Art as a Tool for Empowering Youth in Namibia
Windhoek, Namibia and via Google Meet
Occidental College
Habiba Hopson

Section 1: Narrative

Objective:

Art as a Tool for Empowering Youth in Namibia fuses artmaking, meditation, and mindfulness techniques to encourage positive habits and creative thinking in female students grades 9-11. The project calls for a need to address female-identifying students’ coping methods to stress, anxiety, and gender-based violence.

Collaboration:

Jacob Marengo School, a secondary school located in Windhoek, Namibia, provided a laptop and classroom space to conduct our video conferences. Kenneth Abrahams, the School Director, helped significantly in coordinating the program schedule due to unexpected COVID-19 school closures. Pedro Kapirika, the School’s Conflict Manager, organized all other aspects of the workshop such as: locating appropriate painting supplies, setting up conferencing equipment (microphone, camera to video, laptop, camera to film -- all supplies in their possession) documenting each workshop, providing instructions to students, and general administrative help. This project would not have been successful without Pedro. The school fronted all transportation and art supply costs and I reimbursed them at the end of our collaboration.

Significance:

Among recent news, Namibia now supports a democratic constitution. However, their education system faces serious weaknesses despite the country’s efforts to provide equitable and accessible education for all. In lieu of educational disparities, the Ministry of Education implemented the Education and Training Sector Improvement Program executed through three five-year cycles. Out of no surprise, arts education and general arts classes are limited in most Namibian schools; school programs tend to overemphasize instruction in science, technology, and engineering.

Within educational and domestic spaces, women face the harshest treatment. While the country may celebrate its recent high ranking along the African Gender Index (AGI), cases of gender-based violence heavily loom in Namibian society. Female youth are especially less likely to report gender-based violence taking place in their homes or schools. This project seeks to demonstrate the unique power of art. Students will freely be able to express their emotions, with the intended hope to empower their voices.

Inspiration:

This project is an extension of a past collaboration between Occidental College and Rosemary Children’s Services. Under my leadership, we created a program in which eight Oxy students regularly connected with six young women from a local women’s group home. By the end of our semester together, creative activities fostered the girls’ verbal abilities and self-confidence, allowing them to establish meaningful relationships with us as mentors. I adapted the skills from my training with Rosemary’s to my proposal for Davis Projects for Peace.
My passion for art stems from my childhood experiences in Namibia. The country is a rich cultural landscape composed of ancient and indigenous artistic practices. Now, contemporary organizations such as Free Your Mind, Sister Namibia and Namibian Institute for Democracy empower youth using civic democratic, artistic, and educational tools. My only hope with this project was to be able to impact young girls living in Windhoek -- a place a deeply cherish as a home. Gender-based violence affects women all over the world. I'm passionate about art as a tool for empowering youth and believe in this program's ability to provide a safe haven for young women.

Working with the students was an absolute dream:

At first, students were hesitant to meditate and participate in the drawing activities. Due to the remote nature of the program, I was unable to demonstrate to each student different drawing techniques. After the first week, the students became well-versed in our routine: 1) meditation and breathwork, 2) blind contour exercises using different objects and/or people, 3) painting a selected work by an artist of the African diaspora, and finally 4) ending each class with a meditation and self-affirmation. Pedro informed me of the students’ positive reactions after class, often discussing events from the workshop in elaborate detail with energy. It became clear to me that Art as a Tool for Empowering Youth in Namibia truly encouraged students’ communicative and creative abilities.

Challenges and COVID-19:

The President of Namibia closed all secondary schools twice during the initial timeline of our project. After the second closure, I doubted our ability to execute the program. The original project proposal included concrete travel plans to Namibia, however, I quickly realized that the program would have to go virtual. We adapted to this challenge by administering the project via Google Meet. This sudden change forced us to establish clear and frequent communication between Pedro (my co-facilitator/co-teacher) and Kenneth (the school director). Originally my project included usage of the school garden but due to the program being remote, we focused entirely on mindfulness techniques and painting and drawing. The success of this workshop proved to me how virtual platforms still offered possibilities of cross-cultural connection.

Peace:

I define peace as one’s state of equilibrium and tranquility, regardless of disturbances or distractions from the outside world. I believe that real world peace will only happen once all individuals establish inner peace. We fight at war with one another because we are really fighting at war with ourselves. I stand behind efforts to promote collective healing and peace-building through the application of art and mindfulness techniques.

Meditation is a research-based rehabilitative practice to reduce stress, develop concentration, enhance mood, encourage self-discipline, establish healthy sleep patterns, and even alleviate pain. Painting and the frequent practice of artistic habits also administer similar positive effects. My hope is that students will use exercises from Art as a Tool for Empowering Youth to increase awareness of themselves and their surroundings.
Reflection:

“Art as a Tool for Empowering Youth in Namibia reaffirmed my conviction that art can inspire reflection and community-building that transcends space and time. This project allowed me to develop more artistic and mindfulness techniques to personally use and to share with other members of my community.”

Habiba Hopson
habibahopson@gmail.com

Section II: Photographs

a. Paste 2-3 photographs on one page

PART B. FINAL EXPENDITURES BUDGET SPREADSHEET
a. Instructions and Budget Form Template available online under Forms. Please use this form to submit your final budget. All expenditures to be reported in U.S. dollars and must show fully Expended.
*attached

PART C. HIGH QUALITY PHOTOGRAPH REQUIREMENTS
In addition to the required 2-3 photos to be included in Part A/Section II, you may submit up to 25 additional photographs to further illustrate your project. All photos submitted may be considered for publication in our upcoming 2021 Annual Report. Please follow these instructions:
• Provide original photos in jpeg format (a jpeg image file should be no smaller than 1 megabyte, and should preferably be larger to meet resolution quality)
• Your camera should be 6 megapixels or greater (do not use a cellphone to capture images)
• Set capture size to the largest available on your camera. If possible, set resolution to fine.
• Shoot many photos in order to provide greater choice and quality
• DO NOT compress or change resolution of images before submission
*emailed as Google Drive