

I became involved in the Global Arts project in 2004 when I was hired as a research assistant within the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria by Dr. Tim Hopper and Dr. Kathy Sanford. I since then, have also been able to link the project to my sister, Connie Nimmon, who connected the project to a school in Zanzibar where she was working as an acupuncturist and to, Scott Pattinson, who is an elementary school art teacher in Southern Ontario.

So, not only have watched this project evolve from a background perspective, but I have also seen first hand its positive effects as a teacher using this project in my own classroom. For example, this fall I when I was teaching art to ESL speaking adults at the University of Victoria's English Language Center, I approached Nadine (the coordinator of the project) and asked if I could be involved even though my students were young adults. She responded that the project is totally open to everyone and that it is aimed at honoring the child within us, no matter how old we are.

When I first told my students about it I wasn't sure if they understood me because their English proficiency wasn't very high. But, once they understood the fact that they would have the opportunity to have their voices heard by others about such an important topic it gave them a momentum that I hadn't seen in the class before. It is amazing how focused students become when the lesson is connected to some kind of tangibility in the real world (the class was composed of students from all over the world: Mexico, Spain, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Brazil and Italy). The students and myself also knew (as ESL students taking art) that there is something beautiful in language that does not need to be spoken; a power that resides within the visual form of communication itself. When we worked on the project the students were quieter than I have ever seen them and it was as though a spiritual forum was taking place and not an art class. One student even had to take his piece home to work on it because he needed to be alone to put what he wanted into his art piece. The World We Want representations were as eclectic as the group itself and all embodied the fundamentals that make us human: love, peace, hope are all human themes across the world. But, what was most interesting about the pieces were that they were centered not only the world that the artist wanted, but the world that the artist wanted other people to have.

This is probably the theme that strikes me most about this project on a whole. That it helps people all over the world step out of themselves and their own worlds and consider the whole of humanity as a connected experience. Many of the art projects that I have seen from Canada and from other countries have invited a kind of empathy and love for the other that is truly rich. The repercussions of this project are not subtle because the project reaches us at a time in the world when we feel increasingly compelled towards an intrepid compassion. Thus, this innate desire within so many of us towards gestures of compassion at this global time is stimulated in the Global Arts Project. From what I have seen, the Global Arts Project breathes new life and vision into anyone that is involved and shifts the way they view the world. This new world, the far away neighbor, becomes a valued part of our community. The neighbor is now not even the other, he/she is loved for differences and similarities and for being oneself. The Global Arts Project helps us become more human in the process of recognizing the human experience around us.

By: Laura Nimmon