

The Shelter Project in India: Designing a Classroom for the Future: Arzu Mistry and Jackson Porretta

The authors led the planning and teaching for the Classroom of the Future Project in Bangalore, India, in collaboration with Todd Elkin's and Ariel Roman's Shelter Projects in Fremont and East Oakland, California. The 14-16 year old students who participated in India are from the Baiyapanahalli Community in Bangalore. They attend the Drishya Kallika Kendra, an alternative Learning Center for poor urban children, that is located in the youth's community.



Generative Topic: Initial conversations about the projects focused on Elkin's unit from a previous year and how modifications would evolve from the various contexts. In Bangalore the project focused on the 2009 Open Architecture Challenge, hosted by Architecture for Humanity and the Open Architecture Network, which invited designs for the Classroom of the Future from all over the world. The global need for learning centers within low income communities motivated these artist educators to participate in the competition. These students, whose families work in informal construction trades, had just moved into a new learning center. Because additional centers are planned within multiple low-income neighborhoods, students felt an urgent and relevant connection to issues of space and purpose.

Understanding Goals: The three settings shared common Throughlines, Understanding Goals, and Performances of Understanding, but because the students in the different communities had different needs, there were also unique Goals and Performances.

Shared Throughlines (selected):

1. How can artists be a part of global conversations about important and relevant topics and issues?
2. What is the impact of your context (socioeconomic/cultural/geographic/political/environmental/religious/family) on how you live in the world?
3. What is sustainability and how is it connected to the idea of shelter?

Understanding Goals for Classroom of the Future:

1. How does design facilitate or inhibit the pattern of dwelling in a structure? How does our pattern of use dictate the balance between form and function of a space?
2. How do site and environment influence artists' work?
3. How does the ecology play a role in your classroom? How do you design with this in mind?
4. How does what you do/say/make as an artist/designer/builder/architect relate to your responsibility as a citizen of the world?
5. How does engaging with artist communities in and out of the classroom influence my work?

Performances of Understanding and Ongoing Assessment: In three groups, students researched, conceptualized, designed, and built models of classrooms of the future for their own communities. They worked through cycles of draft, critique, and revision. They grappled with issues of design, including balancing form and function, energy and water resources, and waste management. Teachers and students in all three settings used technologies to converse with each other before, during, and after the projects

Open Architecture Network: <http://openarchitecturenetwork.org/projects/3658>

Our Proposal: <http://openarchitecturenetwork.org/competitions/challenge/2009>

This was an Artists-in-Residence project through Project Vision at the Srishti School of Art Design and Technology with students and facilitators at Drishya Kalika Kendra : <http://srishti.ac.in>

The Shelter Project: Todd Elkin

The Shelter Project was designed by art teacher Todd Elkin in 2007 and taught to students at Washington High School in Fremont, California. As originally conceived, students carried out a set of interdisciplinary learning experiences around ideas of shelter, global conditions, contemporary art making, the effect of context on the kinds of art artists make, how artists live their lives, and how artists/students can participate in global conversations about important issues.



Generative Topic: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."
--Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25

In 2008-2009, Elkin re-conceived his unit to expand students' sensitivity to the impact of context by inviting teachers and students in East Oakland, California (USA), and Bangalore, Karnataka (India) to collaborate. Throughout the project, teachers communicated via the project's blog, <http://shelterproject.wordpress.com> and through Skype and instant messaging on phones and computers. Collaborative planning and ongoing review by the teachers, along with enriching students' library and web-based research through direct communication with students in other settings, promised a more authentic and engaging experience that would lead to deeper appreciation and genuine understanding of global citizenship.

Understanding Goals: Participants in the three locations investigated shared Throughlines and Understanding Goals, as well as some goals and performances that were specific to individual learning communities.

Shelter Project Throughlines:

1. How can artists be part of global conversations about important and relevant topics and issues?
2. How is **form** in artworks a vehicle through which **content** can be communicated?
3. What is the impact of your **context** (socioeconomic/cultural/geographic/political/environmental/ religious/family) on how you live in the world?
4. In what ways do artists push the limits of their media and reconsider what can be thought of as art?
5. What is sustainability and how is it connected to the idea of shelter?

Shelter Project Understanding Goals:

1. What are site-specific, installation, and conceptual art? (TL 4)
2. How does what you do/say/make as an artist relate to your responsibility as a citizen of the world? (TLs 1, 3, 4)
3. How can you plan and create a three-dimensional, site-specific installation that communicates/conveys ideas about the concept of shelter? (TLs 1-4)
4. How can you use recycled materials to plan and create an aesthetically pleasing artwork that doubles as a functioning shelter? (TLs 3, 4)
5. What does it mean to have a shelter? What does it mean not to have a shelter? (TLs 1, 3)
6. How, where, and under what conditions do most people in the world live? (TL 3, 5)
7. How does your **context** (Socioeconomic/cultural/geographic/environmental/ religious/political/family) impact your work as an artist? (TL 3)

Performances of Understanding and Ongoing Assessment: Students researched, created, and gave powerpoint presentations on contemporary artists engaged in global issues. They planned and constructed site-specific artworks that doubled as functional shelters for their groups of 5-8 students. Students reflected on and critiqued their own and each others' works throughout the study and at its conclusion, and also responded to works in progress at the other sites on the blog and using Skype, asking questions, offering critique, and considering the understanding goals as their learning developed.