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## Socially Engaged Art Education: Exploring Issues of Homelessness in an Elementary Art Classroom

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### Abstract

Over the past two decades, the field of art education has emphasized visual culture art education for developing visual literacy. More recently, social justice art education has come into focus since there have been many unresolved social justice issues in American society. Underprivileged groups such as persons experiencing homelessness have not yet gained public attention, nor have they evoked from the government a true sense of urgency. Homelessness often occurs at the intersection of unemployment, poverty, domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health disorders. The impact on families, especially young children, can be profound. The essential part of social justice art education is to provide a safe learning place for students to voice unjust

social conditions through art. A case study was conducted in a large urban city in the southwestern United States to explore elementary students' perceptions about homelessness and how contemporary activist art inspires students to envision a more just society. The article begins with a literature review of socially-engaged art education and discusses homelessness issues in art education, first by describing several art examples by a contemporary mural artist, Skid Robot, who has addressed homelessness in his art. Inspired by Robot's art, elementary students in a relevant art lesson expressed their views on various issues regarding homelessness and "drew" a home for homeless persons through a printmaking exercise. Students' artwork and their implications for social justice art education were provided.

### Introduction

An increasing number of contemporary artists and art educators have strived to use the power of arts for educating their audience about important social issues. In *Contemporary Issues in Art Education*, edited by Yvonne Gaudelius and Peg Speirs (2002), over 35 art educators prescribe a critical approach to art education that teaches students about important social issues. Drawing on the theories of postmodern approaches, critical pedagogy, feminist theory, and cultural studies, Gaudelius and Speirs advocate an issues-based approach to art education reflective of contemporary, meaning-driven art that raises important social and political issues. One of the significant contributions of the issues-based approach is to acknowledge "diverse perspectives and understandings of the ways in which knowledge is constructed and used" (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002, p. 1). Among many social issues, homelessness is one the most important issues that urban students encounter in their daily lives in the United States.

Drawing on art education for social justice (Dewhurst, 2010) and art for life (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005), this article explores issues of homelessness through mural art by Skid Robot with a relevant art lesson carried out in an elementary art room in a large urban city of the United States using a Project Based Learning (PBL) pedagogy. The lesson is relevant to students because they are living in a major urban city where they frequently encounter homeless people. Inspired by Skid Robot's art, this lesson helps teachers and elementary students to reflect on their perceptions and attitudes toward persons experiencing homelessness. Discussing issues of homelessness helps students to develop an informed understanding, to enable human agency, and to support this socially marginalized group. The lesson, consisting of class dialogue and studio production, focuses on creative solutions for some of the challenges faced by people living on the streets. The studio activity fosters empathy in students by "drawing" a home for homeless persons as they further develop their printmaking skills.

### **Socially Engaged Art Education**

Increasing students' social awareness is the first step toward social justice by introducing lessons relevant to their daily experiences, which as Dewhurst (2010) recommends: "to encourage the process of connecting, educators should develop lesson plans and activities that encourage learners to reflect on their own identities, experiences, and interests to help them identify project topics that are meaningful and rooted in students' own lives" (p. 10).

Homelessness is one of many social issues encountered by students outside the classroom. This lesson aligns with the terrain of social justice art education that aims at fostering students' critical faculty through investigating unjust social conditions and creating visual representations envisioning a more just society.

Mead, Ellerbrock, and Cruz (2017) insist on the importance of teaching student-centered social issues in school, since it may foster their civic engagement and a willingness to change unjust conditions in the world:

Global issues such as poverty, hunger, human rights, and socioeconomic inequality are part of young people's consciousness as they interact with others around the world. The opportunities to experience artistic expression that address global issues in the classroom foster student interest in examining the causes of real world problems and thus further develop student civic engagement. (p. 72)

Inspired by contemporary art that engages viewers in a discourse about various kinds of social problems, fostering viewers' critical thinking abilities and judgments, Schlemmer, Carpenter, and Hitchcock (2017) define socially engaged art activities as ones that "stretch beyond the production of aesthetically pleasing art objects to foster a dialog that integrates artistic practices, pedagogical processes, and creative possibilities in pursuit of a more equitable world" (p. 56). Moreover, Sanders-Bustle (2018) emphasizes the interaction in socially engaged art: "[M]ore and more contemporary artists are utilizing participatory practices to create alternative social interactions through participation and dialogue" (p. 39).

Hochtritt, Ahlschwede, Halsey-Dutton, Fiesel, Chevalier, Miller, and Farrar (2018) encourage teachers to implement culturally and socially relevant art curricula, commenting that when "looked at through a social justice lens, teaching and learning in these settings can be viewed as activist work, focusing on that which is culturally and socially relevant" (p.288). Rawdon and Moxley (2016) elaborate on art as a powerful language, and artists can become part of activism to advocate social change:

Interpreters of societal conditions may be one of the most important roles that artists as activists play in society. They can collaborate with other social practitioners in

advancing perspectives about social conditions, engaging in protest, and organizing action to address societal issues and injustice. (p. 432)

In addressing the issue of homelessness through art, we bring awareness of stereotypical perceptions about homelessness and increase students' empathy and agency toward persons in this situation. Socially engaged art education fosters students' critical thinking and problem-solving, and further develops their visual production skills. The classroom is a powerful transformative place where students learn about socially engaged art creatively.

### **Addressing Issues of Homelessness in the Art Classroom**

Art educators have a responsibility to address homelessness in the art classroom for students to examine discrimination and social stereotypes about homeless people. There are several reported classroom studies on this issue. Messinger (2010) designed a series of lessons for K-12 students to learn about the issue of homelessness. One lesson allowed students to find available resources when a person lost his or her home. Messinger's lesson engaged students in a situational conversation for them to "discard the image that people without homes are intrinsically different from them" (Messinger, 2010, p. 17).

Through a service-learning project involving art therapy students who volunteered at homeless shelters, Feen-Calligan (2008) helped students understand the homeless problem and increase their sense of social responsibility for people suffering without a home. The project entailed the enactment of the three educational standards of "cultural and social diversity," "human growth and development," and "studio art." Regarding "cultural and social diversity," Feen-Calligan found that "[s]tudents increased cultural self-awareness as they examined their attitudes and beliefs about homelessness" (p.31). Additionally, "[s]tudents expanded their awareness of social justice and began to think about advocacy" (p.31). Feen-Calligan concluded that service-learning offers art therapy students an opportunity to deepen what they know about the complex reality of homelessness.

Additionally, Danker (2018) suggests a place-based art curriculum to address social justice issues such as homelessness. Danker used a series of sculptures created by a Chicago-based artist, Charity White, as an example to illustrate how contemporary activists engage viewers in discussing issues of homelessness. In one public piece, White placed a homeless figure sculpture lying on a street bench and used a camera to study how passers-by interacted with this sculpture. White criticizes the superficiality of a selfie culture where people preferred to take photos with this street sculpture portraying a homeless person than ponder its deeper meaning. Referencing White's figure sculpture, Danker advocates for a place-based art curriculum in which teachers identify and teach an issue found in their respective local communities with available resources. The place-based art curriculum encourages teachers

and students to critically examine a local issue together with the goal of improving the quality of life in their place.

### **Learning from Contemporary Artist, Skid Robot**

Contemporary artists like Skid Robot have used art to raise social awareness of homeless issues like the availability of clean water, personal hygiene, and street crime. One day, Robot and his girlfriend were walking in downtown Los Angeles. When they stopped in front of a red traffic light, they saw a homeless individual asleep next to it. Robot's girlfriend suggested that he paint for the homeless (Walker, 2015). Robot provides homeless people with imaginary visual scenes to go with their street shelters in Los Angeles. He confronts social stereotypes about homeless people and argues that each homeless person deserves love and respect:

Hollywood has constantly projected stereotypes of the homeless creating bias and distorted perception of them, and because of that, people are more inclined to criticize and be judgmental rather than empathetic. Everyone has a story to tell, and they all have different reasons for being homeless. The general perception of the homeless though is that they're all alcoholics and addicts, which frankly isn't true. (Maleszka, 2016, para. 11)

Challenging the stereotypes constructed in Hollywood films, Robot is concerned with the psychological health of homeless people, and he hopes his art can bring out people's empathy toward this marginalized group:

One of the elements of my work is to focus on the humanity of the individuals I meet. By sharing their stories, people can make the human connection and begin to develop a sense of compassion and a deeper understanding of the homeless issue. You never know who suffered a traumatic event which caused them to lose control of their lives and eventually their minds. This story relates to a lot of the homeless people who are impaired by their mental disabilities and that have no one to care or provide for them. (Maleszka, 2016, para.13)

Robot's street murals feature ordinary household items and furniture such as beds, meals, and TV's painted on the wall for homeless people. In Figure 1, Robot and his team painted a performing stage on cardboard as a backdrop for homeless people to entertain. The stage was dramatically embellished with a bright red curtain on each side tied with a yellow ribbon. The bright blue light in the middle of the stage casts a spotlight for the performer. A photographer is standing on the right side of the stage recording the performance (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1. A Stage for Homeless Individuals to Perform.* Photography provided by Skid Robot. Used with permission. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 2 features a street camping site where homeless people live. Robot painted a serene mountain scenery on the wall as a backdrop to situate homeless people's living conditions. The nightly mountain scenery is illustrated with a deep blue sky, a white crescent moon, and a blue lake filled with seemingly calming spring water. The serenity of this natural landscape offers homeless people a sense of comfort and peace, which securely housed persons take for granted (see Figure 2). Figure 3 shows a homeless person who is getting into the Christmas spirit. He is surrounding himself with a delightfully decorated Christmas tree and several colorful presents. Through the mural, Robot enables homeless people to participate, at least in some way, in the cheerful spirit of the holiday season.



Figure 2. A Mountain Scenery for Homeless People's Camp Site. Photography provided by Skid Robot. Used with permission. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3. A Christmas's Tree and Gifts for a Homeless Individual. Photography provided by Skid Robot. Used with permission. Courtesy of the artist.

Robot's artworks have attempted to help persons experiencing homelessness to better themselves and their living conditions, encouraging them to start a new life. He recalls his encounter with one homeless man:

I met Birdman under a bridge in Silver Lake, where he'd lived for 20 years. I built him a living room, and then people began to ask to take his picture. Within a week, he shaved and cut his hair for the first time in a decade. Soon after that, he went to a non-profit to get help. Now he lives in supportive housing. (Robot, 2016, para. 3)

Robot's art serves as a powerful tool to fulfill dreams and wishes of homeless people living on the streets. Figures 4 and 5 are two examples of what homeless people would need in real life. In Figure 4, a king-size bed, a bedside lamp, and a fishbowl are placed purposefully next to the bed to accentuate a home-like touch. There is a window behind the bed where viewers can clearly see stars and the moon. A painting is hung above the fishbowl in this imaginary bedroom. The warm red color also shapes the cozy atmosphere of a home. As seen, a homeless individual appears to write on his notebook, surrounded by a pile of clothes and bedroom accessories. The bedroom mural again offers the individual a sense of feeling at home.



*Figure 4. A King-size Bed for Homeless People. Photography provided by Skid Robot. Used with permission. Courtesy of the artist.*



Similarly, using a spray paint and sketch technique with some line work, Robot creates a bedroom feel for a homeless person (see Figure 5). The bedroom is simple yet cozy. In this mural sketch, the homeless person imaginarily has a clothes drawer with a TV on top and a birdcage housing his pet to keep him company. His bedroom has a window right above him as he is lying on his mat, smiling and greeting the viewer. Robot's simple sketch brings tremendous warmth and imaginary comfort for the person seeking to find a sense of comfort as if they had a home.



*Figure 5. A Bedroom Mural for a Homeless Individual.* Photography provided by Skid Robot. Used with permission. Courtesy of the artist.

Robot's murals shed light on homeless issues and draw viewers' attention to the living conditions of homeless people living on urban streets. Further, his activist art opens a public dialogue about homeless issues in society. He provides homeless people with spiritual support and psychological relief in a simple yet powerful way, while bringing social awareness to the viewers.

### Teaching Issues of Homelessness

Critically analyzing homeless issues is an essential component of art education for social justice. Therefore, a relevant art lesson was conducted by one of the authors to a class of 22 elementary students located in an urban city in the United States. The lesson guided students

to examine their views on homelessness and as young artists to create art in support of homeless people with caring and acceptance. The student population consisted of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds from the city. The lesson began with an introduction of Skid Robot's art, followed by a class discussion about issues of homelessness (e.g., possible reasons for becoming homeless) while several photos of homeless people living on the streets were shown to students to engage them in the discussion. The students also brainstormed the kinds of support that they and society might offer to help alleviate homelessness. Before moving to the art production component, the instructor reviewed printmaking as an artistic expression and a way of storytelling and demonstrated a relief printing method to show them how they would design a home for homeless people. The class ended with a group session where the class shared about their final prints.

In this lesson, it was important to show Robot's mural images to engage elementary students in identifying some of the living situations that homeless people face today and how contemporary artists use art to address this issue. Robot's art illustrates the importance of social context in understanding art. For instance, without actual homeless people in his art, the meaning of this art would be diminished.

Feminist art created by the Guerrilla Girls and the notion of contextualism were used to guide students to understand Robot's art. Contextualism emphasizes that "the meaning of a work does not reside within its form, but rather, is constructed in the context of its cultural, historical, social, and political functions" (Jeffers, 2002, pp. 159-160). Artists who embrace the notion of contextualism use their art to engage audiences in conversations regarding "social injustice and disparate conditions; changing social mores, roles, relations, and immigration patterns; or the meaning of social responsibility" (Jeffers, 2002, p. 160). Specifically, the meaning of Robot's mural series lies in its specific social context. Robot's art inspires students to learn about how art can be a powerful catalyst for raising social awareness on the living conditions of the homeless in their communities. To assist elementary students in understanding Robot's art created for a specific social situation, they first looked at his murals without the homeless people in them. Then, they talked about the meaning of his murals again with homeless people in them. For the latter exercise, the students understood that the artist wants to provide a "home" for the homeless people. Using this contrast and comparison approach of art criticism, elementary students were able to understand the notion of contextualism clearly and how Robot's mural series presented profound social meaning, namely, raising issues of homelessness. After learning about contextualism and its significance in Robot's art, students were shown several examples of both graffiti and mural art to differentiate between the two. Although both art genres are painted on a wall and displayed publicly, graffiti is more of stylized writing, whereas mural art is more likely to convey a story or an idea.

### **Students' Responses Regarding the Living Conditions of Homeless People**

To imagine living without a home is not hard for elementary students. At the beginning of the discussion, several students mentioned that they have seen homeless people living on the streets. Then, they brainstormed in small groups some of the challenges or difficulties faced by homeless people in their daily lives, as well as the possible reasons that might have led to their living situations. Group members took different roles in the group discussion for later class sharing. In each group, one member wrote down key points during brainstorming on large white paper while other members drew visual cues to illustrate these points.

Additionally, students were allowed to use their phones to research or look up words. After 20 minutes of group work, each group presented what they learned to the whole class. Several student responses include: "They need more food because they starve. They need to open more shelters because they are homeless and need shelters" (Apple's response, 2019). "They become homeless because they lost their job or because they lost their important family members. They don't have a home and it was not safe. If they don't have a job, how can they live?" (Tom's response, 2019). "They may not have enough money to support themselves or buy food and clothing. They could have family problems" (Ella's response, 2019). "They can't pay their rent. They lost their jobs. They can get sick. They don't have enough to eat. They don't get warmth in the winter" (Olivia's response, 2019). "They might have disabilities or might have been abused. They can be hungry or cold" (Harry's response, 2019).

We transferred students' written responses to a word file and started an open coding process to identify emerging themes and highlighted them to summarize our findings. Overall, students did a commendable job on discussion and presentation. They reported that homeless people may encounter difficulties due to personal, family, or social factors. For personal factors, students mentioned that homeless people need food, clean clothes, and a shelter. They may feel hungry, lonely, depressed, sick, and cold, especially during winter. In terms of social factors, students reported that some people become homeless due to unemployment or natural disasters. Regarding family factors, students said that people become homeless maybe because they have lost a family member who was the source of income, or they may have experienced domestic violence or dissonance and that the home is not safe for them any longer.

### **Printmaking Studio Activity: Drawing A Home for Homeless People**

Printmaking is a relevant medium for students to visualize their perceptions of homeless people, yet most students have not been introduced to this medium or have not learned about how printmaking can be used for storytelling. To begin, we showed several examples of printing methods to introduce students to printmaking. Considering the availability of classroom equipment and time constraints in carrying out other printing methods such as

silkscreen, lithography, and intaglio, we decided the relief printing method is an entry point for students to learn about the essential feature of printmaking and its making process. In this class focusing on the issue of homelessness, students were taught to produce three editions (i.e., three copies in printmaking) of their artwork to disseminate the idea to reach a broader audience (as opposed to a final artwork typically produced); therefore, printmaking is an ideal art medium for communication. Specifically, for the studio art project, students were taught to use a relief printing method to draw a home for homeless people. Before starting their creation, they learned about four types of printmaking including relief, silkscreen, lithography, and intaglio. Then, they were introduced to a series of relief printing tools including brayers, carving tools, inks, printmaking machines, and cleaning supplies (e.g., solvents for oil-based ink), as well as how to sign their prints properly once completed. In terms of relief printing materials, wooden and linoleum blocks were discussed. To expand students' printmaking knowledge, the instructor showed different ways of making relief prints, including single-color print, multi-block print, and reductive method by showing examples, as well as relevant printmaking technology. For example, artists normally use Acetone, a chemical component for transferring photos or computer-generated images onto a wooden or linoleum block. Laser cutters and 3-D printing machines have also been incorporated in the relief printing process. In this lesson introduction, students had an opportunity to learn how technology is advancing the traditional printmaking process.

After the instructor demonstrated the relief printing process, students thought and sketched out on newsprint paper what homeless people would need in a home. They completed a pencil sketch on paper before using tracing paper to transfer their "home" sketch onto a piece of Styrofoam. To ensure the final print was exactly the image as shown on the drawing paper, they were taught to flip the image of the tracing paper over on top of the Styrofoam before copying the image to the Styrofoam with a pencil.

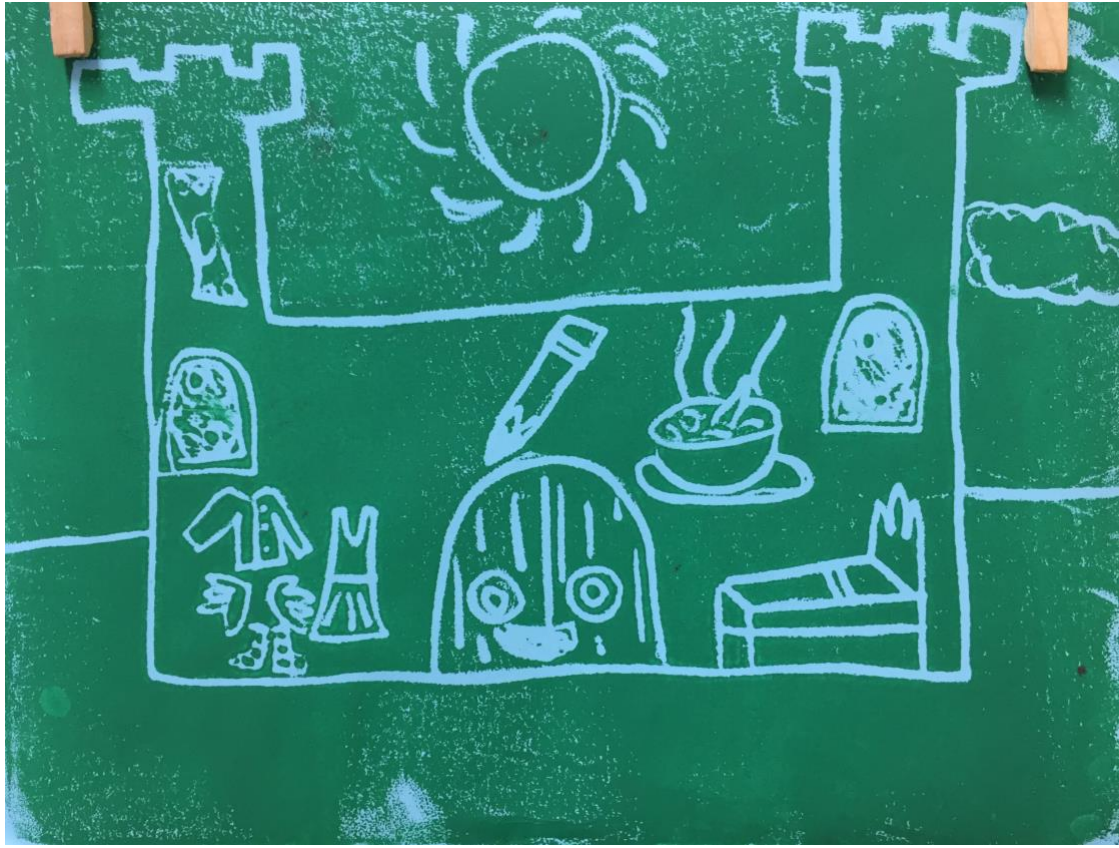
Students referred to the mural pieces by Skid Robot during this printmaking activity as they created a "home" for homeless people. The instructor provided several question prompts to guide students to think about their home drawing. For example, they were asked to think about basic shapes of a home and what homeless people would need for a home, and they were encouraged to add relevant background to the drawing. Adeline (pseudonym of a student) drew basic shapes to represent a house (Figure 6) combining a triangle and a rectangle, representing the roof of the house and the shape of the first floor. Adeline considered both the long term and short-term support for homeless people; therefore, she drew several household essentials such as food, cooking utensils, and clothing. Adeline also drew a book to indicate that education is critical for homeless people to live a secured life. She mentioned that education could help homeless people acquire job skills to earn income and live independently. On the roof of her house, she drew a heart shape representing love from

society and an image of money, representing donated funds to organizations helping homeless people.



*Figure 6. A Home for the Homeless People Drawn by an Elementary School Student. Photo by the author.*

Lydia designed a home with two smokestacks to convey a warm feel. Her cartoon-style door of the house is eye-catching. She thought that our society could provide different kinds of support to help homeless people including donating clothing, money, food, and furniture. For long term support, she thought the government could provide free job training opportunities and affordable education for homeless people.



*Figure 7. A Home for the Homeless People Drawn by an Elementary Student. Photo by the author.*

Julia drew a house with one smokestack in brick style (Figure 8). She illustrated various types of food for homeless people in her drawing. She thought that education could change people's lives. Her drawing included a math textbook and pen, indicating that education is important for homeless people. Julia also suggested that our society should provide more career training opportunities for homeless people, helping them to live independently. She added flowers and trees to the front yard of her house to convey a sense of warmth.



Figure 8. *A Home for the Homeless People* Drawn by an Elementary Student. Photo by the author.

At the end of the lesson, students wrote a short statement about how they could help homeless people. Their responses included: “People can make care packages. Open food banks” (Julia’s response, 2019). “Donate and open more food banks” (Tim’s response, 2019). “Lend them a place to stay. Give food/water. Donate. Build homeless shelters. Food drives/banks” (Jack’s response, 2019) “Donate money, so others can help them. Volunteer, so you can help them. Donate clothes, so they can have clean clothes” (George’s response, 2019). “Give them food. We can build homeless shelters.” “Make mini homes for homeless people” (Loe’s response, 2019).

In sum, they suggested that as a society, we can donate more clothes and bed linens as well as household items such as kitchen utensils and furniture. Offering more cooking sites is another way to help them since they do not have a place to cook. Several suggested that the government can offer more shelters and build more affordable housing for the homeless. Non-profit organizations may increase fund-raising activities to support homeless families. Additionally, non-profit organizations may offer job training opportunities for the homeless so that they are equipped with professional knowledge necessary to compete in the job market. In terms of support from individuals, students suggested that individuals can be volunteers

helping homeless people, for example, by sorting through packages and food items donated to a local shelter or serving food at a charity soup kitchen. Additionally, individuals can donate money to non-profit organizations that are helping the homeless. Finally, students also mentioned that mass media should educate the public to respect the homeless since they are part of our community.

### **Recommendations**

The lesson on homelessness described here is a Project Based Learning (PBL) activity where elementary students are guided step-by-step to explore homelessness issues. Referencing activist art, the lesson shows students how contemporary artists strive to provide a “home” for homeless people. Students then conduct research to find out why people become homeless and seek possible solutions to solve the homelessness problem. This PBL lesson increases students’ awareness and personal agency similar to contemporary activists advocating for a more just society. That is, after viewing Skid Robot's art, students in small groups discuss some of the challenges and difficulties faced by homeless people in their lives and consider possible reasons for people to lose a home. They then participate in a printmaking activity to “draw” a home for homeless people, and a writing assignment reflecting how our society and individuals can help. All of these activities engage students in a relevant project of possibility in pursuit of future social justice endeavors.

The lesson illuminates that elementary students are able to discuss social justice issues in a guided learning setting in spite of having difficulties transferring their ideas into visual images. For instance, several students mentioned that society should offer job training for homeless people; however, they have not considered any images related to job training. Even though some of them did draw a book, we would expect to see more specific visual symbols representing their thoughts. We found that clear visual examples would be helpful for them to transfer verbal language to visual language. For example, teachers might show students how specific visual symbols represent different meanings. This would guide students, step-by-step, to communicate their ideas more clearly through art production regarding addressing the issue of homelessness inspired by activist artists such as Skid Robot.

For further social justice art education on homelessness, we recommend introducing more contemporary social issues related to art to help students to improve their art production skills. For instance, several students reported that this was their first printmaking lesson. Overall, we found that students are capable of discussing the issue of homelessness meaningfully in the art classroom. Furthermore, we encourage art teachers to collaborate with community homeless shelters to teach more impactful lessons on homelessness. A field trip to a local shelter is another opportunity for students to gain firsthand learning experience. Encouraging students



to be volunteers (e.g., helping food banks and soup kitchens) is another way to directly engage students in transforming the lives of homeless people.

### Conclusion

Social justice art education builds the foundation of critical thinking, activist art, counter-narrative, culturally responsive pedagogy, community-based art education, issues-based art education as well as adopting Project Based Learning (PBL) to guide teaching and to fully engage students' learning. According to Ploof and Hochtritt (2018, p. 38), "social justice education seeks to engage learners in a critical analysis of injustice by encouraging them to create works of art that imagine new realities and shift social interaction." Social issues-based art education, such as addressing homeless issues through art, emphasizes the actuation of human agency through the examination and reconstruction of one's personal and social experience. Further, Wilson (2003) points out that contemporary artworks and the ideas surrounding them are reflective of our contemporary lives; indeed, "they probe and problematize contemporary society, and they raise issues pertaining to our values and our aspiration" (p. 217). Homelessness is one of the urgent social issues prevalent in metropolitan areas of the United States. Homelessness is linked to such social issues as street gangs, neighborhood crime, and drug abuse, all of which affect a community's well-being. According to Bell, Desai (2010) argues that social justice art education is "a process and a goal that involves working in a collaborative, participatory, and democratic way to change the unequal distribution and access of resources that hamper equal participation of all social groups in society" (p. 174).

Bearing the genre of activist art in mind, we found that teaching art elements and design principles are not sufficient to address the pressing social issues presented in postmodern art. Skid Robot's art is loaded with social meaning communicated to bystanders in public spaces as opposed to the one displayed and housed in institutional art establishments for mere appreciation. Applying knowledge of modern art and the conventional ways of art teaching and learning would most likely lead to misunderstanding of the complexity of activist art in a classroom learning setting. In other words, Skid Robot's art is situated in a specific social context in which homeless people reside. His body of artworks incorporate everyday visual signs and symbols accompanied with living conditions of homeless people to which ordinary people can relate. Thus, art teachers would need to emphasize the importance of social context in creating and understanding socially engaged art.

In this article, we have visited the notion of socially engaged art education and shared a classroom exploration of homeless issues through art with elementary students. Using Skid Robot's mural art to further class dialogue and studio production, and through these activities, elementary students have become more aware of the issue of homelessness as they develop

empathy and human agency for this socially disenfranchised group. Art is a powerful language where students, even young students, can participate in discussing different kinds of social justice issues and hopefully carry out the mission of art education for social justice in the future.

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### Authors' note:

All students' names in this article are pseudonyms. The authors appreciate Skid Robot for contributing to this article and shares his mural pieces used in this article.

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