

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

ISSUE-BASED ART EDUCATION

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By

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Dedication

This graduate project is dedicated to all of the teachers and students who have helped transform me into the educator I am today.

Table of Contents

Signature Page	ii
Dedication	iii
Abstract	vii
Introduction	1
Project One: Banksy Goes Outside the Classroom	7
Project Two: Pam Longobardi	12
Project Three: Invisible Children	16
Project Four: Figure Drawing	24
Conclusion/Justification	28
References	38
Appendices	
A. Notan Exercise	40
B. Trash Landscape Exercise	41
C. Leopard Stencil	42
D. Butterfly Stencil	43
E. Bird Stencil	44
F. Tiger Stencil	45
G. Monkey Stencil	46
H. Monkey Stencil	47

I. Students Chalking Stencils Photo 1	48
J. Students Chalking Stencils Photo 2	49
K. Students Chalking Stencils Photo 3	50
L. Students Chalking Stencils Photo 4	51
M. Students Chalking Stencils Photo 5	52
N. Chalked Stencils	53
O. “Will you miss us?” Photo 1	54
P. “Will you miss us?” Photo 2	55
Q. “Will you miss us?” Photo 3	56
R. Pacific Trash Vortex Installation Photo 1	57
S. Pacific Trash Vortex Installation Photo 2	58
T. Pacific Trash Vortex Installation Photo 3	59
U. Trash Sculpture Photo 1	60
V. Trash Sculpture Photo 2	61
W. Trash Sculpture Photo 3	62
X. Trash Sculpture Photo 4	63
Y. Trash Sculpture Photo 5	64
Z. Trash Sculpture Photo 6	65
AA. Trash Sculpture Photo 7	66
BB. Trash Sculpture Photo 8	67
CC. Trash Sculpture Photo 9	68
DD. Invisible Children Tape Cast Photo 1	69
EE. Invisible Children Tape Cast Photo 2	70

FF. Invisible Children Tape Cast Photo 3	71
GG. Invisible Children Tape Cast Photo 4	72
HH. Invisible Children Tape Cast Photo 5	73
II. Invisible Children Tape Cast Photo 6	74
JJ. Figure Drawing Proportions	75
KK. Gesture Drawings 1	76
LL. Gesture Drawings 2	77
MM. Construction	78
NN. Ten-Minute Pose 1	79
OO. Ten-Minute Pose 2	80
PP. Ten-Minute Pose 3	81
QQ. Ten-Minute Pose 4	82
RR. Thirty-Minute Pose 1	83
SS. Thirty-Minute Pose 2	84
TT. Thirty-Minute Pose 3	85
UU. Thirty-Minute Pose 4	86

Abstract

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This document is about my transformative teaching experience. Through my own teaching and research I have discovered that art becomes more meaningful when it contains both technique and content. I found that students become more engaged when the art curriculum centers on contemporary issues that are significant in students' lives. In my graduate project, I describe art lessons I have developed that focus on social justice and the benefits of issue-based art education.

Introduction

Throughout my time as an art student, my art teachers stressed technique. I was taught how to render images realistically and I produced countless still-life images and landscapes. When technique was not stressed, the layout and composition were. I created skillful drawings-meaningless, content-less, beautiful drawings. When I became a teacher, not knowing any better, I mimicked art lessons that I received in high school with my students. I did see student technical skill improve vastly, which I took as evidence that I was doing an exceptional job teaching.

In her article, “New School Art Styles: The Project of Art Education,” Olivia Gude (2013) concludes, “Many art educators and art education historians have grappled with the questions of the appropriate philosophy, content, theory, scope, and sequence of visual arts education. What’s striking is that whether the dominant or proposed paradigm is Discipline-Based Art Education, creativity enhancement, visual culture, or another formulation, the range of projects that are actually taught in most schools has remained strikingly similar for decades” (p.6). Specifically, “Projects based on techniques of realistic drawing or on formulaic modernist elements and principles of design are over represented in current art education curriculum, especially at the middle and high school levels. Occupying so much curricular space, such projects crowd out possibilities of teaching a wider range of ways of making art, aesthetic methodologies more suited to investigating contemporary life” (p.11).

I used to be part of this problem. I recycled old projects that emphasized techniques and design, preventing art education from evolving and exploring contemporary issues. The Masters Art Education program at California State University,

Northridge made me realize that foundational skills are insignificant if there is no content in an artwork. Described here are some of my unique issue-based projects that foster skill development and the transformative teaching and learning experience that I have undergone and witnessed because of these projects. I first had to change my understanding of the nature of art, my teaching philosophy and curriculum before I expected to see a change in my students' artwork and values.

As part of my Masters program, I was required to take a course entitled Developing Visual Literacy in the Fall of 2008. The purpose of this class was to combine art technique with content. Our instructor, Dr. Edie Pistolesi had us focus on the theme of war. We started with a single cardboard quadrilateral around four inches long. I spent six hours painting a soldier on this cardboard canvas only to be told that I had to attach another small cardboard piece to what I had already painted. This progression continued until six cardboard shapes were added. This process constantly made me reform my composition and ideas as I researched the subject of war even deeper. Dr. Pistolesi kept pushing me out of my comfort zone, making me repaint over what I had already done until I achieved the perfect balance of formal skills and meaning. While I was extremely frustrated at the time, I can now look back and recognize that that class was a pivotal turning point in my personal philosophy about art. My artwork expanded from being solely about aesthetics to an informative, purposeful, and aesthetic expression of ideas.

I learned that an artwork can become powerful and meaningful if social, political, environmental, and cultural issues are addressed. Thus, I began to change my teaching pedagogy and create projects in which students developed a mastery of skills while exploring personally meaningful subjects through contemporary issues.

According to Mary-Michael Billings (1995), “An issue is a matter of public concern or debate. In an issue-oriented approach to art education, the context for making and viewing art requires awareness of immediate political and social realities” (p.22). After identifying an issue, one must evaluate the problem and then make a work of art (Billings, 1995, p.53). Marit Dewhurst (2010) agrees that the critical pedagogy of issue-based art education is about “learning to critically examine the world around us-to pull apart the structural factors that lead to injustice” (p. 10). The issue-oriented approach to art education not only *recognizes* social discrimination based on race, social class, gender and disability but also *analyzes* the situation through research. The artist then takes action by creating a visual statement that brings attention to an issue in hopes of changing or challenging the current conditions that lead to injustice. Thus, issue-based art education recognizes art’s potential to influence political realities and promote social change (Dewhurst, 2010). Art is no longer solely about aesthetics. Art is about using aesthetic tools to communicate a stance on an idea. Louis Lankford (1997) defines issue-based education as a new paradigm that intertwines aesthetics, civic responsibility, and ecological accountability.

Through my own experience and research on the above art educators who promote issue-based art education, I have concluded that there is a difference between re-producing and producing artwork. Olivia Gude (2013) agrees, “Quality art education does not picture what is already seen and understood. Quality art generates new knowledge” (p.11). Good art projects start by giving students aesthetic strategies, but move beyond traditional techniques and design to make meaningful works of art. “Good art projects are not old school art-style recipes to achieve a good-looking product.

Quality art projects are also not mere exercises in which students manipulate form according to teacher-prescribed parameters without any intrinsic purpose” (p.7).

Intrinsic purpose is a key ingredient used to make my projects authentically engaging. After teaching students formal skills, I gave them the opportunity to make art based on issues that they cared about. Because it was an issue on which students had personal connections, they were motivated to do research of their own free will. This contributed to students’ construction of knowledge rather than its passive acceptance. Students found my first issue-based project, Banksy Goes Outside the Classroom, so enjoyable that they begged me to do other issue-based assignments. They took the initiative to look up other contemporary issues to develop projects, took off running without me, and I could barely keep up. This approach led to a fundamental shift in the relationship between student and teacher. My students and I built an understanding of the issues and formed ideas for projects together. There was a special energy in my classroom that I had never experienced before and it was very exciting not knowing exactly what was going to happen next.

After experiencing the success of these new strategies, I reassessed my curriculum. Gude concurs, “We must be willing to let go some of the old familiar projects (and their myriad variations) in order to make room for other sorts of projects and other kinds of art experiences” (2013). *Experiences* is a key word. The issue-based projects became as much about the process as the end product. Students conducted research individually and collaborated together in groups and as a whole class: at first on their own free and later through formal assignments. Another aspect of issue-based art education that led to unique experiences was taking the artwork outside the classroom.

The activist art had to enter the surrounding community to reach its intended viewers and increase public awareness about important social issues. Interacting with the community made for an unconventional and memorable learning experience.

The following were critical components of producing a meaningful art curriculum for my students: 1) Focusing the curriculum around the contemporary issues of students' everyday lives 2) using traditional artistic skills to raise awareness about issues in the community 3) engaging students directly in the planning and teaching process 4) connecting contemporary artists to larger socio-cultural issues to promote change.

We must not only give students knowledge, but also teach them how to apply that knowledge to promote a democratic society (Ayers, Hunt, Quinn, 1998). In the case of Art education, we demonstrate how students can use technical art skills to highlight obstacles causing injustice to change the world.

One way we can encourage students to change the world and use the knowledge that they gained in our art classes to promote change is by studying how contemporary artists are using their artwork to raise awareness about social issues and injustices. In planning our curriculum, we should try to mimic the actual methodologies used by artists in making the artwork (Gude 2013).

Contemporary artists who use their art to inform people about worldly concerns inspired my issue-based lessons described here. These artists include Banksy, Pam Longobardi, and Mark Jenkins. I taught my students about each artist and incorporated these artists' processes and styles into an issue-based project. I did these assignments with my students at Agoura High School.

Agoura High School is located in Los Angeles, California, just west of the San Fernando Valley. It is a residential area composed mostly of middle to upper class families. There are approximately 2193 students, with a projected senior class of 535. The breakdown of students by ethnicity: White - 83%, Asian - 6%, Hispanic - 6%, African-American - 1%, Filipino - 1% has remained steady over the past six years (www.agourahighschool.net).

By sharing these experiences, I hope to encourage art educators to reassess their curriculum and develop projects that fuse technique and content through issue-based art education.

Project One: Banksy Goes Outside the Classroom

I thought long and hard about what issues I cared about and what would excite my students. To begin, I decided that everyone would agree that environmental issues such as global warming and pollution were important.

I also wanted to base my lesson around a contemporary artist whose work is issues-based. I chose to utilize Banksy, a British based graffiti artist, as inspiration. His satirical street art combines dark humor with graffiti done in a distinctive stenciling technique. Such artistic works of political and social commentary have been featured on streets, walls, and bridges of cities throughout the world (Leverton, 2011).

One of the most fascinating things about Banksy is that his true identity has always been a closely guarded secret, known to only a handful of trusted friends. A network of myths has formulated around him: his real name is Robin Banks; he used to be a butcher; his parents don't know what he does, believing him to be an unusually successful painter and decorator. Then there's the suggestion that Banksy is actually a collective of artists and doesn't exist at all (Leverton, 2011).

I used Banksy's "vandalized paintings" as my first inspirational artwork. Banksy (2005) states, "If you want to survive as a graffiti writer when you go indoors, I figured your only option is to carry on painting over things that don't belong to you there either" (p.158). Banksy took one of Monet's famous paintings of a bridge over a beautiful lily pond and added two shopping carts and a traffic cone dumped in the water. Similarly, Banksy created a satire out of Vetriciano's *The Singing Butler* by adding men handling toxic waste in the background. He suggests that we should not pollute the environment with man-made materials.

After introducing my Fine Art II students to Banksy and his work, my students first had to build a knowledge base about their subject by researching various types of trash. For homework, they had to look at the following websites:
<http://socyberty.com/issues/strange-trash-facts/> and
<http://www.co.cass.in.us/ccswd/trivia.htm>. They read the facts about trash, discovering how long it takes certain objects to decompose and how much trash we create. The first website listed data related to the sustainability of trash; a banana peel decomposes in 2 to 10 days, a glass bottle decomposes in 1,000,000 years, while plastic never decomposes. The second website provided illustrative facts such as “Every year we make enough plastic film to shrink-wrap the state of Texas” (“Trash Trivia”). Students created a conceptual drawing based on a fact they read. For example, one student illustrated the map of the United States, showing the state of Texas wound in plastic wrap.

We began the next class day by students sharing their homework drawings and discussing their findings. We then did a composition skill building “notan” exercise that focused on controlling positive and negative space. Notan is a Japanese design concept involving the placement of light against dark, and the idea that both positive and negative space are equal. Students were given ten small black squares and ten large white squares. They arranged one black square on one white square, creating positive and negative space. Once I determined that they had found the best composition, the black piece of paper was glued to the white square. Next, they cut one black square into two pieces with scissors. They then moved around these two black pieces of paper, shaping the white negative space on the next big square to find the best layout. This process continued

where they added one cut to the black square creating three pieces, then four, and so on until they end up with a series of ten notan designs (see appendix A).

After the students understood composition, I gave them a printed out sheet of paper with the images of shoes, tires, glass bottles, plastic lighters, cigarettes, banana peels; all objects that were mentioned in the homework articles. I taught them how to use an exacto-knife to smoothly cut out these images. I also gave them a calendar image of a breathtaking photograph of a landscape. They had to choose and place three of the trash objects into the pristine environment, as Banksy did to Monet's painting. They focused on the technique of precise cutting as well as the formal elements of composition while making a statement about pollution (see appendix B).

The next lesson was a synthesis of two thoughts. I had discovered through my research on trash, that human pollution destroys animal habitats, causing some animals to become endangered. While considering this fact, I was still inspired by Banksy's stencils.

For this project, each student researched an endangered animal and made a stencil of it in the style of Banksy. As an interest-creating device, I showed them a Youtube video that had a slide show of endangered animals, paired with distressing music. Upon watching this video, the students immediately felt sympathetic and each fell in love with a particular animal. For homework, they had to go to the following websites: <http://www.bagheera.com/index.htm> and <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/species/us-species.html>. They had to fill out a worksheet, citing the animal's habitat, number of the species remaining, and causes that lead to endangerment.

The next day in class, I taught them how to adjust the threshold of the image of their endangered animal in Photoshop to make a black and white stencil. The students

then traced this image onto a clear overhead transparency with “sharpie” pen. Having practiced cutting out the trash objects in the previous lesson, they were easily able to cut out the more complicated animal stencil with the exacto-knife.

We had a class full of stencils but there was one very Banksy-like aspect missing: the city. Not wanting to break the law or deface property, we planned to fill in our stencils with chalk instead of spray-paint. The chalk was also symbolic. It represented that the animals are here now, but will slowly fade away with time, like the chalk, if nothing is done. I asked my class where they would want to chalk the stencils. One student said that her mom worked at a local elementary school. She knew of another teacher, Mr. Robins, who was doing a lesson with his fifth grade class about endangered animals. I contacted him to see if he would like to collaborate. Mr. Robins was very excited about the idea.

My students each made an artwork of their stencil with spray paint on paper (see appendix C-G). We took a walking field trip to the local elementary school and each of my students paired up with a fifth grader. My students gave the fifth graders their spray painted artwork (see appendix H). My students informed the fifth graders about their endangered animals. The fifth graders also brought their endangered animal reports and read them to my students. After the sharing of facts, my students taught the fifth graders how to chalk the stencil in the elementary school courtyard (see appendix I-N). We also chalked the words, “Will you miss us?” in the middle of our animal stencils to make our statement more clear (see appendix O-Q). I observed the students working. The smiles on the student’s faces made it evident that this was an enjoyable event.

When we returned to my classroom, we reflected on this experience. My students discussed how much they enjoyed it. They were each bragging about their fifth grader, describing how cute they were. One of my students even said, “Ms. Karr, do you know that a three-toed sloth weighs nine pounds and moves .1mph?” My students retained the facts because of the bond they made with their fifth graders. It was a unique and memorable way of sharing and gaining information. I emailed Mr. Robins, telling him how much his fifth grade students taught mine. In his reply, he noted how much my students taught his elementary kids. The fifth graders felt really special receiving an artwork made by a cool teenager. They looked up to my students and wanted to remember the knowledge my students shared with them.

My students told me that they enjoyed this experience so much because they felt like they were making a difference by making people aware of this issue. They also enjoyed having their work on public display in the community. A few students even brought their parents to the elementary school to show off their work. They made and did something that they were proud of.

Many students begged me to do more issue-based projects. I told them that I would like to, but I didn't know what issue to do it on. They went home and started researching issues and met outside of class to discuss possible project ideas. Their interest and motivation fueled their self-directed learning. They were truly inspired.

Project Two: Pam Longobardi

My students decided that they wanted to continue to make artworks based on environmental issues. For their next project, students researched trash even further. Their purpose was to raise awareness on the affects of littering on oceanic habitats, and the creation of the Pacific Trash Vortex.

The durability and stability that makes plastic objects so useful to consumers makes them detrimental to aquatic environments. Plastic never decomposes. Once it has reached the sea, the sunlight, waves, and abrasion slowly break down the plastic into smaller and smaller pieces. These plastic particles then travel through the ocean currents like “marine tumbleweeds” (“The Trash Vortex” 2013).

In the Pacific Ocean, the water circulates in a slow clockwise spiral. The currents force any floating material into the center of the spiral where winds and water currents are weak. Here, the plastic garbage has accumulated and created an island of debris, known as the Pacific Trash Vortex (“The Trash Vortex” 2013). Pacific Trash Vortex is a 10 million square mile island of trash (around twice the size of Texas) that begins approximately 500 nautical miles off the coast of California, flowing past Hawaii, and almost reaching Japan (Longobardi, 2009).

Around 100 million tons of plastic are produced each year of which about 10 percent ends up in the sea. These plastic pieces get coated in algae and mistaken for creatures that seabirds normally eat. Numerous albatross, for example, have been found dead; their stomachs filled with medium sized plastic items such as bottle tops, lighters and balloons (“The Trash Vortex” 2013).

Greenpeace estimates that over a million seabirds and one hundred thousand marine mammals and sea turtles are killed each year by ingestion of plastics or entanglement. The harmful effects of plastic littering do not stop here; all species higher on the food chain are affected (“The Trash Vortex” 2013).

Plastic is a biotoxin accumulator- it is a hard sponge that soaks up the chemical pollutants it encounters. One common contaminant is estrogen, and increased levels of this hormone have been traced in all levels of the food chain. Some male fish have even turned into females. In humans, these raised levels of estrogen cause cancer and enlarged prostates (Longobardi, 2009).

Pam Longobardi is an American artist whose purpose is to raise awareness about the Pacific Trash vortex and its adverse affects. She travels to remote beaches, documenting the site with photographs. She then removes duffle bags full of trash, and creates art with the plastic debris and fishing ropes she has found (Longobardi, 2009).

After researching the pacific Trash Vortex, Pam Longobardi’s work, and reading excerpts from her book, *Drifters*, students began to collect trash for their art project. They cleaned up their school and neighborhoods by picking up litter. They also saved trash that would normally be thrown away and recycled it into an artistic creation.

After compiling trash for a week, students had enough material to begin making their sculptures. Each student created an animal-like creature solely out of trash and hot glue. Formal skills and technique of assembling the creatures were taught. Elements and principles of design such as form, space, and texture were emphasized.

Once everyone was done with their sculptures, we created an installation in the main quad of the school. We spread a giant blue tarp on the ground, which represented

the ocean. We then placed colorful plastic objects in a spiral on top of the tarp signifying the ocean current and the Pacific Trash Vortex. The students' sculptures were mingled amongst the spiral symbolizing the creatures that are affected by littering and plastic debris (see appendix R-Z). Some students chose to place their sculptures in the trees surrounding the installation (see appendix AA-CC).

At nutrition (a twenty-minute passing period) and at lunch time, my students stood near their installation and passed out flyers explaining the meaning of the artwork, and listing the harmful affects of plastic pollution. Other students, faculty, and administration became engaged in the artwork and in a discussion about how we are interconnected to the environment. Many people who viewed the installation pulled out their cell phone and took pictures of it, which was then uploaded to various social-media sights such as Facebook and Instagram.

My students liked being able to share their creations with their peers and other teachers who might not normally see their artistic talents. The students also appreciated this project because of the use of non-traditional materials. They felt like they were helping the environment by recycling trash and felt a stronger sense of achievement making something beautiful out of something that would normally be thrown away.

Students enjoyed this project because it fused art, science, and activism. They were able to further explore an environmental issue in which they had already become interested. In *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking*, Sydney Walker notes that artists rarely proceed by making one conceptually isolated product after another. Instead, they grapple with broad important issues through a series of explorations. Artists tend to probe these ideas at increasingly deeper levels, asking new questions and acquiring more knowledge

in the process (2001). This is the exact progression that led my students to further develop their eco art series. They first broadly researched trash and created a collage inspired by Banksy's vandalized paintings. Students then studied endangered animals and made a stencil of a particular threatened animal in the style of Banksy. Students synthesized information by investigating the effects of pollution on animals. They probed deeper into littering and oceanic debris, a specific facet of pollution. Students narrowed their search even further, concentrating on a specific phenomenon, the Pacific Trash Vortex. They created an installation that made people aware of this island of trash and its effect on marine life. These projects developed from a series of investigations that gradually lead to more profound work.

Just when I thought my students had their fill of issue-based projects, they brought my attention to yet another worldly concern.

Project Three: Invisible Children

On March 7th, 2012 I came to school and there was a buzz in my classroom. All of the students were eagerly talking about something. I assumed it was the latest teenage gossip, and uninterested, I carried on with my morning routine. A few minutes later, some students approached me and asked if I had seen the *Kony 2012* video (Russell, 2012). I had not seen it yet, along with a few other students. Those who had seen it were excited to watch it again, so I played it for the entire class.

The film documents the Invisible Children Organization's plan and efforts to stop Joseph Kony, a military dictator in Uganda, who is head of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). For 26 years, this group has been abducting children, turning the girls into sex slaves and the boys into child soldiers. Kony isn't fighting for any cause, rather to gain power. He has accomplished this by kidnapping and adding over 30,000 children into his army.

Jason Russell (2012) created the Invisible Children organization and directed the film. He states, "Although there are a lot of warlords, murders, and dictators in the world, Joseph Kony was first on the International Criminal Court's List in 2002. Its obvious that Kony should be stopped, the problem is that 99% of the planet doesn't know who he is. If they knew, Kony would have been stopped long ago." Thus, Jason Russell decided to expose Kony's crimes. He made a film and used technology and social media sites such as Youtube and Facebook to educate the masses about Kony and share a plan to stop him.

He begins the film by documenting his struggle on getting the government to take action to stop Kony. The Invisible Children organization met with politicians, but

everyone they talked to in Washington said there was no way the United States will ever get involved in a conflict where our national security or financial interests are not at stake. Yet, The Invisible Children organization did not give up on their cause. They flew Ugandans to the United States to share their story. They showed the *Kony 2012* movie to groups of people and their awareness turned into action: “We built a community around the idea of WHERE you live shouldn’t determine IF you live...And because we couldn’t wait for the government or institutions to step in, we did it ourselves” (<http://kony2012video.com/>). They repaired schools, provided jobs, and built a radio network to warn villages about upcoming rebel attacks. Teenagers, who donated money to a program called Tri, funded the majority of these improvements. “They proved that a bunch of littles could make a big difference. And as a result, the unseen became visible” (<http://kony2012video.com/>).

Jason Russell went back to Washington with hundreds of thousands of followers from the Invisible Children Organization. This time, they made an impact. On Oct 14th 2011 the Invisible Children Organization received a letter from President Obama saying that a small number of U.S. forces are deploying to central Africa to provide assistance to regional forces that are working toward the removal of Joseph Kony. Jason Russell states, “It was the first time in history that the United States took action because the people demanded it” (<http://kony2012video.com/>).

However, Kony changed his tactics when he heard the United States was after him. Jason Russell recognized that the public needed to show the government that arresting Kony was a priority so that the mission to stop him would not be canceled. He

wanted to make Joseph Kony a household name-not to commend him, but to expose his injustice (<http://kony2012video.com/>).

Cultural celebrities such as Rihanna, Tim Tebow, Mark Zuckerberg, Oprah, and George Clooney as well as policy makers such as former President George W. Bush and his Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, joined and promoted the cause. They tweeted about the *Kony 2012* video and it spread like wildfire. It was viewed more than 100 million times in just under a week, making it the most viral video in history (Grossman, 2012).

The video culminated with an action plan called “Cover the Night.” Viewers were asked to buy an “action kit” which included stickers, posters, and bracelets. On the evening of April 20, supporters were to cover their city with these campaign materials in order to raise awareness to stop Kony.

The video leaves us with the idea that we can shape the world with new technology that supports communication. “It’s always been that the decisions made by the few, with the money and the power, dictated the priorities of their governments and the stories in the media. They determined the lives and the opportunities of their citizens. But now there is something bigger than that. The people of the world see each other and can protect each other. It’s turning the system upside-down” (<http://kony2012video.com/>).

Upon seeing this video, my students immediately wanted to join the cause. There was some skepticism about donating to the charity but there was a consensus that everyone believed that Joseph Kony should be stopped and that our class could do something using our art to make people aware of the this issue.

Over the next two classes we discussed what our class could make to bring attention to Joseph Kony. Ideas were thrown around, such as making our own posters, but nothing seemed quite unique enough. Then I stumbled across an artist, Mark Jenkins, on a Yahoo news article. He is a street artist who makes sculptures out of packaging tape. Do to the translucent nature of this medium, I thought this would be the perfect material to represent the Invisible Children. I showed my class pictures of Jenkins' work and they were immediately excited to make something in his style!

Mark Jenkins is an American artist who first discovered making tape casts when he was a kid. In elementary school, he cast a pencil in class. "The teacher told me something like don't waste tape." That was the end of tape casting until 20 years later when he was teaching English in Rio de Janeiro. He was bored in between classes and constructed a large tinfoil ball to play catch with. He started making a second one out of tape, but there was not enough tape left on the roll to make a solid ball. Then he remembered the trick that he used as a kid, and he cast the tinfoil ball with the tape. He was impressed with the results and started casting pots, pans and other items lying around his apartment, including himself (Sudbanthad, 2006). "I didn't think it would be sturdy enough but when I discovered it was, I realized I had the means to make life sized sculptures" (Gestalten, 2012).

Soon after, Jenkins made a giant sperm out of tape that was too big to photograph indoors so he brought it to the beach in Copacabana. After taking pictures, he pushed it into the ocean and watched it surf the waves toward the shore. Some beach goers just stared, but others were curious and wanted to talk about it. The artwork suffered water damaged and had to be thrown away. Yet Jenkins remembers, "There was something

about the experience, though, of putting my art into public space that I really enjoyed” (Sudbanthad, 2006). When Jenkins returned home to Washington DC in 2005, he continued placing his tape sculptures in public places of his hometown. He made casts out of baby dolls and stationed them all over the city. He placed them on trees, billboards, and famous monuments. He gained recognition for this stunt, and he began placing his sculptures in other areas of the world (Mueller-Kroll, 2011).

For Jenkins, his tape casts are more than just sculptures. When he places his artwork on the street, people interact and react to the sculptures. This becomes an art form in itself. “The theater is happening but there is no stage. The people who pass by them are like actors” (Gestalten, 2012). Jenkins views this urban stage as an experiment. After installing a work, he likes to document how people react to it and record the data. “You know it’s an art project but I think it’s equally a social experiment” (Gestalten, 2012). “Maybe the police will come, or a few times fire trucks have come and you see this installation, this stage becomes more interesting with this sort of climax. And it makes the whole scene really real” (Mueller-Kroll, 2011).

Jenkins explains that street art is different than traditional forms of art: A painting is always going to be recognized as a painting regardless of where it is placed. Yet the placement of his tape casts help create the artwork. He is using the city as his canvas. He also concludes that more people would rather be outside than in an art gallery and that street art is the easiest way have society interact with art (Green, 2006).

Due to the expensive nature of the Scotch Packaging Tape, the class budget only allowed for making a few sculptures. I divided the class into groups of around five

people. One person volunteered from each group to be the mold of the tape cast. The models struck a poses and the rest of the group wrapped them in tape. They wrapped one limb at a time, with two layers of tape. The first layer was sticky-side out; the second layer was sticky-side in (see appendix DD-FF). The tape was then carefully cut off the model and re-taped at the seam. After all of the body parts were constructed, they were taped together to create a life-sized figure (see appendix GG).

Each group was responsible for coming up with a way to make sure people could distinguish their sculpture as an invisible child. One group armed the child soldier with a machine gun (see appendix HH) while another group spray-painted a stencil that read “Kony 2012” on the chest of their sculpture (see appendix II).

Like Mark Jenkins, each group had to place their sculpture in a public place and observe and record how people interacted with it. One group put their sculpture on a bench in the Westlake Promenade, a local outdoor mall comprised of mostly restaurants. They primarily observed older businessmen and woman taking their lunch breaks. Many of the passersby were in a hurry and simply gave a quick glance at the tape sculpture. Others were more curious and stopped and asked the group that constructed it about its meaning. Students felt like this had the most impact because they were directly able to inform the public about Kony. They also received complements about their artwork and their cause.

Another group put their sculpture in Sumac Park which borders Sumac Elementary School. When school ended, the children flooded into the park while the group observed from afar. Some kids seemed scared of the sculpture and were afraid to go close to it. Other kids were brave and would run up to it, touch it, and run away. More

and more children wanted to play with the sculpture. While the meaning of the sculpture was lost on the youngsters, the group reported that it was fun observing how much the children interacted with the sculpture. They also hoped that the parents who were picking up their children from school could decipher their cause.

A third group placed their sculpture outside of Starbucks and sat at a nearby table to observe. They overheard a few couples recognize the sculpture as an Invisible Child and the artwork started a dialog about Kony. Then something strange happened. A Starbuck's employee came outside, took the sculpture, and put it in his car. My students first thought they got in trouble for bringing the sculpture to a private establishment. Then one of my students asked the employee why he had taken it. The employee said, "because it looked rad and I wanted it." He explained that he was an Art major at Moorpark College and really appreciated the sculpture. My students told them how they made it for a school project, and the employee returned it to them.

A fourth group had scheduling and transportation issues that didn't allow them to meet outside of school. Instead, they walked around with their sculpture at nutrition, took it into their core subject classes, and ate lunch with it in the main quad. Students, teachers, administrators, and noon aids marveled at the sculpture. They were interested in the meaning and the process of making the sculpture. By the next day, the tape sculptures were the latest gossip at the school. Everyone had heard about them, and those who had not seen one, wanted to. Large numbers of kids that I had never had as students came to my classroom asking if they could see the Invisible Children sculptures.

We discussed each group's experience with placing the tape casts in public. Each student wrote a reflection describing what he or she had gained from this project.

Overall, the students enjoyed working as a group. It gave them a chance to get to know their classmates and to have a support group to trouble shoot with and share ideas. Students also enjoyed this project because they felt that they were creative. They created a beautiful sculpture out of an ordinary everyday office supply. Most importantly, they valued the social experimentation and activism. They were so invested in this entire process because they brought my attention to the Kony video and it was a cause they truly cared about. Through the endangered animal sculptures and the pacific trash vortex creatures, I had created a group of young activists. They enjoyed learning because their work was personally meaningful. As the *Kony 2012* video showed, a bunch of “littles,” or ordinary teenagers, can make a big difference. My students helped spread awareness of the war crimes in Africa to our entire school and community.

Project Four: Figure Drawing

In the fall semester of 2011, I took *Studio Problems: Drawing* with professor Joy von Wolffersdorff. The class focused on figure drawing from a live nude model. Joy was such a wonderful and encouraging teacher. I saw my figure drawing skills improve drastically during this class, and I wanted to share my new knowledge of how to draw the human form with my students at Agoura High School. There was one problem: Due to the high school environment, I could not use nude models when teaching figure drawing. However, as a wrestling coach, I was able to get several of my wrestlers to model for my Studio Art P/AP class wearing their tight spandex singlet.

I started out by teaching them gesture drawing. I explained that the purpose is to sum up the entire figure in only a few minutes. The idea is to convey the action, movement, and the attitude of the figure. The focus was on expressive lines and capturing the position of the pose rather than accurate proportions.

After a few days of gesture drawing, we moved onto construction. We learned how to break the body into simple shapes. The limbs became cylinders, which allowed the students to capture foreshortening easier.

We then progressed to proportions, comparing the size of the head to the ratio of the body. I taught students that the human body is the length of eight heads (see appendix JJ). I also taught them sighting and measuring techniques-how to hold up their pencil to the model and compare that measurement to the proportions of their drawing.

As my figure drawing class at CSUN progressed, the professor gave us the opportunity to teach a lesson to the class for extra credit. There were only six students in

the class. The classroom had enough drawing horses for over thirty students. Wanting my students to be able to further their figure drawing skills, I asked Joy if I could bring my high school students to our class for a night and teach them a lesson that involved a live nude model.

Joy got permission from CSUN and I had to have my students fill out waivers. I gave my students directions to CSUN and they carpoled to the university. A few cars got lost, and in the beginning of the class I was running around trying to find my students in the parking lot to escort them to the classroom.

It was a little hectic at first, but once all of my students arrived, the night went smoothly. We did some shorter poses for gesture drawing (see appendix KK-LL) and construction (see appendix MM). We progressed to ten-minute poses (see appendix NN-QQ) and finished the night with a long thirty-minute pose (see appendix RR-UU).

My students commented on how much easier it was drawing from a nude model. They could clearly see the “s curve” of the spine as well as other landmarks on the body that I had been talking about. Their drawing skills vastly improved and they were able to make portfolio-worthy pieces.

The three-hour art class was a momentous experience for students. They enjoyed last years trip to CSUN so much that they asked me if we could do it again this year. I was no longer taking Joy’s class so that was not an option. I began to ask the administration at Agoura High if I could run figure drawing workshops afterschool with a nude model. I explained that the AP judges value figure drawing and that this would increase my students’ score on their AP test. In addition, most art colleges require a portfolio with observational drawing, and figure drawing is the most prestigious form of

observational drawing. My administration saw the benefits and was quick to approve my workshop. My biggest challenge was to find nude models. I was finally able to get the contact information of some of the models who pose for the figure drawing classes at CSUN.

Our first workshop was a big success. Drawings that were made in the workshop were submitted in students' college portfolios. I had a record number of students not only apply to art school, but get accepted into prestigious programs as compared to my previous years teaching. Many students have even received scholarships based on their artwork. I believe that the increased interest to pursue art has a direct correlation to the kinds of projects that I do with my students. Students have become more attracted to Art because they have participated in projects that interest them. My students requested to do more figure drawing and my students requested to make artwork based on wordy events that they care about. Issue-based artwork has also helped my students produce stronger, more meaningful works of art. The AP College Board lists the following grading criteria on their rubric for the AP Studio Art Scoring Guidelines (2013):

- “The work shows effective integration of concept and technique.
- An evocative theme is carried out.
- Form and content are effectively synthesized to communicate visual ideas”

As stated in the AP rubric, the ability to communicate profound visual ideas is just as significant as stylistic and technical concerns. While my issue-based projects were beneficial in helping students think about concept and ideas, I kept some aspects of a traditional art class that focused on technique when I taught students about figure drawing. I tried to fill the curriculum with an equal amount of skill development and

concept. Sometimes the technique development was taught by itself as with my figure-drawing unit. However, I tried to integrate new artistic procedures with content when possible as I did with my issue-based projects. As a result of my nude figure-drawing lessons that develop advance drawing techniques coupled with my new philosophies about making content filled artwork with students, AP test scores have increased as compared to previous years.

Conclusion/Justification

I had seen firsthand the benefits of issue-based art education. To help understand why it was so successful, I began to research other art educators who have dealt with contemporary issues and social justice art education.

While this pedagogy has not been integrated into the majority of classrooms, numerous art educators have pioneered these instructional methods. Marit Dewhurst (2010) found evidence of issue-based education being implemented since the 1990s only under different names: activist art, community-based art, new public art, art for social change, and community cultural development. Despite the assorted labels, this work unites in its purpose to create art that raises awareness and attempts to stop injustice.

Marit Dewhurst used this research to develop curriculum for teenagers participating in a free after-school activist art class. Her work on the role of art in social justice education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and community development, has been published in several books and journals such as *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *The Harvard Educational Review*, *The Journal of Art Education*, and *International Journal of Education Through Art* (2010).

In his article “Art Education for a Change,” David Darts (2006) wrote about his experience teaching the Contemporary Issues and the Visual Arts class at his high school. He created a number of individual and group lessons that examined contemporary social issues both within the classroom and the larger school community. These works include installations relating to drinking and driving, fine arts and performance pieces about bullying, violence, and discrimination; photography investigating public space, power, and surveillance; video projects examining consumer culture; eco-sculptures built with

garbage; and a community arts festival focusing on issues linked to poverty and homelessness. He states that he developed the curriculum around the belief that “the arts can facilitate the development of an ethic of care, thereby enabling participants to positively transform themselves, their communities and the world(s) in which they live” (p.6). He reports that, “a number of art education theorists support this position (Blandy, 1987; Chalmers, 1987; 2001; Congdon, 1993; Darts, 2004; 2006; Desai, 2005; Freedman, 2000; 2003; Garoian, 1999, Garber, 2001; Greene, 1995; Hicks, 1994; Holloway & LeCompte, 2001; Lanier, 1991; Kincheloe, 2003a; 2003b; Krensky, 2001; Springgay, 2005; Stout, 1999; Stuhr 2003; Tavin, 2005) and recognize the vital connections and possibilities that exist among art, education, culture, and society, and who acknowledge the importance of the arts in the development of the thoughtful, creative, and engaged citizens” (p.7).

Other art educators such as Hilary Inwood (2010) have developed curriculum and have written articles specifically on the benefits of eco-art or environmental art education. Eco-art investigates topics such as interdependence, biodiversity, conservation, restoration, and sustainability. It combines the traditional cognitive ways of learning about science with the emotional and sensory approaches of making art. Combining knowledge in logical and creative ways appeals to multiple learning styles and creates a greater impact on students. She found this method inspired students and increased their interest in improving environmental conditions.

Hilary Inwood was influenced by Gablik (1991, 1995) who disliked modern art’s emphasis on aesthetics. Gablik wanted art to connect to daily life. She believed it could be used as a means to capture the public's attention, and be an innovative way to show

and solve society's problems. Gablik documented a growing trend in producing art that focused on the environment. Inwood used these artworks as an aesthetic framework to show to students and develop her lessons.

I found articles written by other art educators that were even more aligned with the curriculum that I compiled and developed. Sheng Kuan Chung (2009) published an instructional resource describing a unit for high school students where they examine street art, specifically the work of Banksy. They then made art that address social and political issues.

These scholars, my professors at CSUN such as Dr. Edie Pistolesi, and others provide surprisingly similar suggestions for delivering issue-based art education as well as its benefits. I have concluded through my own studies and experience, supported by other art educators who have integrated issue-based projects into their curriculum, that issue-based art education combines meaning making and aesthetics. It allows students to construct knowledge through research, allowing them to make meaningful connections to their lives, which requires a fundamental shift in the relationship between students and teachers where the students take more responsibility in their own learning. Similarly, issue-based projects allow students to make connections between various disciplines and the community. Furthermore, issue-based projects prove to be more enjoyable for both teachers and students.

Using traditional aesthetics and formal qualities to highlight an idea or contemporary issue is what made my curriculum so successful. David Darts (2006) had a similar transformation as I did: “Developing and implementing the curriculum for the Contemporary Issues and the Visual Arts class went against the grain of what I had

experienced and formally been taught about teaching art. My own education as an art student and later as an art education student dictated that the mastery of materials and techniques was the key priority in the art classroom...And while I still believe that teaching the foundational skills of artistic production remains a critical component of art education, facilitating this course helped me to understand the profound importance of also focusing on the production of meaning within the art classroom” (p.10). He realized that he needed to shift his curriculum away from materials and techniques to include concepts, problems, and ideas. While technique remained a substantial feature in his lessons, it did not supersede the investigation of social and cultural issues.

Challenging worldly problems requires artists to move beyond surface illustrations that emphasize technique and design. The aesthetics are the means in which to express an idea. Activist artists need to choose the appropriate materials and techniques that would best achieve their intended impacts (Dewhurst, 2010). As such, one must consider the audience and how the viewers interact with the artwork (Billings, 1995). Louis Lankford (1997) termed this “purposeful creativity-creativity directed toward increasing awareness, expressing ideas, feelings, and values, and problem solving related to local and global ecologies” (p.50).

Through this process of researching and implementing issue-based art education, I have learned that aspects of traditional teaching methodologies are still necessary. Students should be encouraged to balance both their activist intentions and their aesthetic aims -- sacrificing neither one for the other. Students have to understand formal skills and concepts. This is the structure that holds up the content and allows the artwork to be successful.

I began my new issue-based lessons in a traditional format. I introduced my students to artists and issues through PowerPoint lectures and the students were taught traditionally in terms of technique. After students gained a mastery of skill, they applied the technique to an issue.

The visual communication of an idea is what made my students' artwork meaningful and powerful. Through my projects, students were able to investigate contemporary life and issues they cared about. Students were authentically engaged because they were intrinsically motivated to spread awareness about an issue that they were passionate about. Educators such as Mary-Michael Billings (1995) and Marit Dewhurst (2010) emphasize that the issue should be explored through an understanding of the current situation in the student's own life and community. Activities should be planned that help students reflect on their own identities, experiences, and interests so projects become more meaningful.

This concept of making the curriculum meaningful for students is universal. Anita NG Heung Sang (2010) describes how inquiry-based learning is used in the *Hong Kong Visual Arts Curriculum Guide*. Students are encouraged to become active learners and investigate problems rather than just being passively given facts. Inquiry-based learning is students centered and teacher guided. Thus, students have more freedom to help design their curriculum, which leads to higher levels of interest.

David Darts (2006) agrees that students become more motivated when they are truly interested with an issue. He also recognized the benefits of inquiry-based learning and had students participate in the daily teaching and lesson planning responsibilities. In this way, students could incorporate their interests and experiences into the curriculum.

Marit Dewhurst (2010) concurs, “It is imperative that we understand that social justice art education involves teachers and learners building understanding and action together. Therefore, this approach to art education requires a fundamental shift in the relationship between students and teachers” (p. 11). Anita NG Heung Sang (2010) notes that “teachers should change from being transmitters of knowledge to being facilitators, and helping students become active learners” (p.39).

When topics relate to students, they are intrinsically motivated and engaged in their own learning. After my “Banksy Goes Outside the Classroom” lesson, students became engaged in self-directed learning and took the initiative to research and discuss issues outside of class on their own free will. Students did this because they desired to do another issue-based project.

After I had taught my students foundation skills, I acted more as a mentor supervising their project development. This relationship created a stronger bond between my students and myself. I trusted their level of knowledge, motivation, and technical skill. They respected the greater level of independence that I gave them. We worked as a team, brainstorming projects based on current issues.

My students’ quest for inspiration for their artwork was personal and informed by research. Students need opportunities to research subject matter, context, ideas, and other artist’s work. Professional artists work from research and well-articulated knowledge and classroom artmaking should be held to the same standards (Walker, 2001).

Through research, artists discover the factors that contributed to their selected issue. By posing and pursuing questions, activist artists are simultaneously learning and teaching about social issues (Dewhurst, 2010). “Educators should encourage both

investigative (What's happening?) and analytic (Why is it happening?) questions that help students identify the possible tactics and tools to effect change” (Dewhurst, 2010, p.12).

David Darts (2006) took a similar approach to implementing issue-based art education. He started with interest-creating devices- activities that increase concern and enthusiasm over the topic at hand. He then moved into the foundation of the curriculum where he taught basic information, provided important facts and statistics, and showed contemporary artwork that related to similar issues.

My projects started with interest creating devices. We watched videos about Banksy, endangered animals, and the Invisible Children. Students then conducted deeper research by listening to PowerPoint lectures, reading articles, discovering statistics, filling out worksheets, and investigating artists.

My projects were meaningful because they allowed students to make connections beyond school. My students followed the same process as many professional artists such as Banksy, Pam Longobardi, and Mark Jenkins and thus learned skills that are relevant in the workforce. My projects emphasized research, analyzing of data, decision-making, innovation, creation of a product, communication of findings, time management, and collaboration.

The projects were also rewarding because students felt like they made a difference in society by spreading awareness about the issue of endangered animals. In order to be able to inform people and change an injustice, the artwork needs to leave the classroom in which it was made in order to reach the intended audience (Dewhurst, 2010).

Sheng Kuan Chung (2009) also thinks that the community is an important aspect of issue-based art education. He taught students about using street art as a way of

informing the public about worldly events. Guerilla art has an excitement that you don't get with traditional art. By injecting art into society, it reaches a broader audience. She states that the ultimate goal of her Banksy inspired project was "to allow students to enter the real world with their art to increase public awareness about important social issues" (p.31).

My students enjoyed the opportunity to contribute to their school and community. They were proud to have their artwork on public display. They not only beautified the community with their art but also raised awareness about important issues. They got satisfaction out of making an installation in the main quad of our school calling attention to the Pacific Trash Vortex. They liked placing their invisible children tape casts in the community and documenting how the public reacted and interacted with their sculpture. They enjoyed being able to break away from the traditional setting of the classroom and interacting with the community. They cherished the opportunity to bond with fifth graders and help teach them about endangered animals through making art. In addition, they appreciated the opportunity to go to CSUN, and participate in a local college art class.

Proof that these lessons were successful can be seen in the quality of work that my students produced. More importantly, students openly told me that they enjoyed the issue-based projects and brought my attention to worldly problems because they wanted to use them as inspiration for a new project. The students took an active role in developing their own curriculum. I was able to be inspired by and respond to my students' ideas and motivation, just as much as students were able to be inspired by and respond to mine.

This way of teaching not only made my class more enjoyable for my students, but for myself as well. The issues of social justice and global warming truly resonated with my students. I learned that it was much easier to teach students who love what they were doing and are eager to learn and create. Teaching is more exciting when you don't know what the students are going to come up with or what is going to happen each day. By incorporating current events into my art curriculum, I never became burnt out from recycling the same old-school projects that have been stuck in the art curriculum for decades. The new issues and ideas for projects that my students help me develop keep my job refreshing.

David Darts (2006) has a similar recollection of his experience with his Contemporary Issues and the Visual Arts class: "The classroom exuded an extraordinary energy throughout the semester and none of us knew exactly what was going to happen from moment to moment. I was genuinely excited to come to school each day, and based on the overwhelmingly positive feedback and obvious enthusiasm displayed in the class, so were the students. Perhaps most importantly, a large majority of the students in the class were indisputably engaged in the curriculum and meaningfully participated in their own and each other's learning" (p.9).

When students were in my class, they became activists. They were in the habit of researching and being informed of current events. They learned that art has the power to promote change, but more importantly, they realized that THEY had the ability to express their ideas to society. A few students have even come back to visit me from college to tell me that they have incorporated environmental art into their college artwork. Others told

me that their figure drawing professors were amazed at the entry-level skills that they possessed.

My innovative projects allowed investigation of contemporary life and activism while still developing a mastery of technique, formal skills, and the elements and principles of design. Students found projects fun, motivating, and challenging because they played an active role in choosing the projects and in the entire planning process. Don't these projects sound more interesting than traditional redundant projects that solely emphasize technique?

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