Socially Engaged Art in Middle School

An Arts for LA Activate Project by Jennifer Dowty

“It is through others that we develop into ourselves.”

Lev Vygotsky
What is Socially Engaged Art?

A.K.A. Social Practice, Public Practice, Community Art, Participatory Art, Collaborative Art, New Genre Public Art...

“Social practice work focuses on the interaction between the audience, social systems, and the artist through aesthetics, ethics, collaboration, methodology, antagonism, media strategies, and social activism.” (Wikipedia)

“Its overall objective is … to employ the varied forms offered by the expanded field of contemporary art as a collaborative, collective, participatory social method for bringing about real-world instances of progressive justice, community building and transformation.” (Art as Social Action)

“SEA depends on actual -- not imagined or hypothetical -- social action.” (Education for Socially Engaged Art)
How does this fit into the middle school curriculum?
6th Grade Signature Project @ LCS

How can I make my local community more sustainable?

"A sustainable future is one in which a healthy environment, economic prosperity, and social justice are pursued simultaneously to ensure the well-being and quality of life of present and future generations. Education is crucial to attaining that future."

(Learning for a Sustainable Future - Teacher Centre, 2019)
6th Grade Signature Project @ LCS

Project Overview

- Identify a **PROBLEM** that is present in our local community.
- Research the facts and issues surrounding that problem and gather data.
- Argue two sustainable **SOLUTIONS** to the problem and propose your ideas, keeping our community’s **ASSETS** in mind.
- Design a **creative piece** to support your ideas.
- Present your project in front of a panel of community members and at the annual LARCHMONTx Showcase.
Introduce **Signature Project** to students. Assess our community’s *needs* and *assets*.
Community Walk Presentations

**Art**
We also noticed that we need more art! All the walls are so bland. We believe this is because people a lot of people do graffiti and artists don't want their work to be destroyed by it. We can help end this by putting out more artwork. It doesn't have to be on walls either! There is so much imagination in the world, we just need to use it!

**Pollution**
- There is a lot of pollution on the streets, you can't go a day without seeing a bit of trash.
- What I think we should do is put more trash cans on the streets, so that people will still not think that they can throw trash wherever.

**Green Spaces**
Like this grass patch, this is a good use of a green space. It makes this school more lively and very naturey.

**Community Space**
The way people are helping our community is by helping homelessness so they can rest or stay for a safe and comfortable place.
Introduce **Signature Project** to students. Assess our community’s *needs* and *assets*.

- **Fall 2018**
  - Students determine their project topic. Teachers introduce **Socially Engaged Art**.
Introduce **Signature Project** to students. Assess our community’s *needs* and *assets*.

Run a “pilot program” with a small group of interested students.

Students determine their project topic. Teachers introduce **Socially Engaged Art**.
## Student Projects in Process

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<tr>
<th>Partnerships</th>
<th>Room</th>
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<th>Driving Question</th>
<th>Creative Project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jill's Room</td>
<td>Religious Discrimination</td>
<td>How can we bridge understanding between different religious beliefs?</td>
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<td>Jill's Room</td>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>How can we get mental health services to the affected homeless people?</td>
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<td>Jen/Jill</td>
<td>Reducing Waste</td>
<td>How can humans reduce the amount of waste they produce?</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Jill's Room</td>
<td>Animal Rights</td>
<td>How can humans reduce the animal abuse in our city?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jen/Jill</td>
<td>Rec drug use</td>
<td>How can we educate people about the dangers of legalized recreational marijuana</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jen's Room</td>
<td>Kids with unstable homes</td>
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<td>Jen's Room</td>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>How can we get supplies and materials to homeless people?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jen/Jill</td>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>How do we house the homeless population in Los Angeles?</td>
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<td>Jen's Room</td>
<td>Trash on the street</td>
<td>How can we convince people to properly dispose of trash?</td>
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<td>Jen/Jill</td>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>How can we decrease the amount of people living in homelessness?</td>
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<td>Jen/Jill</td>
<td>Ocean Pollution</td>
<td>How can we reduce the amount of pollution in our oceans?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jen/Jill</td>
<td>Pollution/Trash</td>
<td>How can we reduce the amount of plastic waste created by people in their everyday lives?</td>
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<td>Jen/Lorena</td>
<td>Ocean Pollution</td>
<td>How can we inspire people to become a part of the solution in beach clean up?</td>
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<td>Jen/Jill</td>
<td>Ocean Pollution</td>
<td>How can we prevent ocean pollution?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jen/Jill</td>
<td>Homelessness / Housing</td>
<td>How can we contribute to the quality of life for our homeless neighbors?</td>
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<td>Jen/Lorena</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
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<td>Lorena/Candice</td>
<td>Food waste</td>
<td>How can we connect FOOD WASTE PRODUCERS to FOOD WASTE CONSUMERS?</td>
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Introduce **Signature Project** to students. Assess our community’s needs and assets.

Winter 2018-19

Students determine their project topic. Teachers introduce **Socially Engaged Art**.

Spring 2019

Run a “pilot program” with a small group of interested students.

2019-20

Fully integrate **Socially Engaged Art** into the 6th Grade Signature Project Curriculum.
Project Timeline

Fall 2018

- Introduce Signature Project to students. Assess our community’s needs and assets.
- Students determine their project topic. Teachers introduce Socially Engaged Art via examples on YouTube.

Winter 2018-19

- Run a “pilot program” with a small group of interested students.

Spring 2019

- Fully integrate Socially Engaged Art into the 6th Grade Signature Project Curriculum.

2019-20

- Bring Socially Engaged Art Curriculum beyond my campus and to communities outside of LCS.

2020 & Beyond

- Bring Socially Engaged Art Curriculum beyond my campus and to communities outside of LCS.
Special Thanks

Thanks to all of my teammates for their support and encouragement throughout this process.

A huge THANK YOU to my teammate Raghubir Kintisch for introducing me to social practice art!

And another huge THANK YOU to Deirdre Marlowe for her super organizational skills, knowledge, and social connections.