,

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<sup>5</sup>The following student comments from my ongoing study, reflective of an end of course anonymous questionnaire, suggest that students respond positively to the concept of pleasure. *Have you changed as a result of this course?*—“I learned about cultural art and how we can affect others around us including our communities.” “I have become more open-minded and accepting of others.” “Art connects all students to the world and themselves.” *Do you think education should be pleasurable?*—“Kids should want to get up and go to school, otherwise it’s like a punishment.” “Students they [sic] will learn to love it [learning] and enjoy/be eager to learn even more.” “Teachers will be successful if they enjoy their work and students will too.”

<sup>6</sup>The Guerrilla Girls, an anonymous group of feminist artists, have been instrumental in employing art and humor to challenge sexism and gender discrimination in the art world. The Yes Men also employ art and humor to confront social issues in provocative ways. Finally, Mierle Laderman Ukeles is known for her pioneering site-specific work over the past 30 plus years involving garbage, sanitation, and recycling in New York City.

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using quality multicultural picture books provides integrated teaching opportunities, involving the “multiple literacies” (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000, p. 5) of reading, writing, and art, as well as other content areas, such as mathematics, science, and history. Ken Marantz (1963, 1994, 2001) and Sylvia Marantz (1992a, 1992b, 1995) pioneered the value of picture book art as a means to explore both the voice of the artist and the text of the images. In their book *Multicultural Picture Books: Art for Illuminating our World* (2005), they note the issue of whether outsider author/artists should write/illustrate picture books from cultures other than their own.

While cultural patrimony issues are too complex to engage with here, given the ongoing exploitation of non-dominant cultures and the difficulties for non-emic author/illustrators to “get it right,” I advocate for using books by emic author/illustrators whenever possible. Exploring the art in these books can provide insights into different cultural groups’ forms of social and ecological caring, while also facilitating classroom discussions on issues of representation and stereotyping. Finally, as K. Marantz and S. Marantz (2005) and Nodelman and Reimer (2003) point out, quality picture books are inherently pleasurable with their nurturing associations of “being read to” and the transporting beauty of the artwork, as well as the enjoyment of expression that comes from classroom dialogues “with or against” the various texts.

By empathetically comparing and contrasting culturally and place-specific picture books with students’ local cultures and environments, art teachers and students are able to explore the interconnections of class, race, and environment. This strategy develops sensitivity to, and appreciation for, both communities and environments. Students then actively participate in the life of their community by creating (and exhibiting/installing) art that either celebrates or criticizes and acts upon their discoveries.

### **Enacting a Place-Based Pedagogy of Pleasure**

Because good stories usually do not exist outside of place, quality multicultural picture books can provide exceptional visual culture resources for art educators. Teachers can help their students learn to decode images, making connections between culture and environment, while gaining a greater understanding of other ways of being, both in and beyond their immediate world.

Earlier, I provided the following key words to describe my definition of “quality multicultural picture books”: *place-specific, culturally sensitive, well written and visually appealing*. Worlds of meaning exist within each of these terms; consequently, I would like to expand on this definition to help educators select quality books. The following evaluative guide, adapted from Higgins (2002), Reisberg, Brander and Gruenewald (2006), and The Council on Interracial Books for Children (2007), assists in selecting books that have these qualities.



### Place-Specific Qualities

Look for unique geographical, ecological, and cultural features of real places conducive to learning about how people actually live in place. Even urban stories can show nature with trees, plants, birds, domestic animals, or insects. Does the book show the natural world? Do you care about this place after reading/viewing the book? Are you able to see connections between the culture(s) and place in the book?

### Culturally Sensitive Qualities

See if the author/illustrator is identified as a cultural insider, either on the book jacket cover or on the first or last pages. If not, what kind of research has s/he done? Look for stereotypes, inaccuracies, or generalizations, such as one cultural group shown all positively or all negatively. Are the characters and community credible, or is it a generic story with generic characters with different colored skin and hair? How do they relate to their environment? Are non-dominant cultures in subservient or background roles? Is the story about a “safe minority hero” or a minority kid who has to “prove” him/herself to white people? Does the character’s problem lie solely with the individual, such as poverty, homelessness, or struggling in school, or can it be explored within larger contexts of social or environmental justice? Do the characters have agency?

### Well-Written and Visually Appealing Qualities

Does the story engage the reader into caring about the characters? Are the characters fleshed out and believable? Does the author use language vividly or poetically? Does the author or artist provide multiple levels for exploration, such as a “second story” hidden in the art? Does the art provide dignity for the characters? Is the art appealing, either through color, composition, originality, or skill? Is the illustration style cartoony? If so, does it avoid stereotypes? Do the illustrations convey the mood of the writing and details of the place? Does the art make you want to turn the page to find out what happens next?

With current classroom time limitations, book “readings,” and the ensuing deconstruction of the themes and images, can be conducted in a spiral curriculum fashion, either broken down into sections related to the day’s art activity or read in one sitting, and then reviewed for each project as it builds upon the previous project. In addition, while picture books are considered appropriate only for the very young, a surprising number are also appropriate for upper grades to explore social and ecological themes on deeper levels, such as *Honoring Our Ancestors* (Rohmer, 1999), *Just Like Me* (Rohmer, 1997), *I See the Rhythm* (Igus, 1998), and *This Land is My Land* (Littlechild, 1993).

For the past few years I have been practicing a PBPoP in my own teaching and have developed many lesson plans connecting multicultural picture books with social and ecological issues and art. In the next section I provide

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a curriculum web example used to inspire PBPoP art projects, followed by an outline of how a PBPoP could potentially be used as a means of preservice art education curriculum reform.

**A PBPoP Example: *What's the Most Beautiful Thing You Know About Horses?***

*What's the Most Beautiful Thing You Know About Horses?* (Van Camp, 1998) pairs author Richard Van Camp with Plains Cree artist George Littlechild. Van Camp comes from the Dogrib tribe, which reveres dogs, while Littlechild is part of the Plains Tree Nation, who revere horses. Before reading the book, using sources such as Littlechild's website (2006) and his autobiographical children's picture book *This Land is My Land* (1993), the class studies Littlechild's life and art as primary source material about one indigenous artist's experiences of place and race. *What's the Most Beautiful Thing You Know About Horses?* is a delightful book appropriate for all ages. On the surface, it is a story about the author, whose tribe reveres dogs and knows little about horses. Consequently, he asks his friends (including Littlechild) and family the title question. In the process, we not only learn beautiful things about horses, but we also learn about the people in Van Camp's community. These are contemporary people who happen to be First Nations (something rarely seen in children's literature or other forms of visual culture). In addition, we learn about the author's home environment in the frigid Northwest Territories of Canada. The following web reveals some of the many themes and connections in the book's art and text.

The web image here provides a range of visual culture sources and social or ecologically themed art projects that draw on visual culture, place-based, and intercultural art education. My students and I have successfully done many of these projects on a small scale. However, for something resembling a PBPoP to become a viable widespread means of forging social and ecological connections, attention needs to be paid to the commitment, ethics, and social value of art education, as well as to the resources (including time and money) that are provided both for the professors who teach preservice art educators and K-12 art teachers in the field.

Consequently, I outline what a place-based pedagogy of pleasure might look like as a nascent model for art education reform at the preservice level. However, because instituting a system such as the one I propose requires resources, particularly for teachers in low-income schools, I include numbers 6 through 9 as foundational keys.

**A Place-Based Pedagogy of Pleasure as a Model for Reform**

Along with the history and philosophy of art education as well as studio and other necessary art education courses, preservice art teachers should be taught:

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<sup>7</sup>In the interests of disclosure, I need to note that I am close friends with George Littlechild and some of the other Children's Book Press authors and illustrators whose books are mentioned in this article.

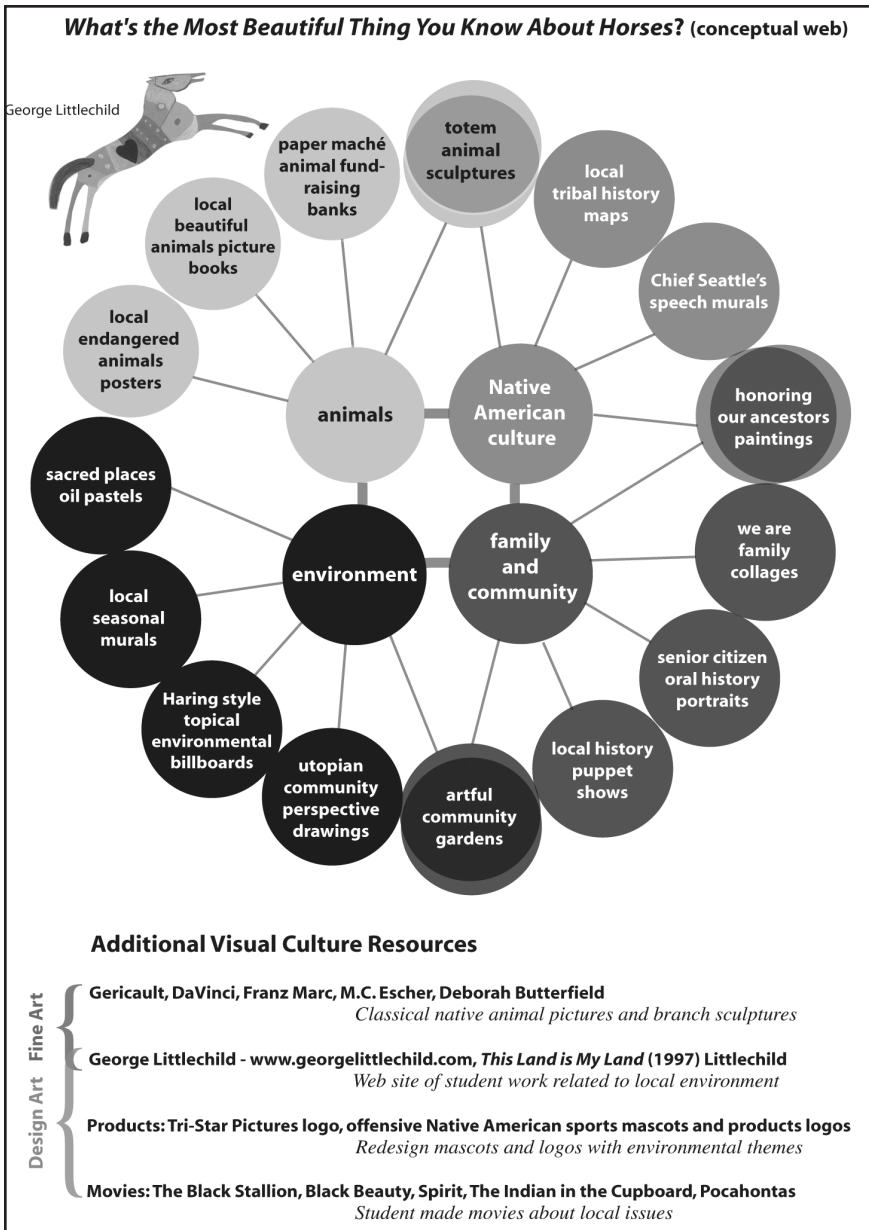


Figure 1. Aleksandra Giza and Mira Reisberg. Horse image by George Littlechild (Van Camp, 1998, p. 3). With permission of Children's Book Press.<sup>7</sup>

1. How to teach visual culture, place-based, and intercultural art education, *and* why they are important in the contemporary art classroom.
  2. How to select quality multicultural picture books, paying particular attention to depictions of the cultures represented in students' future classrooms, communities, and environments, and how to use accompanying related visual culture references from fine art, indigenous art, and popular media.  
*Examples:* Cultural getting-to-know-you projects—self-portraits from my cultures, immigrant history cartoon narratives, honoring our ancestors' portraits.
  3. How to lead children in deconstructing the messages embedded in visual images, such as those in the selected book and related visual culture sources, to see how they either support or resist unhealthy practices.
  4. How to create curriculum webs from quality books and other visual culture sources.
  5. How to have more pleasure in the teaching and learning process by creating collaborative classroom cultures that promote humor, caring, playful exploration, and a sense of interconnection with each other, local communities, and the natural world.  
*Examples:* Play and pleasure projects—abstract finger painting in response to ideas at any age; more group work; such as local seasonal murals, field trips, and artmaking in nature, local history puppet shows, and local endangered animals posters—all in community venues. In fact, any art project can be deeply pleasurable, if taught well.
  6. How to create allies with parents, community members, local politicians, and businesses by bringing the community into the classroom for student projects and taking students out of the classroom and into their local community.  
*Examples:* See Figure 1.
  7. How to network and organize on political levels.  
*Examples:* Persuasive PowerPoint presentations at school board meetings; posters and brochures with student-generated visuals of a life without art—people in colorless clothes, interiors with colorless furniture and plain walls, books with no pictures, television with text only, etc.—to distribute to politicians; participation in national and regional organizations like the NAEA to support policymaking and the hiring of government lobbyists; and organization of anonymous activist groups like the Guerrilla Girls to bring popular attention to the importance of these concerns.
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8. How to make and network websites to share student artwork in a larger context, demonstrating the intellectual, emotive, and aesthetic power of art, while promoting social and ecological caring.  
*Example:* Creation of interlinked websites of PBPoP children's work with descriptions of its outcomes to show the cumulative effects of these visual interventions.
9. How to write grants and raise funds, organize field trips, learn public speaking skills, develop leadership skills, engage the help of parents and community members, and become empowered advocates for children, social and ecological caring, and art education.

### Conclusion

Art education can enlist a much broader spectrum of advocates by greatly increasing the quality, content, and visibility of children's art while demonstrating its cognitive, aesthetic, and activist value on local, national, and global levels. Our system of schooling continues to reinforce competitive, individualistic, and alienating worldviews that have contributed to great social and ecological distress. While I am not so naïve as to believe that a place-based pedagogy of pleasure would instantly radicalize attitudes towards social and ecological caring through art education, my hope is that other educators will join me in developing this or similar pedagogies taking advantage of the art and written narratives in quality picture books. A PBPoP proposes an exploratory method for finding more pleasure and interconnection in teaching and learning. By providing counter-narratives to mainstream culture's "dominator model" (Gablik, 1991), art educators can become art activists, teaching their students how to contribute to the well being of their own communities, while organizing to help each other and our world, one place at a time.

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