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Executive Summary

*Background*

At the start of this project, I wondered why my students were resistant to eco-conscious behaviors and what it would take to make them change their minds and habits. During this project, the responses, engagement levels, green practices, and art-making of high school art students in a catholic, all-female school were observed and documented to see if a campaign to raise eco-conscious would have an impact.

The students were introduced to eco-conscious behaviors at the beginning of a brand new school year. The classes completed environmentally themed art projects based on eco-artists. Advanced Digital Media students completed a triptych based on the work of Chris Jordan. Each triptych had to show evidence of wastefulness. Art One students completed plastic bottle cap murals based on the work of Michelle Stitzlein. Students held a bottle cap drive and completed murals of their own design. The Art One Students also completed Andy Goldsworthy inspired eco-art installations. We sketched ideas, collected natural materials, and completed the installations outdoors in the park adjacent to the school. Each of these projects enhanced and reinforced the eco-conscious practices in the classroom.

*Research Questions*

Central: How might the introduction of a campaign to raise environmental consciousness in a high school art classroom impact art students and their artworks, other students in the school, and the local community?

What are some preconceived notions and opinions that the students hold about the environment and culture?

How might these preconceived notions and opinions change with this campaign?

What kind of curriculum, strategies, and activities might be used to help students move toward environmental consciousness?

What can I, as the teacher, learn from researching and teaching about the environment in my art classes?

*Data Categories*

Categories were created based on the data collected. Data from my field notes, questionnaires, and artwork analysis was reviewed and color coded. After narrowing down the findings, I arrived at the following categories:

**Preconceived Notions and How They Changed:** The preconceived notions of students going into this research was important to my research questions, so I made sure to take note of it before getting too far into the implementation of my project – first through the student questionnaires and second in my field notes. The data showed that students knew about the state of the environment, but thought that small efforts by one person were unimportant. For this reason, I focused on disproving that fact during the rest of the projects.

**Student Response to Eco-Consciousness:** I was unsure what impact introducing a theme of eco-conscious in my art classroom would have. To my surprise, I really did not encounter much. Most students were either neutral to the change or had a positive response. The fact that I implemented the project in my own classroom at the start of a new year was an important contributing factor. Students proved to me that they were making changes and taking initiatives.

**Effect on Community:** The results of the anonymous community questionnaire were pleasing. Most of the people who took these questionnaires said that our efforts made them think twice about their own individual practices and out of 39 questionnaire-takers, 23 made pledges to try harder. Some pledges included using reusable bags at the grocery store, recycling more, buying local, using less paper, and switching to eco-friendly cleaning products. It is these small things that can make the difference and it seems the members of our community realized that after visiting my classroom that day

**Teacher Reflections:** I noticed that I was paying a lot more attention to the students and their responses during this research project than I have in my previous years of teaching. This focused attention was a key to my success. I was always interested in their thoughts and ideas but by recording classroom happenings in my field notes, I did a lot more watching and listening than I was used to. I paid attention to body language, attitude, mood, and changes in the students. I think this gave me great insight into the minds of the students and I think they respected it because they knew I cared about what they thought and wanted. I believe the implementation of this project made me a better teacher.

**Willingness to Commit to Green Practices:** I was pleased to find that so many students were willing to commit to green practices. The responses on the post-questionnaires were the most evidence of this. Out of all 15 questionnaires, students’ responses included using less water and paper, turning off electronics like lights, cell phones chargers, and TV’s, walking or riding bikes more, and taking shorter showers. Many of these things were not even mentioned in the classroom. This showed me that students were able to take what they were learning from me and apply it elsewhere, especially at home. Students went from thinking their actions were unimportant to voicing responsibility.

*Approach/Methods:*

**Questionnaires:** Students filled out questionnaires at the start and finish of the project to determine changes. Community members filled out questionnaires at our Open House to determine their reactions to our efforts. All questionnaires were anonymous.

**Field Notes:** I kept a reflective journal from 9/7/11 through 11/1/11. I wrote summaries and reflections daily, sometimes a few words during class, but always immediately following the class.

**Artwork Analysis:** I analyzed student eco-art according to my Artwork Analysis Checklist. I checked for engagement, understanding, use of green materials, and knowledge of the eco-artist on which the project was based.

*Findings:*

* Students were environmentally aware but needed a little push and reminders to act in a more eco-conscious way
* The preconceived notions of students changed with this campaign. They learned that small efforts can yield high results.
* Modeling at school impacted our community.
* I had focused attention on my students through watching and listening more than I had in the past. Students respected me for this attention.
* I, as the teacher, was able to change my classroom into a green classroom by implementing the project.