

# Otherness as a Form of Knowingness

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## Abstract

This presents a brief textual and photographic account of personal, perceptual experiences in Namibia at an InSEA Seminar and post-seminar cultural tour. This developed sensitivities and sociocultural awareness not found without journeying into novel circumstances filled with opportunities to grow as a person, artists, and educator.

My DNA reveals that I originated in West Africa. Going to Namibia was a feeling of returning home; the climate, the flora and fauna, the music and dance, and the brilliant colors. As a world traveler and cultural enthusiast, I seek to find differences from my previously experienced perceptions so that these new experiences significantly influence my teaching and research. But, most importantly, these experiences change me to be more flexible and empathetic to other ways of knowing. Intriguing cultural landscapes and scholarly presentations are the fuel to novel perceptual constructs that reinforce sociocultural awareness and dismiss cultural stereotyping. As I wrote in *A Framework of Teaching about Cultural Sensitivity in a Global World* (in-press), "I know I must deliberately align my thoughts and emotions to develop actions. This removes the casualness of inaction and replaces it with a moment or series of moments of action to realize the dimensionality of new and undiscovered cultural knowledge." Most fortunately, each of my new experiences finds its way into my classroom in direct, formal presentations, and equally important, informal conversations in the classroom and community, which may start with, "Did you know?", "I didn't know that...", or "You may be surprised that...". This is especially true when sharing experiences of Otherness with those who have not traveled much or experienced various cultural norms, behaviors, and value systems.

Our perceptual experiences filter our awareness; especially in the arts, and we are reminded by the wisdom of Gustav Klimt who stated, "Art is a line around your thoughts." This begs to question how our sociocultural experiences direct our pedagogy and curricular development? How can we teach our layered and complicated dimensional sensory experiences with others? Can I really share the brilliance of the Namibian sky, or the sound of hundreds of seals on the Namibian coast, or the subtlety barren arid beauty of the Namibian desert? In *Quadratic Pedagogy*, a chapter in *The Heart of Art Education* (2012), I wrote, "...

It is equally important to understand what is in our heart and emotion, and balance that with what is in our mind and intellect, thereby recognizing the multidirectional conversations that are possible only when multiple capacities within the individual are

engaged and integrated. Perhaps there is a potential for these experiences to be delivered in the classroom through a combination of significant curriculum and compassionate pedagogy. Together, these can allow us, as teachers, to discover broader, more holistic, approaches to individual empowerment in the art classroom and beyond.

I believe this philosophy and instructional processes even more so today as I live in an increasingly hostile and uncivilized society fraught with violence and racial tension. As Allan and I wrote in *Global Consciousness: A Passport for Students and Teachers*:

The division and divisiveness in society today should concern all of us, and it should be something we all want to address. This situation seems to be triggered by isolation and intolerance for Otherness, but is made worse by intolerable human conditions that have persisted in our communities for years. (p. 1)

The *InSEA SEMINAR: Building Social Cohesion through Arts Education* provided rich experiences in Namibian culture, but as well, the many social and intellectual interactions from international scholars who added a wonderful depth of the awareness of Otherness in its complex beauty. I believe that an international conference is important because the presentations provide alternative philosophies and academic interactions. But for me, perhaps even more important, are the informal interactions that weave a complex tapestry of sociocultural art educational practices. For me, these intimate conversations may provide more breadth and depth than the many formal presentations.



Figure 1. Group Photograph at the InSEA Seminar.



Figure 2. Interior view of the Seminar.



Figure 3. Interior view of the Seminar.



Figure 4. Former InSEA President Rita Irwin addresses the seminar participants.



Figure 5. Participants' view of the presentations.



The seminar presentations discussed various topics tangent to art education, and in particular, *Social Cohesion*. With this first-time Namibian InSEA Seminar, many suggestions were made to benefit students, teachers, and the community. There were vigorous conversations addressing resources and the needed support by the local and national government for art education. I hope this was the very first spark to ignite a passion for student benefit found in the arts that cannot be found in other educational settings. The arts are integral to human existence. As found in the InSEA Constitution, "Education through art is a natural means of learning at all periods of the development of the individual, fostering values and disciplines essential for full intellectual, emotional and social development of human beings in a community" (<http://www.insea.org/insea/about-insea>).



Figure 6. The author participating in the workshop by Pilar Perez Camarero, *Dreams and Inner Images - recreation, self-knowledge, creativity*.

Since we are sensory beings, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that all senses influence our cultural awareness including the color found out of the seminar setting and into nature. As part of the post-Seminar experiences, I discovered many exciting opportunities to expand my awareness as seen below with just two of the many brilliant floral beauties



Figure 7. Twyfelfontein Lodge.



Figure 8. In route to Etosha.



Figure 9. Post-Seminar tour group at Okaukeujo Lodge.

For those interested in enhancing cultural awareness in Namibia, one must adventure with Safari, which was a post-seminar opportunity arranged by the seminar organizers. Certainly, the climate, food, music, and company (we spent many hours in our tour bus) offered various opportunities for cultural growth, but the addition of sharing safari experiences allowed us all to galvanize relationships and long-term friendships that will propel us past the

classroom, publications and presentations, and professional societies into the recognition that we are determined to expand our sensitivities and knowledge of Otherness in ways unrealized until the moment of epiphany. Below are only a very few images that cannot compare to the actual, real-time experiences with artists, scholars, and most importantly, friends.



Figure 10. Springboks in the shade. Etosha National Park.



Figure 11. Cape Cross seal community.



Figure 12. Lioness resting in the shade, Etosha National Park.



Figure 13. Elephant, zebra and Springbok, Etosha National Park.

As many gave hugs before our departure from Namibia and return home, we all expressed our desire to see and do more in this beautiful country. I suspect that many of us will return to do what we can to support the growth of Art education in Namibia. Now, we all carry a small piece of the experience in our hearts that continues to call us back - an alluring call of the heartbeat rhythm of the landscape and people.



Figure 14. Another spectacular Namibian sunset.

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