

CREATIVE COLLISION: AN EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT  
ARTS CAN HAVE ON ADOLESCENTS DURING A GLOBAL CRISIS

by

Jazmine Beatty

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Thesis Supervisor:

Jana Minifie

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## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Event Logo.....	07
2. Sponsorship Letter .....	10
3. Event Website .....	14
4. Instagram Templates .....	16
5. Instagram Filter .....	17
6. Event Recruitment Flyers .....	18
7. Survey Part I .....	26
8. Survey Part II .....	27
9. Survey Part III.....	28

## **ABSTRACT**

Artistic-focused programs for adolescents across the US are minimal to non-existent. This lack of access and participation in artistic activities is stunting our youth's creative brain development which is a critical intelligence they will need in the future to be effective leaders, problem solvers and workers in our fast-paced, digital world. That's why I developed Creative Collision for my senior thesis project, a non-profit, Fine and Performing Arts event. It is designed to enhance adolescents' levels of human connection, collaboration, artistic career exploration, academic success and well-being. I believe art is a universal language and necessity in life, as it provides an outlet for therapeutic, collaborative, and expressive communication, especially during times of stress. With the wide-spread impact of COVID-19 sweeping the entire planet, the collaborative and therapeutic nature of this event is needed now more than ever. Through examination of the event, I will determine the levels of human connection and collaboration produced on a digital platform, and ultimately the impact art of all forms can have on a community in crisis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Challenge.....	01
II.	Research.....	02
	a. Industry Trends.....	03
	b. Description of the Total Market.....	04
	c. Documentation of Need.....	05
	d. Appendix.....	05
III.	Solution.....	07
IV.	Execution Process.....	09
V.	Execution Analysis.....	19
VI.	Reflection.....	21
VII.	Impact.....	24

## **I. Challenge**

While many art programs provide great resources for students, they often do not appear to integrate various art forms or provide constant collaboration, nor do they regularly bring professional artists to the students. I believe this type of differentiated teaching content is crucial for encouraging students to pursue artistic professions. Simply believing in a future in the arts is far less impactful than gaining hands-on experience that showcases the possibilities, letting students know it's achievable. As a society, we must expand opportunities for marginalized and underrepresented youth that don't have the resources, knowledge, or support to know that they can pursue their art dreams.

Students need a curriculum that approaches art with serious intent to further develop their talents, yet allows room for creativity, individual expression, and interaction with others. Unlike most art programs, I want to offer students a collaborative experience that prepares them for the real-world by exposing them to professional artists in various fields who ingeniously combine their creative and analytical skill sets. This real-world influence can help them better visualize what they want to do with their talents; they can learn about the multitude of art industries and specializations offered.

Also, a collaborative community environment can help to expand students' social interaction skills. Instead of solely texting and posting on social media, teens will be face-to-face with diverse groups of people. They will learn how to effectively communicate with peers and adult mentors in order to gain knowledge, receive feedback, develop their craft, and articulate (promote) their personal stories. Being able to talk to others and make connections is a fundamental life skill. Having this skill will positively influence the future success of our youth, in all aspects of their lives.

## **II. Research**

Through preliminary research in my Spring 2019 Independent Study class, I began to develop my ideal business plan for a Fine and Performing Arts teen club that would allow youth to explore and expand possibilities in art fields. My community-based program would help them develop and display their talents, as well as network with peers and professional artists; making their portfolios attractive to college and art program recruiters. As part of the development of my business plan, and the initial research for my thesis project, I read, analyzed, and summarized research done on the after-school industry, as well as demographic research on San Marcos, Texas adolescents through the Simply Analytics Database.

During my research process, I developed an understanding of business fundamentals, from customer research and budgeting to overall branding and company values. I researched industry data for afterschool programs in order to understand the current market. I talked to business owners (to analyze fundamental business operations), and interviewed people who parent or work with adolescents to understand my customer base. This extensive primary and secondary research indicated that my collaborative art idea, Creative Collision, would appeal to a wide range of families and students due to the variety of interests teens have, and their parents' desire for them to get off their phones. In today's modern technological world, we've lost the ability to truly connect with one another, especially younger generations who have been more immersed in digital culture. In the long run, the "moments of more" that we enjoy on our devices "may leave us with lives of less" connection with each other (Turkle 2011). This lack of connection is a social gap that Creative Collision can fill, due to its collaborative nature.

I anticipate that the success of Creative Collision will be furthered by integrating the unique element of professional interaction. Connecting adolescent students with professional artists from colleges and art program will help the students develop their people-skills, as the artists explain their skills and careers to them. Moreover, the Creative Collision thesis event will help me analyze the potential impact of my business endeavors. I will now go over the industry research I did to develop a basis for my art business.

## Market Analysis

### A. Industry Trends

Teen after-school programs are a very open market, as most adolescents tend to focus on specialized activities within their high schools, such as clubs, sports, etc. According to IBS World, participation in after-school programs tends to diminish with age, as they [kids] become involved in their own extracurricular school activities. High School student only take up 16% of the after-school market, in programs that are more likely to incorporate academic enrichment activities or sports instruction (Miller 2018). Overall, the level of change in the after-school program industry is stagnant, leaving room for opportunity and improvement. Also, technology is not a major aspect of the industry. However due to the digital age we live in today, it is necessary and should always be incorporated in any educational activity. Adolescents today are more technologically dependent than previous generations, therefore we must implement formats they are familiar with such as mobile apps and social media networks.

## B. Description of the Total Market

School districts throughout Texas operate one of the largest statewide afterschool programs in the country, *Texas After School Centers of Education* (ACE). During the 2014-2015 school year, the ACE program served almost 10,000 teachers and close to 180,000 students in 164 school districts (Blazer 2016). Between 2013-2018, the number of students participating in after-school activities has risen due to increased demand, a large portion of which remains unmet. According to data from the Afterschool Alliance, an estimated 10.2 million children participated in after-school programs in 2014, an increase from 6.5 million children in 2009. It was estimated that 19.4 million children not currently enrolled in an after-school program would partake if made available to them (Miller 2018). This information verifies that there is a demand for more program offerings among children.

In the greater Austin area, *Communities In Schools* (CIS) of Central Texas believes that children cannot learn to their potential when they are in crisis or face significant nonacademic needs. CIS provides support by bringing resources and relationships to school campuses; they build a support system within schools, so students can focus on achievement. Approximately 99 percent of students intensively served by CIS-Central Texas stay in school, and about 85 percent improve their grades, attendance, or behavior (Olsen 2018), highlighting that human interaction at school and supplemental resources can have a positive impact on a child's academic development, regardless of their environment. Also, the demand for after-school programs is much higher among low-income households. An estimated 50.0% of children from low-income households would participate if a program was available to them, in comparison to 34.0% for higher-

income households (Miller 2018). Enrichment programs would serve these lower-income communities well.

#### C. Documentation of Need

Current market demand was documented through market research. I interviewed residents of San Marcos through various outlets—from random samplings at Walmart, to parents of students from the local middle and high schools, to local youth counselors/therapists and psychiatrists. 72% of residents believe that teens need to spend less time on their technological devices and more time engaging with people in the real world.

#### D. Appendix

Over the period of several weeks, I interviewed a total of 28 adults, who have consistent interaction with adolescents, in order to validate the market for art related after school programs. These interviews allowed me to get an accurate understanding of what teens, and their families, are seeking outside of the classroom. Of the 28 interviewees, 17 were parents, three were teachers, four were psychologists, and four were community specialists. The interviews are administered via phone, as well as in person. The topics discussed included, teen interests, the challenges of partaking in activities, and areas lacking a desired impact. The major themes of the interviewee responses were, teen interest in hanging out with friends, challenges in transportation, and a desire for human connection. The following questions were asked:

1. What are their [adolescents] interests/ hobbies, any extracurricular activities?
2. What challenges do you and/ or your children face, when participating in after school activities?

3. What are some things they aren't getting that you wish they did (academically, socially physically, etc.)

- Excerpt from community specialist interview- 1. "Playing sports, video games, and arts and crafts."
- Excerpt from teacher interview - 2. "Communication both intrapersonal and interpersonal- not a lot of free time nowadays if not related to class."
- Excerpt from parent interview - 4. "Putting them together in a real environment to work on social skills"

I also interviewed 10 business owners, in order to better understand business operations of art and youth related programs in San Marcos, Texas. The interviews are administered over the phone and at their place of business. The businesses varied from co-op spaces of fine arts and music, to specialty services in the arts, to dance studios and other arts-based classes. The topics discussed were success factors, staff, pricing, customer-base, industry trends, marketing, and challenges/benefits.

The answers varied greatly from business to business. Generally, all of them have hopes of expanding further to reach more people. Many of the businesses utilize a variety of marketing outlets from physical word-of-mouth, to newspaper ads (more common than I thought, maybe due to location) and social media.

*"[Hired someone earlier for social media- and rebrand] It is incredible... I've gotten a lot of notice for it."*

— Interviewee Sarah Visel- ShowMakers

### III. Solution

My Thesis is centered around my business plan research on community-based art programs for adolescents (referenced above). I plan to use my thesis after college as a foundation for starting my own real-life art business, Creative Collision, a fine and performing arts program for teens. I fashioned this name to signify the mixture of Collaboration and Expression, thus creating Collision. The logomark I developed (in Figure 1) is a combination of modern geometric art, representing the visual arts and theatrical masks, representing the performing arts. The color palette was chosen to emphasize the act of collision, opposing forces coming together. Since orange and blue are complimentary colors, nearly opposite on the color wheel, they work well together. The contrast between them evokes a fun and vibrant aesthetic, which bespeaks of artistic energy. Art is “a universal language”, it bridges “individual to individual [and] individual to society relationships” (Elyagutu 2016). It unites all of us and is necessary for human prosperity. As I continue my studies in the Art and Design department, and teaching art through organizations like ArtSpace in San Marcos, I constantly see the need for (and functionality of) art in all aspects of life.

Figure 1: Event Logo



**CREATIVE COLLISION**  
COMMUNITY ARTS EVENT

The Creative Collision event will provide artistic youth with an opportunity to perform, display, and observe art in a collaborative environment. There will be 4 key activities within the event: 1. Listening to talks by profession/working artists, 2. Students performances in music, dance, etc., 3. Visual art student gallery, and 4. A collaborative activity called Collision Room in which groups of students work together and come up with a creative solution to a given prompt— incorporating music, dance, visual art, etc.

In an article about the impact of art therapy (dance, fine arts, writing, music, etc.) on adolescent girls, it was proven that art helps them better express and understand themselves, and function with the people and world around them (Perryman 2015). I plan to analyze the benefits of art therapy on both male and female psyches as a group and individually. Through examination of the event, I will determine the levels of human connection and collaboration produced, and ultimately the impact fine and performing arts can have on today's youth. The element of therapy within my project has become especially important with the rise of COVID-19, as everyone shelters-in-place, feeling uncertain from day-to-day, and fearful of their futures. My hope is for the Creative Collision event to help connect people during this global crisis, and ease stressed-out young minds by cultivating their creativity.

Creating authentic human connection in the midst of the current global crisis is particularly challenging. While the initial premise of this event was to provide adolescents in my local community a face-to-face collaborative experience with other student and professional artists, it is now being moved to a digital platform. With the escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown mandates, I re-imagined the event

into an online one that now lends itself to a broader student population and protects participants from possible COVID-19 exposure.

As schools across the country shut down and teachers hastened to create viable, online lesson plans for their students. I strived to reach out to fine and performing arts teachers to let them know I could provide them with an art-focused lesson plan and opportunity for their students to collaborate with their peers and guest speakers from art industries via my online art event.

Originally, the event would've taken place on April 4, 2020, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. at the Price Center. However, I rescheduled the event to May 2, 2020, 1:00 to 7:00 p.m. CST, within an online platform where fine and performing arts students across the board from singers, rappers and poets to visual artists, graphic designers and dancers, as well as guest speakers were given the opportunity to collaborate and share their talents. The event is being conducted on the *Zoom Video Communications Platform*, with artwork and performance videos being shared and uploaded onto *VoiceThread*- a collaborative, multimedia slide show that holds images, documents, and videos.

#### **IV. Execution Process**

During the beginning stages of the project (pre-pandemic), I developed a basis for the event parameters, to help me better visualize the sequence of steps I needed to take moving forward. My initial brainstorming sessions with advisors, peers, and professionals in youth art education (such as ArtSpace) helped me confirm a venue and create a Run of Show—the event agenda. Shortly after, I developed a budget plan based

on the cost of the venue and other necessary supplies. Referring to these financial needs, I began writing drafts of my sponsorship letter (Figure 2). The letter went through several revisions before I began distributing it to local and national businesses. The letter highlighted the purpose of the event, the impact it would have on adolescents and the community, and the type of recognition sponsors would receive depending upon their donation. Coinciding with the distributing of the sponsorship letter, I also began creating an informational website to briefly explain the premise of the event to potential participants and donors; validating the event’s artistic value.

Figure 2: Sponsorship Letter



As a Communication Design major, the branding of this event was a key component to the development for me, as visual appeal is necessary when trying to not only engage people but have them remember your content and overall message – evidenced by the local San Marcos art league director, who complimented on the event flyer for its beautiful clarity of information. Upon the initial event brand development, I dug into researching, emailing, and even visiting companies that might be willing to sponsor the event. At this time, I also began connecting with local high school art teachers and students for volunteering, operational assistance, and (initial) youth participation outreach.

During the 2019 Winter Break, I continued to reach out to potential sponsors, and even developed a GoFundMe campaign as a secondary source of event funding (which later became the primary source). With the help of my advisor, Dr. Minifie, I was able to conduct the event under her Service-Learning Excellence Program, making all donations tax deductible. I utilized this as a way to entice family, friends, and colleagues to donate. I also began researching and contacting professional artists, asking them to be guest speakers at the event. I expanded the brand development with outreach flyers to encourage participation by students and professionals, artists, a GoFundMe banner, and social media pages on Instagram and Facebook. This recruiting strategy began to pay off by mid-January. Several professional artists signed up to be guest speakers and I confirmed my first major sponsor, the San Marcos Main Street Program, which donated \$500.

Once the Spring 2020 semester began, I met with a potential sponsor (who later became a donor) to discuss ideation for increased success. Upon our discussion, I made adjustments to social media, the website, request letters, etc. At this point I started to realize that in order to have greater turnout, I needed to broaden my student outreach, beyond San Marcos High School. I reached out to various Texas State University departments, mainly those I had a connection with, such as Art & Design and Honors. I distributed flyers throughout the city, in the University Art Building, the Art League located downtown, and the Our Lady of Wisdom student Parish. I also reached out to high schools in Hays County/the surrounding cities of San Antonio, Buda, and Austin. I continued to meet with San Marcos high school students, as well as send an abundance of emails to university students and faculty for participation. Word-of-mouth was also a great recruitment tool. I told peers about the event, distributed flyers at a dance performance receptions, and did some networking/ event sharing at a regional art competition I volunteered for. By mid-late-February, my event began to pick up momentum. Several professional artists confirmed their participation as guest speakers, several college and high school students volunteered to help me with the event and submitted work.

However, as the nation began to lock down in the beginning of March, in response to COVID-19, my plan of attack drastically changed. By mid-March, I examined several online platforms and attended web meetings and workshops with: *Zoom Video Communications*, “*Virtual Participation*” by *All In The Loop Live Streaming*, and *VoiceThread* a collaborative, multimedia website. Thankfully, my free

student access to *Zoom* made the platform easy to utilize. *Voice Thread*, the primary company I've worked with to make this event come to life, is an online platform that provides users with an application that transforms media into collaborative spaces without needing additional software. This gives students the ability to participate in the event via their computer, smart phone or tablet. This user-friendly platform will allow them to easily share their artistic talents and exchange feedback with other participants.

Once I landed the deal with VoiceThread for free academic use of their site for my event, I re-fashioned my original in-person event into a virtual one and unveiled my new operational plan to my sponsors. I notified sponsors of the changes, and outlined how I would continue to provide them publicity in the following ways: Website Recognition for donations \$350 and below (including money, gift cards, supplies, or scholarship for attendees) and Recognition on our Website and Social media sites: For donations \$400 +. Unfortunately, my major donor—The San Marcos Main Street Program— had to rescind their \$500 donation, indicating that due to the pandemic, they were not authorized to fund non-essential expenditures. In the end, I was left with the following donations: \$100 gift card donation from Target, \$100 from SMTX Mermaid Society, and \$780 from my Go Fund Me campaign, totaling \$980. My expenses included an \$100 unrefunded rental deposit to the Price Center, \$120 on promotional materials used to publicize the in-person Price Center event, approx. \$70 for Google advertisements, approx. \$50 for the website and approx. \$200 for Facebook and Instagram promotions, and \$260 for student e-gift card prizes, totaling to about \$800. The

remaining balance of \$180 will go towards event t-shirts for the student participants and guest speakers.

With a limited budget, I knew access to digital platforms for hosting the event would be minimal. Luckily, I was able to combine my free student access to Zoom, with the generosity of the VoiceThread company, allowing me to focus on promotional efforts—which became a crucial part to getting participation for the online event. My project workload changed from heavy in-person meetings to constant email updates and follow ups, as well as an increase in promotional ads across various digital media platforms. The website went from an informative tool, to the epicenter of the entire event (Figure 3). I purchased a premium plan to remove ads and create a domain name for my Wix website make the site more easily accessible and visible to a broader audience.

Figure 3: Event Website

<https://www.creativecollisionarts.com>



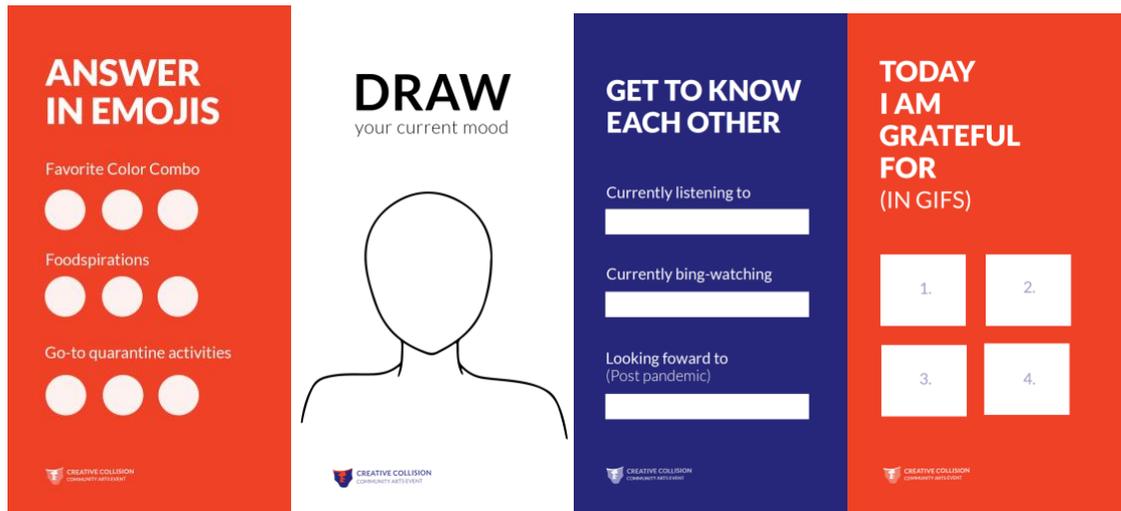
Originally, the purpose of the website was mainly for potential donors to get a quick visual understanding of what they're donating to. With the event turning virtual, the developmental requirements for the website grew ten-fold as I strived to make it more accessible and user friendly. Since I'm no longer able to meet with teachers and students, the website and social media are the main ways people can get information on how to participate. From a design perspective, implementing the use of micro interactions and color blocking to entice people as they browse the pages, in order to keep their attention. I also added short paragraphs written in a low fog-index style and designed bold corresponding buttons; making it easier for the reader to follow and be directed towards the calls-to-action (such as the link for uploading artwork and the registration link).

From my research, my own experiences, and my time working with adolescent students, I knew that utilizing social media would be one of the best ways to reach my target audience. Therefore, I began researching advertisement costs to use Facebook, Instagram, Google and other social mediums, so I could determine the most cost-effective way to promote the re-imagined online event and ensure costs fell within the current budget I had available. I developed a timeline for posting on social media in order to engage viewer as consistently as possible.

I unsuccessfully attempted to utilize Instagram Story templates I created (Figure 4) as a way to engage with followers, making it fun and interactive to grab their attention. People were not drawn to them. I think Instagram templates may be too much work. I completed a few myself and spend quite a bit of time trying to add the content. I often

found that the best engagement tools on social media were videos and gifs, content that is exciting to engage with but doesn't take up a lot of time.

Figure 4: Instagram Templates



Another promotion effort I utilized as creating an Instagram filter (Figure 5).

Since the audience of my event primarily consists of adolescents, I chose to spend more time targeting users on Instagram. According to a study done by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, Instagram is most used social media platform for teens. Therefore, I spent a lot of time designing engaging content to get more traffic to the event Instagram page and website. I focused on amplifying my digital advertising with simple concise text, exciting graphics, and visually interesting gif and videos to pull users in.

Figure 5: Instagram Filter



The social media promotions did not have the effect I thought they would. If I had the funds for more consistent ads, that may have helped. People saw the ads and visited the website, but they weren't driven to register for the event or upload artwork. From this, I've concluded that digital engagement isn't sufficient without reinforcement. If people were constantly reminded about the event from family, friends, teachers, etc.—as was true of the students that did attend—they would probably be more likely to participate. That initial personal connection opens the door for a greater amount of engagement.

In late March, I sent an email to everyone who had expressed interest in the event and to new contacts, explaining the new virtual format and features of the Voice Thread platform. Moreover, I began exploring compatible external links like YouTube that

participants could use to upload their content to the website and offered participants user instructions. I also gave them a deadline of April 25, 2020 at 11:59 p.m. CST to submit their content for the event (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Event Recruitment Flyers



The four reimaged event activities included: Art Displays and Performances—combined into a virtual gallery on VoiceThread, student artists uploaded their work onto VoiceThread to be displayed and reviewed. Allowing registered participants, student peers and professional artists to view their work anytime within a 30-day window and provide feedback. Students in turn were given the opportunity to review comments interact with reviewers and ask questions. Artist Talks – Guest speakers shared their artistic career journey with student artists and participants in live Zoom meetings about

every hour—20-minute talks and 10-minute question and answer sessions. Collision Rooms— Zoom Breakout Rooms were established that split off from the main Zoom meeting, solely for student artists to participate in live, collaborative activities with one another. The breakout sessions were designed to be smaller groups (3-5 ppl per team) and challenged the student artists to collaborate in order to create a mini campaign related to their chosen prompt of Friends & Family, Education & School, or COVID-19, incorporation a visual, a jingle, and a dance move. The groups were judged based off their teamwork, originality, and completion of the tasks. The sessions were judged by independent judges in public relations, marketing and art education afterwards and members of the winning teams earned \$50 e-gift cards.

## **V. Execution analysis**

After the event, I distributed a brief, anonymous digital survey to the attendees via Google Forms in order to assess their experience. (See Figures 7-9 on pages 26-28) This feedback will help me tremendously when constructing art programs similar to this in the future. The areas assessed were as follows:

1. The levels of interaction the event participants felt they had with one another— none (closed, disengaged), low (minimal communication with others), medium, or high (actively engaging with others).
2. Their emotional state (happy, inspired, excited, neutral, or other) after the event
3. Their favorite event activity and why
4. Suggested Improvements

Surprisingly, a lot of people felt highly engaged (Figure 8), which I believe had more to do with the content of the artists talks than the virtual gallery or collaborative activity for students. This is probably due to the fact that nearly half of the attendee population consisted of people in the general public (Figure 7) who solely listened to the artists talks, i.e. not my target audience of high school students. Of my roughly 30 consistent attendees throughout the day, less than 10 of them were students. As a result, I was only able to conduct two collaborative group activities, which was probably best on account of the huge learning curve (and technical difficulties) I, and the participating students, experienced during the session. Getting the groups member to warm up to one another and making sure they understood the task took more time than I had anticipated. Nonetheless, I enjoyed seeing them grow more comfortable throughout the session and openly interact with one another. It was also intriguing to see the contrast between the two groups' collaboration strategies; although, the collaborative activity was only rated a favorite for three of the students (Figure 9). This may have been due to the fact that the level of human interaction possible for the in-person activity could never be emulated on a digital platform, or the technical difficulties made it less enjoyable and confusing, or people's natural discomfort when collaborating with people they don't know drove the response; highlighting the need for live human connection when engaging in group work.

Facilitating the collaborative activity simultaneously with the artist talks was challenging. In the original event, I had volunteers assigned to oversee the various activities to avoid exactly what happened during the virtual event; jumping between the activities. By doing this, I was unable to efficiently manage the various parts of the event. Toggling between the main Zoom meeting and Zoom Breakout Rooms during an event

with 20+ people wasn't as seamless as it appeared when I was conducting a test meeting with only 3-6 people. Honestly, I probably needed just as much help conducting the virtual event as I would've had for the original in-person event; it really does take a village to conduct any kind of mid-to-large scale event. Luckily, I had a ton of help from family, but for future virtual events, I will definitely assign roles to other people to help orchestrate the event better.

I've had zero engagement on the virtual gallery; no one left feedback for the student artists (as of the due date for this paper). I think this occurred because people were unfamiliar with the VoiceThread platform. My hope is that in the coming weeks, the attendees, artists and professors I've reached out to will leave their feedback, as I provided them detailed VoiceThread user instructions and extended the feedback deadline to the end of May.

Ultimately, I determined that producing high levels of engagement and collaboration on a digital platform is extremely difficult. For many participants, this was their first-time using Zoom and attending a virtual event. The unfamiliarity with the platform partially resulted in some discomfort for the students when collaborating. I also think a large part of that was also due to the lack of collaboration and human connection young people engage in on a regular basis.

## **VI. Reflection**

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had no idea how serious this disease would become in a few short weeks. By March 14<sup>th</sup>, the President of the United States had declared a nationwide state of emergency and asked everyone to minimize large

gatherings to help prevent the spread of the virus. In response, Texas State University implemented a social distancing policy, which slowly progressed. Policies continued to change day-to-day as health officials learned more about COVID-19, eventually leading to the complete shutdown of all campus. Due to these unforeseen circumstances, I quickly began brainstorming out-of-the box solutions. I went from looking at postponing the event by a month, to potentially conducting a hybrid event, and ultimately to reimagining the event on a virtual platform for May 2<sup>nd</sup> to provide myself with enough time to restructure the various components.

The challenge of converting the event to a digital platform was extensive. My event advisor and other community leaders told me I'd have to make the event virtual, and my first thought was that it would be impossible to do in 45 days. I lacked the finances, equipment and time to pull off that feat. Moreover, the entire premise of my event was to facilitate authentic human connection; engaging adolescents communication skills by moving them away from their electronics. Initially, I was skeptical about conducting the event on a digital platform; it felt very contradictory and juxtaposed the main purpose of my project. Then I discovered VoiceThread, an online platform that provides users with an application that transforms media into collaborative spaces using multimedia slide shows allows people to navigate slides and leave comments using voice (with a mic or telephone), text, audio files, or videos (via a webcam). *VoiceThread* graciously agreed to let me use their platform free of charge because of my affiliation with the university's Service-Learning Excellence Program. They were excited about the expressive nature of my event because it encapsulated everything they stood for—letting people's voices be heard. Veering away from the convoluted and impersonal tendencies

of the digital age, *VoiceThread* focuses on utilizing our most effective tool for communication—our voices (both verbal and non-verbal).

The transition to an online event platform definitely had significant pros and cons that I think are important to note. I was able to broaden my reach beyond San Marcos, beyond Texas, to fine and performing artists from various parts of the country, which I would not have been able to do with the original event. I was able to showcase a more diverse demographic, allowing for a greater impact. On the flip side however, the transition to the virtual event at the last minute resulted in unresponsiveness, a lack of commitment, and withdrawal from the event by previously vested participants. I lost my biggest event sponsor because of the pandemic and was unable to get a refund on the venue, contributing to a limited budget. Being able to find my “IN” was crucial, since I didn’t have any direct connections to the local youth. This proved to be extremely challenging as time progressed and event parameters changed. Once schools closed down and classes became remote, contact with people at the local high school became minimal. I immediately began reaching out to other schools I had connections with, including my former high school in Virginia and other fine and performing arts high school in that area. I also contacted former teachers, family members and friends involved in art education and art schools in AZ where I was sheltering-in-place from the pandemic. I thought broadening my reach would make it easier to recruit participants but time-after-time, my plea for participants fell upon deaf ears. Teachers would express interest, then fail to involve their students or provide excuses or blame their chain of command or just not follow up at all. I suspected that many schools and teachers experienced challenges with the sudden transition to distance learning and they were not receptive to my event. They

may have perceived it as another challenge to overcome instead of a helping hand, even though I provided teachers with a complete lesson plan to accompany the event.

Unfortunately, people around the world were afraid, and still are, struggling to make it through each day because of the COVID-19 pandemic. I believe this affected the lack of responsiveness from former participants and schools. While social interaction has been limited for everyone over the past couple of months, students especially have been severely impacted, as many of them received their primary human interaction at school. Providing support, resources, and relationships during stressful times can help bring some normalcy, and ease minds. Highlighting the importance of building support systems outside of school, like Creative Collision.

## **VII. Impact**

I'm grateful for the opportunity to bring people together for this event during the COVID-19 pandemic and motivate young artists to follow their dreams by connecting them with professions who have done just that. Creative Collision not only gave people something to do while they were sheltering-in-place at home, it also set a precedent for utilizing technology to unify people on a personal level. Personal connectivity is key. While none of the follow-on schools I contacted in AZ, MD and VA ended up participating in the event, the eight students who did had an in-person connection with me prior to the pandemic (either from San Marcos or family and friends). The same was true for my guest speakers. Through this project, I've discovered that personal connections make people more likely to fulfill their obligations. I will have to keep this in

mind for the future when developing my art program. I believe my graduate studies in art education will be a great starting point for building my teacher-student network.

Virtual experiences such as this could continue to be implemented in my future art business endeavors. I hadn't considered it before because I wanted students to interact in a physical space. However, through reimagining my project, I've realized how technology can reinforce real human connection. I can see the Collision Room activity I developed being used on a larger scale...students working in teams to create campaigns. By engaging in more collaborative activities, students can more easily develop their problem-solving skills, while growing more comfortable with one another, thus fostering more creativity. This event validated my decision to work with adolescents and help them enhance their personal and academic development; elevating them to their full potential.

Figure 7: Survey Part I

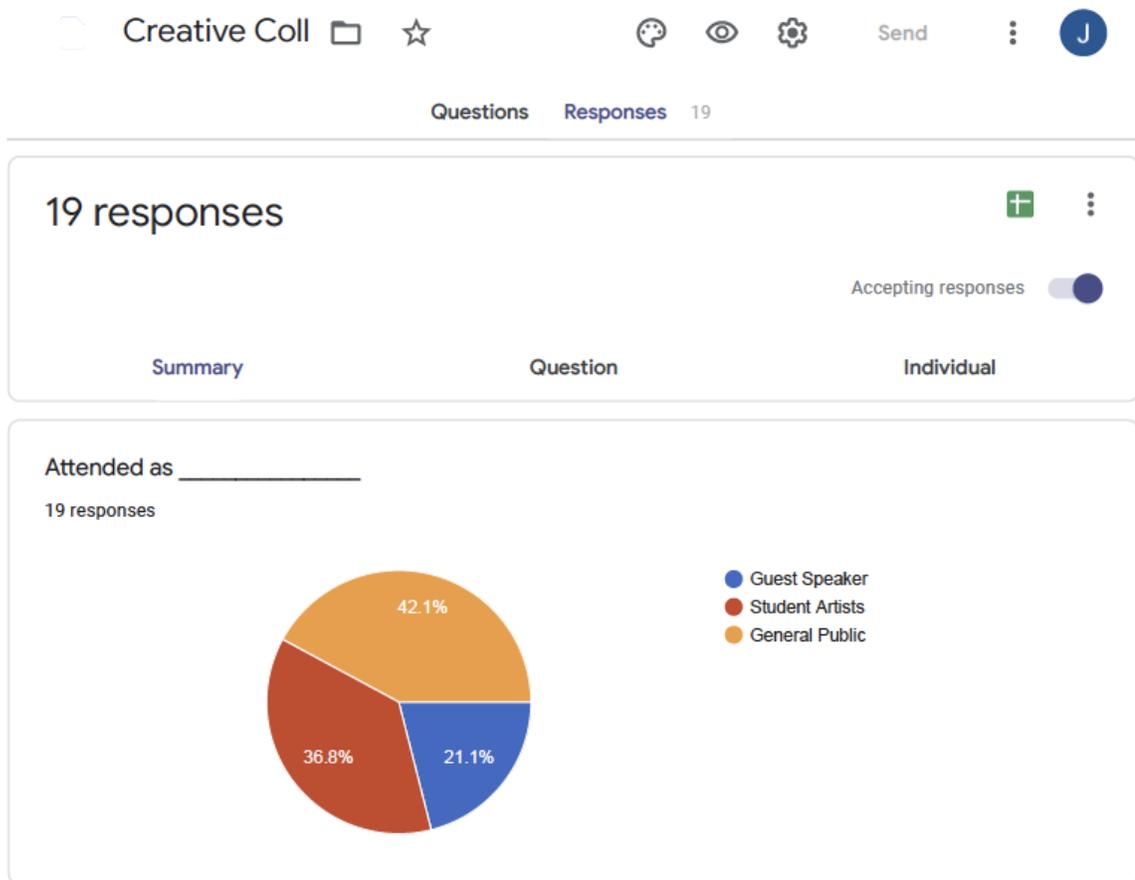


Figure 8: Survey Part II

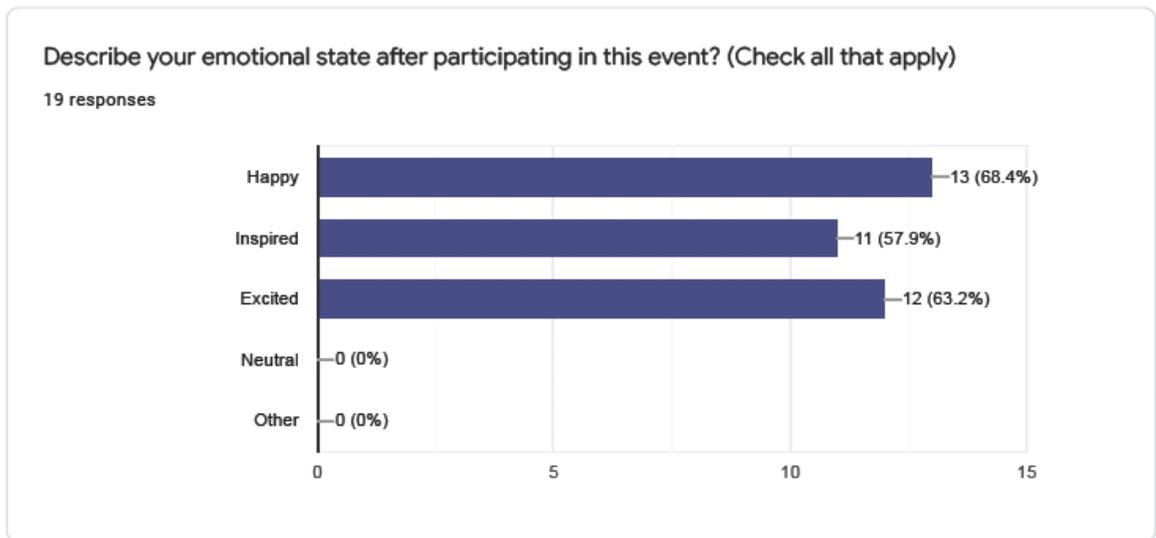
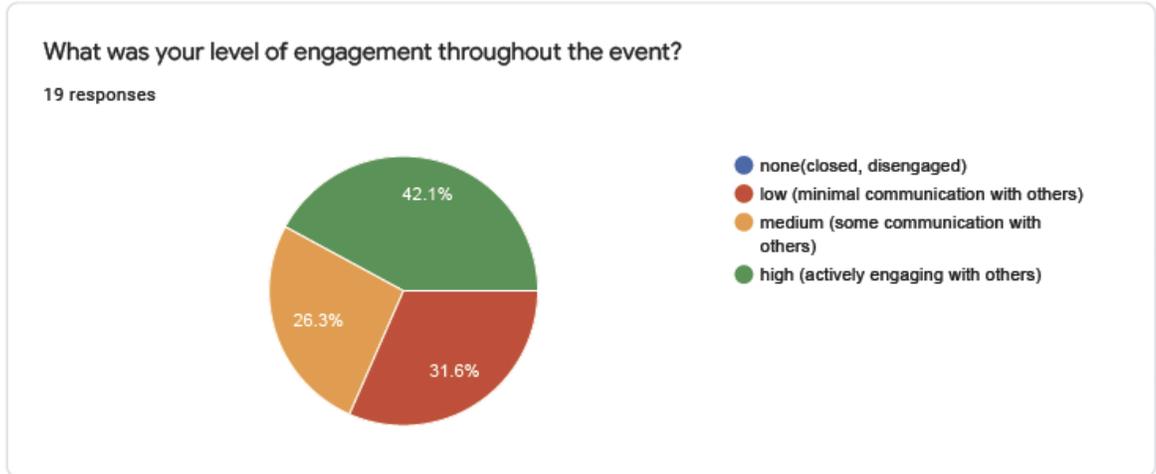
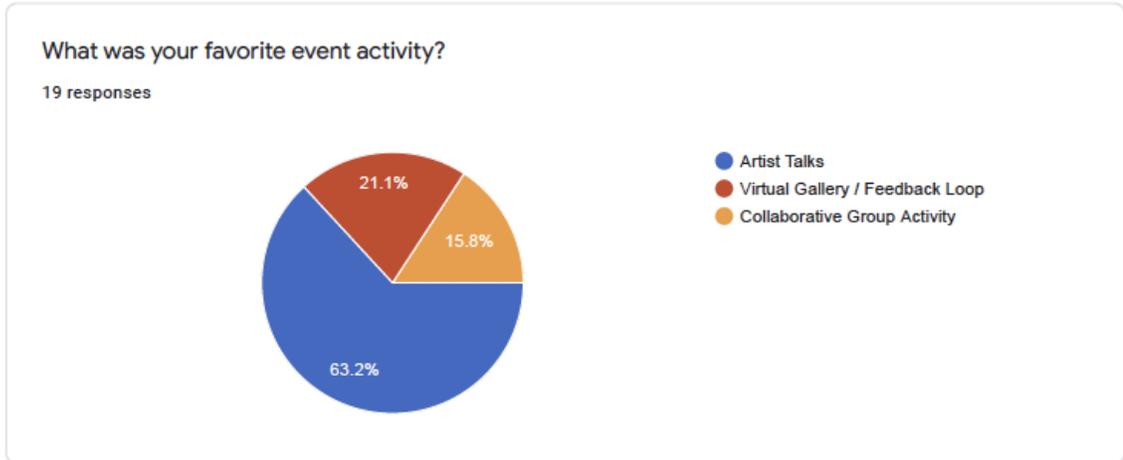


Figure 9: Survey Part III



Why was that your favorite?

17 responses

I enjoyed learning about the artists' inspirations, methods, and visions for their future work.

I love the feedback from people

Speaking to individuals who were interested in my journey.

Connect with my fans

Let me be more engaged in the activity

I liked it because it was the most engaged and talkative I've ever been in a zoom.

Very informative. Fantastic line-up. Gave young people wonderful perspective on job ops in a variety of at-related career fields. Promoted art focused programs for teens

I love being able to see the various things that people around my age have been creating, in their own fields and mediums. This was a great way to open my perception of art and the abilities of my age group.

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To view the student work, and watch video recordings from Collision Room, the collaborative activity, and the Artists Talks please visit

<https://www.creativecollisionarts.com>