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Socially Engaged Art Projects with High School Students

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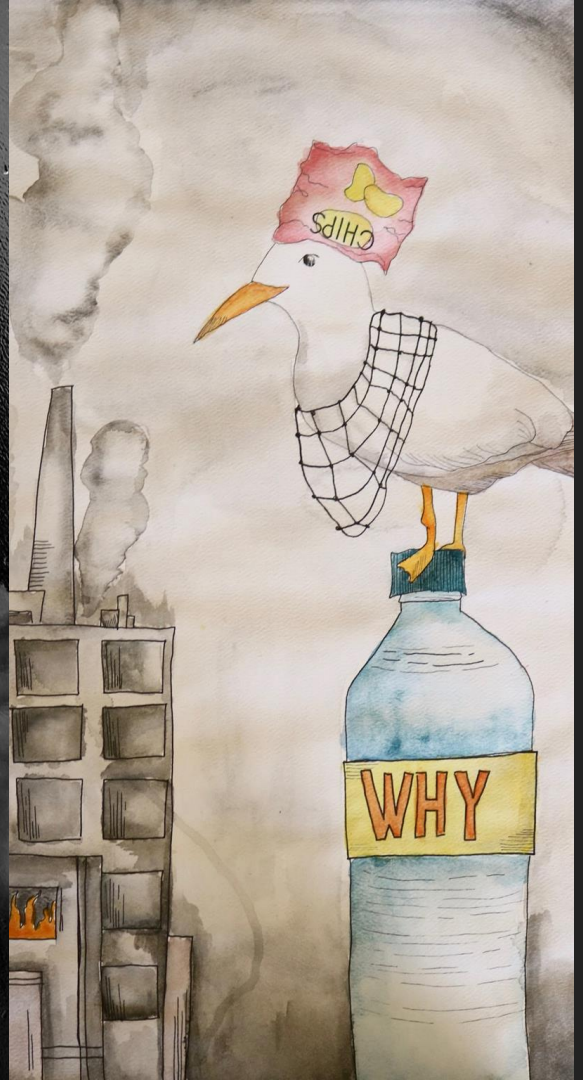


Socially Engaged Art Projects with High School Students

By Kate Randall

Dominican University of California, School of Education & Counseling Psychology Scholarly and Creative Works Conference, 2019

Definition from
http://artmakingchange.org

Socially Engaging Art (SEA):

An “artistic or creative practice that aims to improve conditions in a particular community or in the world at large.”

“You can’t have communication without a fire.”

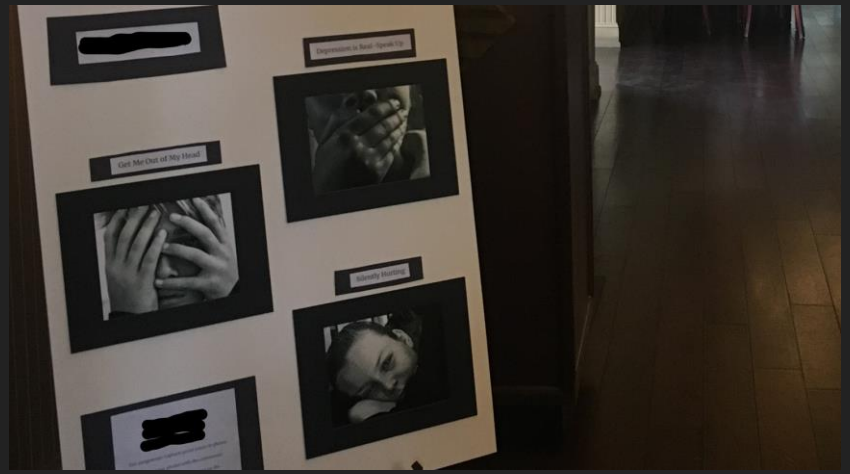
-Ms. Will, Drawing and Painting Teacher

The Problem

Art classes are often thought of as:

- Only a “creative outlet” class.
- Not necessary to provide for every student.
- An easy “A” elective course
- A class that does not teach skills that are transferable to other subjects.

And yet there is research that shows art is important.



Art has transformative power, the ability to express deeper thoughts and emotions, and can give a voice to those who do not have one.

The Literature

The History of Visual Arts in Public Schools

- Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) believed **art made self governing citizens**
- Pestalozzi created a curriculum based on Kant and Schiller's ideals
- Art Crusaders tried to bring this idea to the U.S. public school

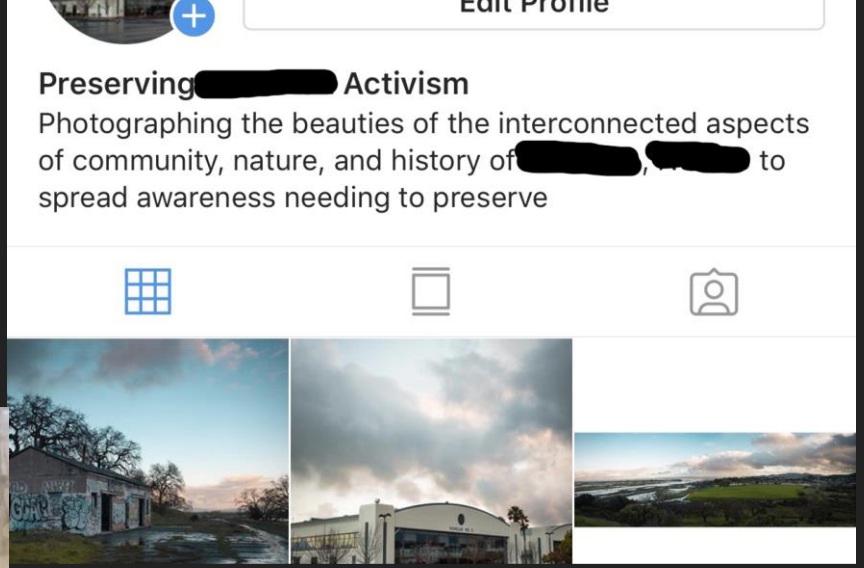
What Art Teaches

- Empathy- a key skill in being a "good citizen"
- Creative-Critical thinking
- Reflection
- Perseverance
- Open-mindedness
- Analyzing and Observing
- Connecting learning to an experience

Art, Ethics, and Civil Society

- SEA projects can teach character education
- Art can have purpose
- SEA projects allow for community connection
- Art can be a grey space in civil space
- Art has a voice for those who need it

There was little research showing what the students thought about completing a SEA project.



How does completing a SEA project affect high school students' engagement with a community on topics that the students care about?

Methodology
Mixed Methods Approach

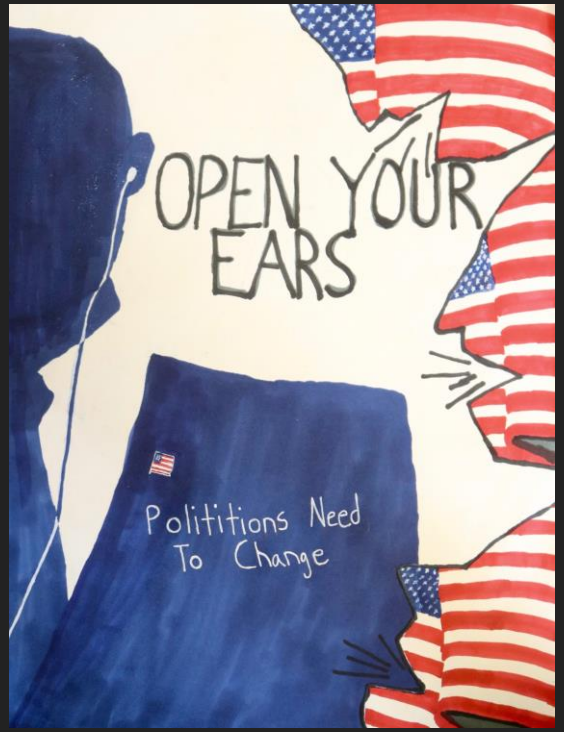
- 1 School Site
- 2 Teachers
- 2 Mediums
- 3 Classes

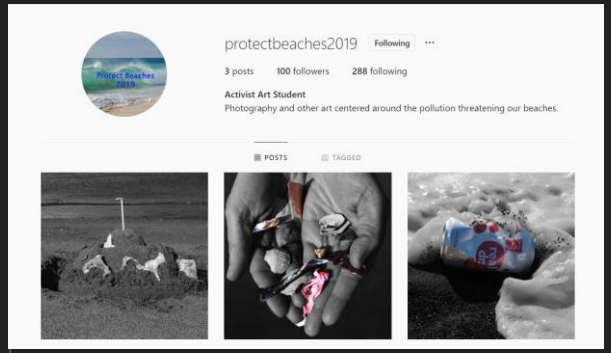
- 30 Surveys Returned
- 21 Student Interviews
- All 3 classes were a part of a specialty art program

Findings

The Power of Art and Student Voice

- Students found the project to be empowering.
- They discovered their art can have a voice and purpose.
- There was student growth in communication.



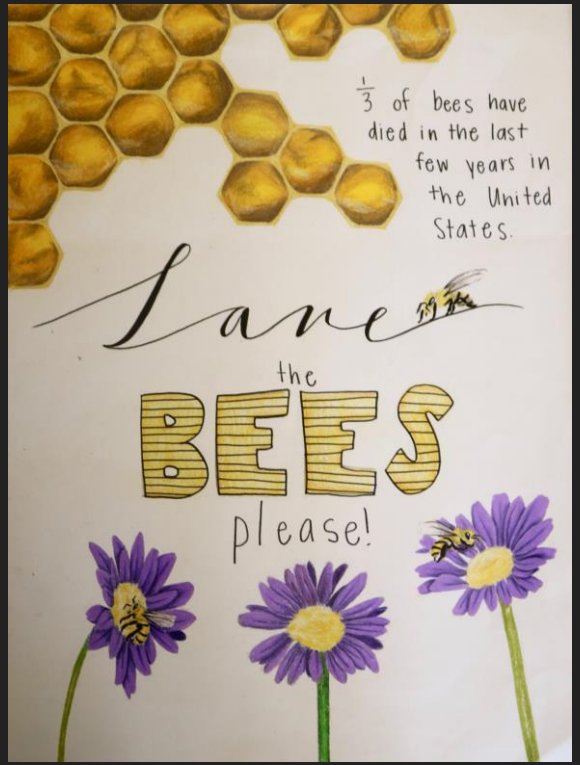


Findings

Community Through Art

- Students connected with a community.
- Those who did not reflected on why.
- Students liked the community engagement.
- Students felt art could help them become better citizens.

Findings

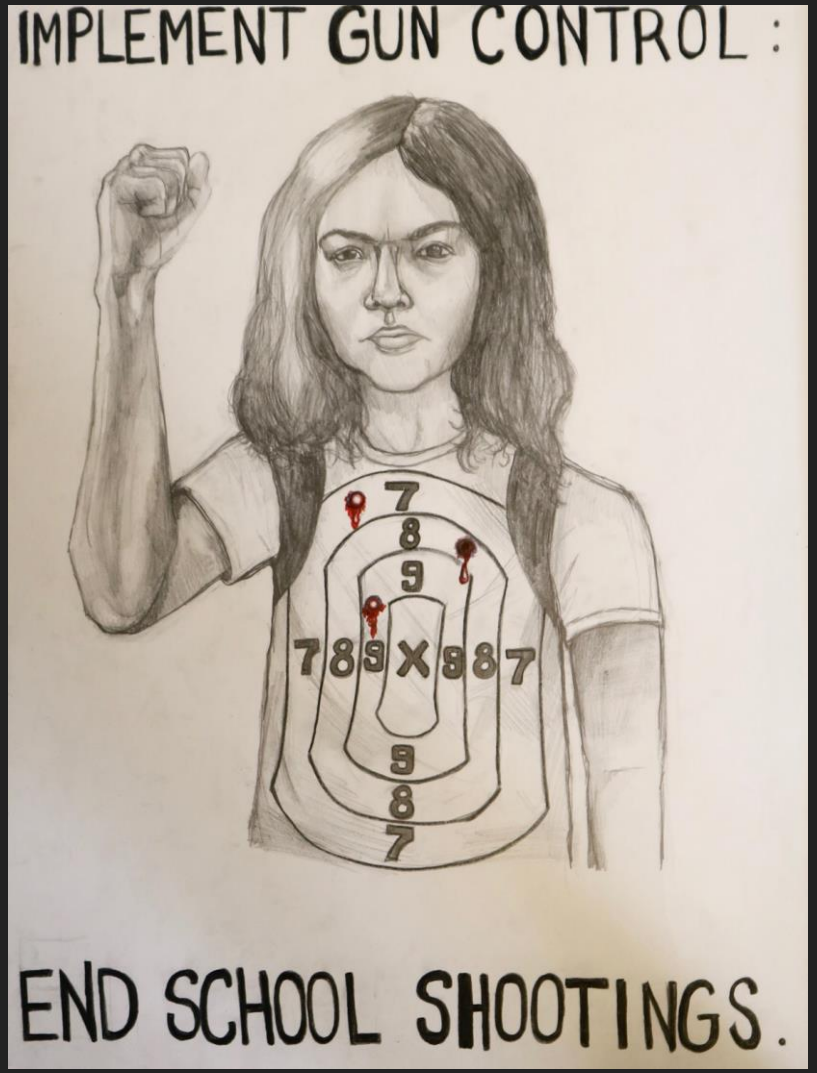


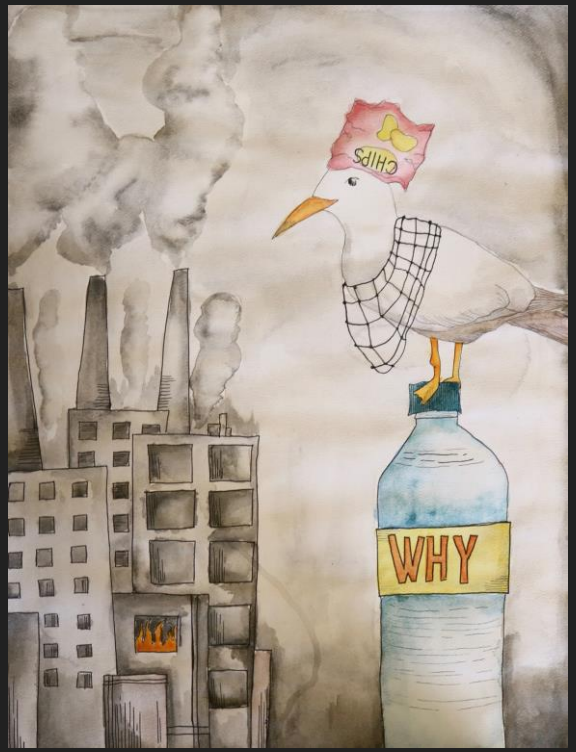
External Influences

- The projects were different in each class.
- The teachers taught and held different expectations.
- Both teachers loved the project and the real world aspects.

Implications

- This project was more open than those in the literature.
- Students appreciate the chance to share their views.
- SEA projects can prepare students to be active citizens.
- They also allow for learning critical skills like professional communication.
- More art teachers should try creating a SEA project.
- SEA projects should become a part of CA Art Standards.





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Questions or Comments?

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