

## **Adinkra Symbology and Art Education: Implications for Exploring and Developing Meaning in Personal Context**

Christine Waugh-Fleischmann/ Professor Carole Pawloski  
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My goals in researching this subject are to respectfully explore the art of another culture and develop art educational methods for students that encourage understanding of a non-dominant culture and draw parallels between that culture and that of the student.- In the process, students will create symbolic artistic expressions with personal meaning. As a student of multicultural arts education, I am constantly vigilant regarding methods of introducing artworks reaching outside of the traditional presentation of dominant culture work. Multicultural arts education must be presented respectfully and in a manner to which students can relate personal context. Implementation of this process in an art classroom will provide students opportunity to develop respect for the richness of the art of another culture and recognize value in that work, as well as expressing, valuing and developing personal contextual expression in their own work.

This research came about as a result of my personal interest in this subject developed during an Eastern Michigan University art history class called Arts of Africa combined with my area of study in visual arts education. Through library and Internet research I came to understand and respect the complexity of the language developed in Adinkra symbology, as well as issues surrounding the production of Adinkra cloth and the marginalization of the Ashanti people commonly encountered in producing this cloth today. Investigation of the meaning of African proverbs and the resultant language system led to exploration regarding the rich history of Adinkra cloth, method of its creation, how it came to represent such a specific area of Ghana, and its history and marketing in today's global economy. To experience the process as closely as possible, I tore and hand dyed the cloth, cut stamps from soft wood and developed a method of stamping which mimics the stamping process used in the creation of Adinkra cloth. I stamped some cloth, but mainly used the stamps I made in the creation of a self-portrait in the form of a painting. Although I was unable to follow the exacting and complicated process of making ink used by the Ashanti people, I did experiment with multiple mediums until I found one suitable for use with American school children.

Through the study and completion of this process, I have realized meaningful methods whereby children can experience the art of another culture, draw personal contextual parallels and benefit from that experience with meaningful creative expression. This research will benefit art educators and those who write visual arts education curriculum, providing a valid method of incorporating a multicultural element into an art curriculum which honors often ignored or neglected diasporic roots in favor of Western European exemplars. There is also an obvious cross-curricular benefit to classroom teachers of other disciplines, such as history, sociology, writing and geography.

I have taught art education for nearly thirty years and never seen this particular topic addressed. I think that alone makes the study of the Ashanti people and Adinkra cloth in

particular unique. This research contributes to the field of visual arts education, because it provides a method of genuinely constructivist activity, which is contextually relevant to students. In this process, students will create symbols based on personal descriptions and analysis of experiences, feelings and relevant subjects. They will interpret personal meaning through symbols, making judgments about their own life experiences and relationship to visual culture. Options for developing lessons include exploring personal symbol, creating a self-portrait with a symbolic identity, using the stamps as an art element, inventing writing assignments, designing textiles, creating a personal use for the stamps, and exploring the art of the Ashanti culture and diasporic parallels found in the United States.

I hope by this research, to develop a new vehicle for creating meaning in the arts. That goal is beginning to be accomplished. This process will continue as I incorporate Adinkra symbols and personally created symbols in my own artwork and in a visual arts curriculum requiring students to express themselves through individual imagery. I am at the beginning of developing artwork which uses Adinkra symbols and develops personal symbols. Students will come to develop their own symbols and make personal connections between the art they see and the art they create. This concept facilitates understanding and tolerance between cultures, a major goal of visual arts education. This research opens the door to many other lesson possibilities. Ultimately I would like to conduct symbology research of this culture and another culture and compare non-verbal expression through symbols as a means of communication.