Contested and neglected stories of artL A critical study of cultural representation within the primary art curriculum

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Abstract

This study interrogates cultural representation within the primary art curriculum, exposing the enduring dominance of Eurocentric narratives and the marginalisation of minority ethnic artists in classroom practice. Prompted by Ofsted's 2023 call to explore the 'contested and neglected stories of art' (Ofsted, 2023: 17), it critically examines whether primary art education has responded to this imperative or continues to replicate the 'whiteness' of teachers' own art education (Cameron *et al*., 2024). Drawing on critical race theory and critiques of the artistic canon, the study explores how systemic inequalities are perpetuated through curriculum choices, often under the guise of cultural appreciation.

An online questionnaire distributed via social media gathered responses from 22 primary educators: mostly white, female, and non-specialist. Participants identified the artists and cultural practices they include in their teaching, alongside perceived barriers to delivering a more representative curriculum. Findings reveal that 59 per cent included no minority ethnic artists, and 68 per cent included no Black artists. Even among specialists, only 38 per cent referenced Black artists, suggesting tokenistic inclusion rather than a broader anti-racist pedagogical commitment (Kraehe and Herman, 2020).

The study highlights how cultural art is often reduced to decontextualised activities that reinforce stereotypes and risk cultural appropriation (Rogers, 2006; Davenport, 2000). Teachers cited lack of training, confidence, time and fear of parental resistance as key barriers.

This research calls for systemic change, advocating for a flexible, child-centred curriculum that reflects Britain's cultural diversity and empowers teachers as 'arbiters of truth and shapers of history' (Link, 2020: 11).

Link to article

Keywords

culturally responsive teaching, primary art education, social justice, equality, diversity

Introduction

The primary art curriculum in England, a discipline often taught by non-specialist educators with limited formal training in art or art history (All Party Parliamentary Group for Art Craft and Design in Education [APPG], (2024) is shaped not only by statutory guidance but by the personal experiences, biases, and cultural understandings of those delivering it. In recent years, the call for a more inclusive and representative curriculum has gained momentum, with Ofsted's 2023 Research Review for Art and Design urging educators to explore the 'contested and neglected stories of art' (Ofsted, 2023: 17). This directive marks a significant shift in policy, acknowledging the need to challenge the Eurocentric dominance of the artistic canon and to reflect the multicultural reality of British classrooms.

Despite this policy shift, the implementation of culturally diverse art education remains inconsistent and, in many cases, superficial. The absence of minority ethnic artists within national collections and the continued marginalisation of non-white figures in art history (Boime, 1990; Juneja, 2011) reveal the entrenched inequalities that persist within the discipline. These inequalities are mirrored in classroom practice, where cultural representation is often reduced to tokenistic gestures or appropriated activities that lack ethnological context (Davenport, 2000; Staikidis, 2025). The prevalence of units such as 'African masks' or 'Aboriginal dot paintings' exemplifies how cultural art is frequently domesticated and decontextualised, reinforcing stereotypes rather than fostering genuine understanding (Lea, 2010; Chung, 2015).

The role of the teacher as “arbiter of truth and shaper of history” (Link, 2020: 11) is particularly significant in primary art education, where curriculum choices are highly subjective and often reflect the ‘whiteness’ of the educator’s own art education (Cameron *et al*., 2024). Without robust training, resources, or statutory guidance, teachers may inadvertently replicate exclusionary practices, perpetuating a narrow view of artistic excellence that privileges white, Western artists. This is compounded by systemic barriers such as lack of confidence, fear of parental resistance, and limited access to culturally diverse materials (Begum *et al*., 2024; Constantino, 2015).

This study seeks to interrogate the extent to which cultural diversity is embedded within the primary art curriculum and to examine the rationale behind teachers’ curriculum choices. It aims to uncover how systemic inequalities are reproduced in classroom practice and to explore the potential for art education to become a site of resistance and representation. Through an analysis of teacher responses and curriculum content, the research highlights the challenges and opportunities inherent in creating a more inclusive art curriculum, one that not only reflects the cultural heritage of all learners but empowers them to see themselves within the artistic narrative. In doing so, it contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding equity in education and the transformative potential of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Literature review

In 2023, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) Research Review for Art and Design was published (Ofsted, 2023) providing much needed clarity for primary art teachers; the first of its kind since the limited guidance provided by the English National Curriculum for Art and Design (Department for Education [DFE], 2014). This document identified the need for teachers to explore the ‘contested and neglected stories of art’ (Ofsted, 2023: 17) within their classrooms; making this the first time an explicit (albeit brief) requirement has been written into art educational policy for teachers to teach a diverse and representative art curriculum (Access Art, 2023).

As well as an absence of representation within the curriculum, the absence of minority ethnic artists within national collections and exhibition spaces (Juneja, 2011: 274; Topaz *et al*., 2022) reveals the deep-seated prejudices that exist within art history (Sherwin, 2011; Sions and Wolfgang, 2021). This lack of recognition was described

by Albert Boime as 'the art of exclusion' (Boime, 2009: 1) and is still prevalent within the modern art world with just 6.3 per cent of exhibitions and a mere 2.2 per cent of gallery acquisitions featuring artists of colour (Burns and Halperin, 2022).

The invisibility of minority ethnic artists is compounded by the problematic representation of non-white figures within traditional art, where 'black subjects are identified as 'Negro' or 'Servant.' (Paterson, 2019: 7). This historical marginalisation of people of colour (Paterson, 2019), identifying black individuals as property rather than people (Harris, 1993), is shamefully apparent in traditional portraiture with the common depiction of black people in positions of servitude and submission (Noble, 2022). Even art theory is embedded with racially encoded practices where white carries associations of virtue and innocence whilst black signifies evil and death (Gude, 1999).

The Black Lives Matter Movement of 2013, that gained significant attention in 2020 with the murder of George Floyd, forced art institutions to confront their position on both curatorial and acquisition decisions (Gompertz, 2020). Since then, the art establishment has made gestures to appear more culturally inclusive (Savoy, 2020); however, the 'separate but unequal' programming that often underpins curatorial decision making (Wilson, 1989) and the de-politicising of key artistic figures from Black communities by galleries (Denman, 2021) has become the catalyst for discourse surrounding the British artistic canon, raising questions as to 'whose art history' (Price, 2018: 8) should be included in the taught narrative of art.

Stuart Hall, in his seminal 'Whose Heritage' speech, called upon arts practitioners and policy makers to reevaluate the concept of heritage to move beyond the idea of Britain as a 'closed, self-sufficient island' (Hall, 1999: 10), to instead reflect the significant cultural contributions of our increasingly multicultural society. Hall describes this as a living process, calling on a sustained government commitment to create a more inclusive society (Ashley and Stone, 2023: 12). This, alongside the critical eye and political rhetoric of postmodernism (Holt, 1995), created a challenge to the art establishment to adapt to 'the new art history' (Jõekalda, 2013: 1) by acknowledging the inequality experienced by minority ethnic artists.

Despite this call to end the 'grand narratives' of modernist art (Foster, 1983), this movement towards a more inclusive canon has led to issues of tokenism (Libri, 2020) where artists of colour are 'codified, packaged, and presented within a "clean" formalist art historical practice' (Smalls, 1994: 3) in order for galleries to absolve responsibility for past inequalities and appear more diverse. Through this racial profiling, minority ethnic artists learn that the recipe for success is to fuse contemporary ideas with 'ethnic markers' (Weisenfeld, 2010) creating a burden of choice between authenticity and acquiescence (Mercer, 1999). Conversely, many contemporary artists succumb to 'hyper-visibility' (Mercer, 1999: 56), where artists of colour, granted entry to the static, isolated traditions of 'National Heritage Art' (Desai, 2005: 296), avoid important issues of identity and politics in order to evade the stereotype of 'Black artist.' Despite the art world appearing to welcome some minority ethnic artists as 'the avant-garde of the day' (Hall, 2006: 16) most find the 'doors barred' (Von Rosenberg: 79) and attempts by non-white artists to modify their style to 'gain legitimacy and acceptance from the White art establishment only contributes to their invisibility and erasure' (Smalls, 1994: 3).

The application of critical theory to art assumes that 'art does not reside on neutral ground, and neither do art educators' (Kraehe and Herman, 2020: 5) and as such, educators must 'stand in the gap' instead of 'occupying the sidelines of art education (National Association of Art Educators [NAAE], 2021: 3) to ensure an art education that is actively 'anti-racist' (NSEAD, 2023). Although some policy makers see this challenge to the dominant, white ideology of art education as disrespectful to the national identity (Solorzano and Yosso, 2010: 472) or even as the preaching of anti-white hate (Crewe, 2021), educators must acknowledge the reality that the lived experience for many minority ethnic children 'will be one where they encounter racism, live shorter lives and earn less than their white counterparts' (NSEAD, 2023: 6). This highlights the importance of a culturally representative art education as a tool to challenge systemic injustice. As such, a critical reflection is needed to analyse how the primary art curriculum can be designed to fully represent the increasing cultural diversity of its learners (Link, 2020) as introducing the work of a few culturally diverse 'processes and techniques is not an escape hatch that will save art education from its entanglements with colonialism and white supremacy' (Kraehe, 2020: 5). By

acknowledging that racism is white educators' problem to solve (Nieto, 2003) we must 'unravel education's own complicity in oppression' (De Lissovoy, 2010: 419).

A move to make art education more culturally representative has existed within literature since the 1950s (Haynes, 1993; Berger, 1973) as society's way of addressing its 'guilty conscience' for the historical 'cultural gap' (Hurwitz, 1966: 21). However, despite acknowledgement of the need for educational reform (Eisner and Ecker 1984; Banks and Lynch, 1986), without a coordinated strategy written into statutory curriculum, examples of truly inclusive art education remain 'scattered' (Haynes, 1993: 32). Without curriculum guidance, primary art teachers often embark on a superficial tour of domesticated cultural art (Lea, 2010) inadvertently portraying non-western creativity as primitive (Delacruz, 1996) or reducing traditional artforms to 'Kitsch Culture' (Bequette, 2005: 70) through the use of cheap, modern materials that neglect the ethnological context in which the art was produced (Davenport, 2000). Although this is presented by educators as cultural appreciation (Han, 2019), this adoption of the elements of one culture by members of another, more dominant culture (Rogers, 2006: 474) reinforces the power dynamic of cultural appropriation where the artistic traditions of a minority culture are trivialised or exploited (Down, 2024). Without support for primary art educators to truly understand what a representative art curriculum looks like (Acuff, 2016; Begum*et al*., 2024), the shift to an art education that attends to all students' heritage as well as their 'hopes and dreams' (Banks, 2006: 9) remains a challenge.

The need for improved guidance within educational policy to support culturally responsive art teaching (Tigert and Leider, 2022) is starkly evidenced in the 2024 '*Visualise'* report into race and inclusion in secondary school art (Begum*et al*., 2024) which found that only 2.3 per cent of artists named within exam submissions were from Black or South Asian backgrounds. Further analysis of art exam papers concluded that minority ethnic artists were predominantly aligned to 'craft practices', rather than cited as standalone artists and that within student course work, the prevalence of 'White Art' was still the most significant genre (Begum *et al*., 2024: 38). Also within this report, 37 per cent of teachers acknowledged that they had not been introduced to any minority ethnic artists during their own training (Begum *et al*., 2024: 10) and many teachers admitted to avoiding issues of cultural identity in art lessons

due to lack of confidence and fear of 'getting it wrong' (Begum*et al*., 2024: 11). Of the art curricula analysed within this study, less than 10 per cent mentioned any minority ethnic artists at all and of those minimal references made, non-white artists were exclusively aligned with historical or world cultures (Downing and Watson, 2016) instead of heralded for their own individual contributions to art. There is no equivalent research into the national picture of representation within primary art, but given the lack of non–specialist art teachers within primary schools (APPG, 2024), it can be predicted that the dominance of Eurocentric art, artists and processes is likely to be similar.

The highly subjective nature of the primary art curriculum (Access Art, 2021) places teachers as 'arbiters of truth and shapers of history' (Link, 2020: 11; Gaztambide-Fernandez *et al*. 2018) through the art curriculum choices that they make. Primary art, often taught by non-specialist teachers (Pavlou, 2004) who may lack confidence in art themselves (Cooper, 2018; Ofsted, 2024), replicate the 'whiteness' of their own art education (Cameron *et al*., 2024) due to lack of time, confidence and resources (Begum*et al*., 2024; Cooper, 2018). Years of erosion of teacher autonomy created by centralised curriculum and policy changes (National Foundation for Educational Research [NFER], 2020) have left teachers feeling powerless to address issues of race and inclusion. So, without fundamental curriculum and policy change, professional development and significant government investment in time and resources (Ofsted, 2023), primary art education is yet to develop a lasting impact on the whiteness of today's art education (Link, 2020; Begum*et al*., 2024). This leaves the responsibility for enacting a more representative art offer on the shoulders of the small minority of non-white primary teachers (UK Government,2025) rather than as a shared responsibility for all those involved in the artistic education of our young people.

This study aims to highlight the prevalence of white artists within primary art education and to identify the rationale behind primary teachers' limited curriculum choices.

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to explore teachers' curriculum choices and identify the extent to which the primary art curriculum represents the diversity of learners. This was enacted using an online questionnaire that was designed to ascertain the artists

and cultures selected by teachers to be taught in their primary art classrooms. The questionnaire was then distributed through online art teacher groups via social media.

The use of an online questionnaire provided flexibility and ease of distribution for both researcher and participant (Ong *et al*., 2023) and allowed greater reach to a broader base of participants (Browne, 2005). The use of snowball sampling was employed to build up a reasonable sized sample by encouraging participants to nominate others who would be relevant for the purposes of the research (Denscombe, 2016). All information about the study was communicated within the design of the questionnaire to ensure that participants knew they were being researched, were fully informed about their involvement and were aware of their right to withdraw (Hammersley, 2017: 62). Due to the sensitive nature of research addressing issues of race and ethnicity, consent was gained by a mandatory series of tick boxes to ensure that participants had given 'active consent' before accessing the research questions (Lambert, 2012: 141). The questionnaire was designed to avoid the need for participants to share their names or provide log in details, to harness the inherent anonymity of online questionnaires.

The lack of research in this area of primary art meant that there was no baseline for the application of construct validity (Thomas, 2017); however, the questions were designed to mirror the executive summary of the *Visualise* report (Begum *et al*., 2024) which is situated in secondary art education with the hypothesis that similar responses might be returned.

The research questions within the online questionnaire were:

1. What artists do you study are part of your primary art curriculum?
2. What historical or cultural art practices do you study with your primary children?
3. When planning a diverse and representative curriculum, what do you perceive the barriers to be?

The questionnaire was completed by 22 participants, whose characteristics were broadly in line with the teaching population in that they were predominantly white and female.

Ethnicity	White British	Minority Ethnic	Unclassified			
Teaching Workforce 2023	90.3%	9.7%				
This Study	91%	5%	5%			
Gender	Female	Male	Unclassified			
Teaching Workforce2 023	75.72%	24.1%	0.16%			
This Study	95%	5%				
Age	Under 25	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Teaching Workforce 2023	14.14%	33.11%	27.94%	17.55%	2.78%	4.45%
This Study	5%	9%	14%	32%	32%	9%

Figure 1: Participant sample data compared to the primary teaching workforce taken from 2021 Census date (Gov.uk 2024)

Thirteen out of 22 participants identified themselves as art specialists.

The authors own positionality is of a white, middle-class, female teacher with 20 years of experience within primary education. The gap in the research was identified, in part, with the acknowledgement of the author's own complicity in delivering an overly Eurocentric primary art curriculum due to lack of cultural experience and reliance on the ‘whiteness’ of their own education. This study aims to take the first steps in highlighting the lack of diversity as an issue in order to suggest positive strategies for the development of a more inclusive art offer to meet the needs of all children.

Findings

The findings of the literature review present a systemic lack of representation within both art history and the resulting curricula in both primary and secondary education. The literature also indicates teachers' fear of addressing cultural issues due to deficits in their own education, knowledge and experiences, perceived parental pressure, all exacerbated by a lack of training, resources and teacher autonomy.

Participants in this study were asked to list the main artists that they choose to study within their school's art curriculum to identify to what extent the selection of artists for inclusion transcends the 'tolerance of a few non-Eurocentric heroes' (Lea, 2010: 33).

Of the 68 artists mentioned in total, only 12 could be considered minority ethnic (17.6 per cent) with only eight (11.7 per cent representing black artists. The inclusion of 17.6 per cent minority ethnic artists in the primary curriculum compares favourably with the secondary-based *Visualise* report where only 2.3 per cent of artists mentioned in coursework were considered minority ethnic. However, the majority of the ethnically diverse artists were mentioned by a very small number of teachers. In fact, 13 (59 per cent) of participants mentioned no minority ethnic artists at all and 15 (68 per cent) included no black artists. Only four participants mentioned more than one minority ethnic artist (18 per cent with only one participant including more than one black artist (4.5 per cent). Even when analysing responses from the 13 art specialists in isolation, only five (38 per cent) included any black artists in their response. Unsurprisingly, only two non-specialist teachers (22 per cent) identified any Black influences within their art curriculum. This supports the assertion that schools do little to challenge the 'long established ethnocentric curriculum' (Knight, 2015: 79) where artists of colour are excluded, or included for tokenistic purposes (Libri, 2020).

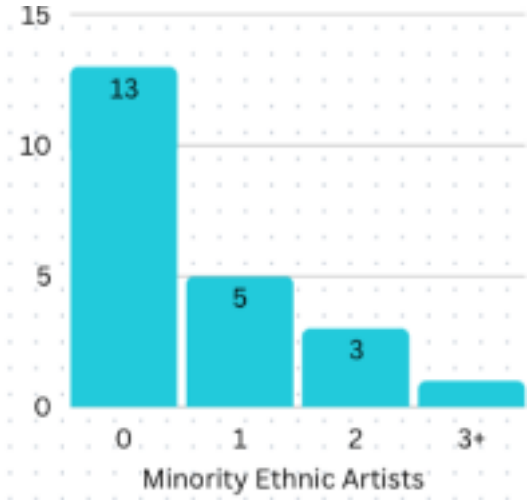

Figure 2: Graph to show the frequency of minority ethnic artists being included within the participants' primary art curricula.

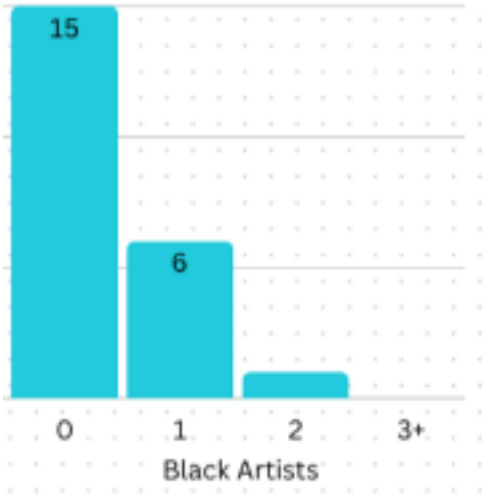

Figure 3 - Graph to show the frequency of Black artists being included within the participants' primary art curricula.

Ranking all of the artists by frequency of inclusion revealed a complete absence of Black artists within the first 16 most popular artists. It also demonstrated that the inclusion of non-white artists in primary art is still a rarity with only Frida Kahlo and Yayoi Kusama representing minority ethnic artists within this group.

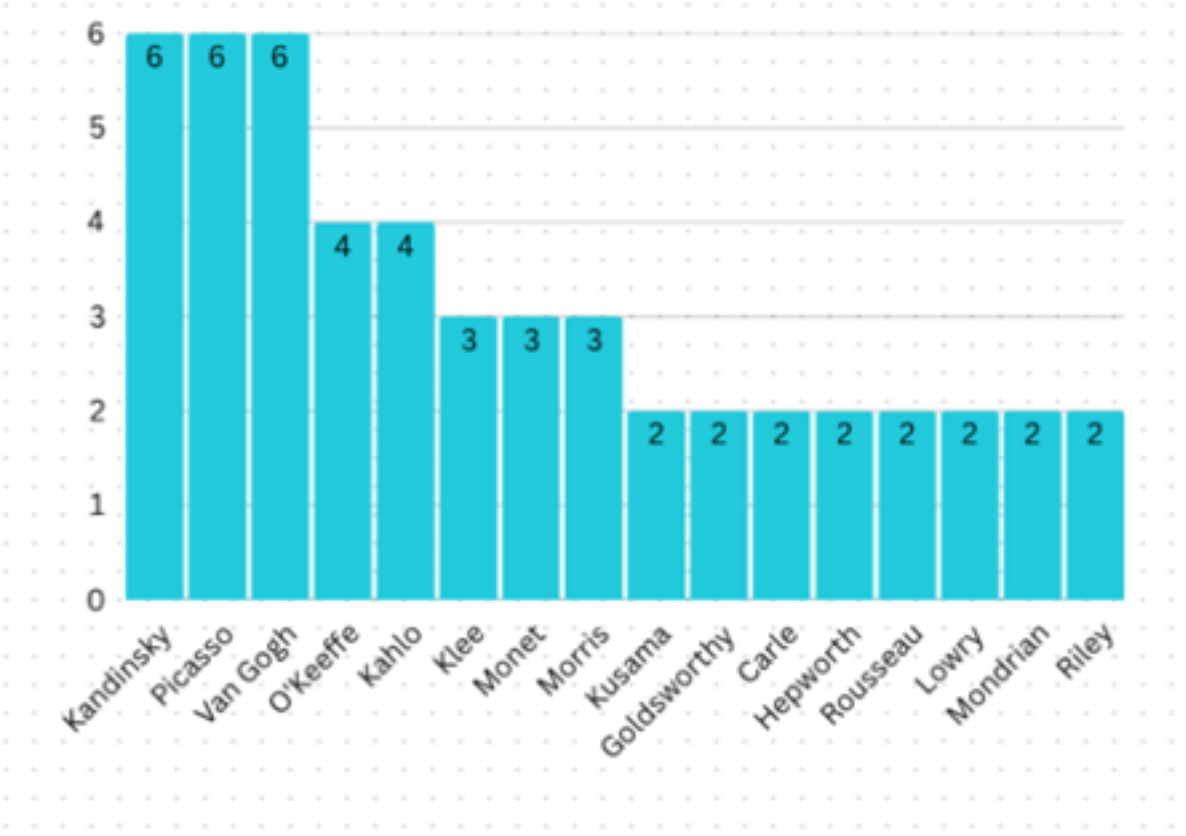

Figure 4 – A graph to illustrate the frequency of artists selected for inclusion in the primary art curriculum

The emergence of white, Europeans: Wassily Kandinsky, Pablo Picasso and Vincent Van Gogh as the most popular artists suggests that primary teachers are drawing their curriculum choices from historical, 'Master Narratives' (Acuff, Hirak and Nangah, 2012: 6) where the 'whiteness' of teachers' own art education (Cameron *et al*., 2024) is being passed on through the generations through the selection of overwhelmingly Eurocentric influences (Wylie, 2023). Although further document analysis would be required to ascertain the depth of study that underpins the inclusion of these ethnic minority artists, the lack of diversity of the artists within this data set suggests a 'surface level' engagement in 'heroes and holidays' (Knight, 2015: 79).

When asked what historical or cultural art practices were studied within schools, the 'maintenance of existing structures' (Knight, 2015: 79) was also evident with participants citing broad, cultural themes such as 'African' and 'Indian' art indicating the domestication of cultural art (Lea, 2010) through the reduction of an entire continent or country's artistic legacy to a singular unit of work. Evidence of this cultural appropriation (Rogers, 2006) was also apparent with multiple participants within both

the questionnaires and interviews discussing the children creating their own 'Aboriginal Art'. This is particularly problematic as the artwork of First Nation Australians is steeped in sacred information that should not be reproduced without the consent of the relevant indigenous people (National Library of Australia, 2024) thus by including this as a primary art unit neglects the ethnological context in which the art was produced (Davenport, 2000). The participants' examples of "Mendi patterns using poster paint," "paper-mâché African masks," the creation of "Aboriginal Art on sugar paper," and "making art by copying cultural artefacts," indicates the use of cheap, western art supplies to reduce important items of cultural significance to 'Kitsch Culture' (Bequette, 2005:70). There was no evidence that any participants had engaged their children with any contemporary art processes beyond the Western canon, suggesting that non-European art may be presented as unnecessarily primitive and traditional (Delacruz, 1996).

The celebration of art from non-western cultures is a key component of the primary art curriculum if the context in which the art was created is exemplified and shared as inextricable from the art itself. This cultural understanding was identified within this study as a key limitation to the teaching of a diverse range of art processes.

> "I go on Pinterest and show the children art from other countries. That way they can copy what they see and make their own version." (Participant 10)

This surface level interaction with non-western art was also corroborated by a further participant.

> "I don't really know much about art from other countries. But there are lots of pictures on the internet so we tend to look at those." (Participant 7)

When asked to describe the barriers faced in planning a more diverse and culturally representative curriculum, teachers predominantly cited their own lack of knowledge and confidence as a limitation (Constantino, 2015; Begum *et al*., 2024).

> "Without the necessary knowledge and training, it is a challenge to find artists that are relevant to the life experiences of the children that we teach." (Participant 5)

The absence of training, money and time were also consistent themes, with a small number of teachers also citing fear of resistance from parents as a limiting factor and the risk of upsetting the status quo (Brown *et al*. 2022: 584).

> "You've got to be mindful of parents and carers and their views. You have to tread quite a careful line sometimes." (Participant 18)

This response points to a broader issue of systemic racism (Eddo-Lodge, 2018) where teachers feel that teaching a representative curriculum could be seen as 'avant-garde' (Hall, 2006: 16) or a challenge to the national identity of art (Solorzano and Yosso, 2010) instead of recognising the necessity to move away from Western norms (Chin, 2013) to widen the 'canon of default artistic references (Begum *et al*., 2024: 21).

Evaluation

These findings carry remarkable similarities to those of the secondary education based *Visualise* report that also highlights the overwhelming whiteness of the art curriculum, teachers lack of knowledge of minority ethnic artists and the absence of support available to support teachers in developing their cultural understanding (Begum *et al*., 2024). In both studies, over half the teachers never, or infrequently use works by minority ethnic artists with majority of teachers citing the lack of guidance from the National Curriculum as a limiting factor to the development of more culturally responsive art practice. Interestingly, both studies also identified a deficit between minority ethnic and Black artists, with the latter significantly more likely to be excluded completely from the curriculum.

The absence of Black artists within both studies supports the work of Amelia Kraehe who compels teachers to confront the many forms that 'anti-Blackness' takes within art education (Kraehe, 2020: 5). Although the majority of teachers in both the *Visualise* report and this study recognise that 'art must not stand on neutral ground', few appeared to feel empowered to actively challenge art educations 'entanglements with colonialism and white supremacy' (Kraehe, 2005: 5).

Key findings

- The lack of teachers who included any minority ethnic (59 per cent) or Black artists (68 per cent) within their teaching.

- The tokenistic inclusion of a limited pool of non-white artists incorporated for their ethnicity, rather than their impact.
- The prevalence of the culturally appropriated e.g. ‘Aboriginal Art’ and culturally reductionistic units of work e.g. ‘African Art’
- Primary art teachers cite lack of knowledge, confidence, training, money and time for the lack of diversity within their art curriculum, as well as the fear of “upsetting the status quo”.

The findings of this study reinforce that there is little evidence to suggest that the benefits of a diverse and representative art curriculum are being felt within the classroom (Wylie, Anwari and Hood, 2024). Many teachers described artists being selected primarily to ensure each year group studied a minority ethnic artist and that this tokenistic approach to inclusion (Libri, 2020) does little to support children in understanding the lived experiences of a broad range of artists (Hurston, 1997). There is also emerging evidence that artists Frida Kahlo and Yayoi Kusama are becoming common choices for their intersectionality as both female and minority ethnic artists, allowing their inclusion to tick the ‘multiple boxes’ of two under-represented groups. Teachers also described choosing artists to highlight issues of racial inequality which, without a range of artists to provide a balanced perspective, could reinforce stereotypes (Desai, 2000) and perpetuate ideas of minority ethnic submission and Black servitude (Noble, 2022).

As a suggestion for further research, a national document analysis of primary art curricula would support a greater understanding of the ways in which culturally responsive teaching is embedded into practice. By analysing the long-term plans that schools create to monitor progression, a more accurate picture of the ethnography of the different artists and art movements chosen would be possible, removing the impact of social desirability bias (Ball, 2019) enabling the measurement of enacted behaviours rather than perceptions (Taber, 2013). It would also be possible to identify if any opportunities are provided for curriculum flexibility to allow teachers to address the diversity of each individual cohort (Bell, 2010). By analysing the curriculum offer, the data could be enriched with a greater understanding that goes beyond ‘who’ teachers are choosing to study and provide more depth around ‘how’ those artists are studied and the context in which their work is being used to broaden children’s cultural

understanding (Bastos, 2006). The contextual information that this document analysis would provide would garner greater insight to allow more rigorous comparison between intent and practice in schools.

Recommendations

- Teachers need access to professional development and training to support them in developing their practice. The lack of subject specific CPD available in primary art (Cooper, 2018; Ofsted, 2023) results in missed opportunities to subvert the replication of the 'whiteness' of teachers' own art education (Cameron *et al*., 2024).
- Support is needed to build connections between teachers, schools, art galleries and practising artists. Meaningful, cultural conversations about art are best inspired by concrete examples for which galleries and local artists are a key resource (Downing and Watson, 2008).
- As part of the government's curriculum review, the statutory guidance provided for primary art needs to be enhanced to provide specific support to ensure that all primary art teaching is culturally representative. The need to study abroad and representative selection of minority ethnic and Black artists must be made explicit expanding beyond Ofsted's current statement that simply encourages exploration of 'contested and neglected stories of art' (Ofsted, 2023: 17). The curriculum must mandate that teachers move away from the 'business as usual' approach to art history (Knight, 2015) to tell the full and inclusive story of art (Jõekalda, 2013) by selecting artists not for their ethnicity but for their contribution. Examples of significant artist studies could be provided within the non-statutory guidance of the curriculum to support non-specialist teachers without constraining those with more confidence.
- There must be flexibility within the new curriculum for teachers to attend to the diversity of their own classes (Gay, 2000). This could be addressed by including learning objectives within the curriculum that encourage the study of local art, or the exploration of children's own identities through art. Providing open starting points that allow children to share their own cultural heritages and learn about each other (Lucas and Villegas, 2010) ensures that the primary art classroom becomes a 'culturally pluralistic environment' (Knight, 2015: 72) that radiates the

diversity of the class (Gay, 2000). Through a flexible and child-centred curriculum, value must be ascribed to the cultural heritage of all children (Yosso, 2010).

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the persistent whiteness of the primary art curriculum, revealing a landscape where minority ethnic and Black artists remain largely absent, and cultural representation is often reduced to tokenistic gestures or appropriated practice. Despite the increasing multiculturalism of British classrooms, the curriculum continues to reflect a narrow, Eurocentric canon that fails to honour the lived experiences and identities of its learners. The findings echo those of the *Visualise* report (Begum *et al*., 2024), reinforcing the notion that primary art education is yet to enact meaningful change in response to calls for cultural inclusivity/

Teachers' curriculum choices, shaped by their own educational experiences and constrained by a lack of training, time, and confidence, perpetuate the 'master narratives' of art history (Acuff *et al*., 2012). The inclusion of artists such as Frida Kahlo and Yayoi Kusama, while a step towards diversity, often serves to tick multiple boxes of under-representation rather than celebrate artistic merit. Meanwhile, the reduction of entire cultures to singular art units such as 'African masks' or 'Aboriginal dot paintings' reflects a troubling trend of cultural domestication and appropriation (Lea, 2010; Davenport, 2000).

This study calls for a radical reimagining of the primary art curriculum, one that moves beyond surface-level inclusion and embraces a pedagogy of critical consciousness. Teachers must be empowered to challenge the colonial legacies embedded within art education and to curate curricula that reflect the plurality of their classrooms. Without statutory guidance and sustained professional development, the replication of exclusionary practices will continue. Art education must become a site of resistance, reflection, and representation where all children see themselves not only in the art they study but in the stories that are told. Only then can we begin to dismantle the structures that have long silenced the voices of artists of colour.

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