Future Bound: Your Future, Your Way

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Future Bound
Your Future, Your Way

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Abstract

In modern American culture, a lack of emphasis has developed in regards to education and its value and role for the future. This has plagued the nation with despair, which has increased over the last several years. A growing interest in STEAM education and the available paths following secondary education, we can revitalize the nation and redirect our future to a more lucrative outcome: vocations, entrepreneurship, or post-secondary education based upon the correct path for each individual life.

The application of STEAM in education can create opportunities and expand knowledge in fields across the board: exposure to arts can create a level of humanism to the future that currently is not present, and exposure to math can expose the methods behind the process. Furthermore, by reducing the stigma on vocations, we can create a generation who not only hold the truths behind applied sciences, but can create a future of prosperity and hope.

Keywords

1. Education
2. Vocational Training
3. Personal Choices
4. Visual Design
5. Public Art
6. Connection
7. Revolution
Introduction

Inner-city education systems are notorious for being sub-par in preparing their students for the future. While this is not the fault of the educators, only so much can be achieved when there are exceedingly few resources to be harvested. This is the basis that is responsible for a massive displacement of children who are raised in the viscous conditions associated with minority and low socioeconomic status, who are under the impression that they are required to follow one certain path that has been paved prior. Future Bound is a social movement that will serve as a public service announcement, for anyone who may be struggling to connect with the traditional path of education, and to educate an entire generation of students of the idea that they have the option to make choices about their futures that are unique to their circumstances and desires.

Context

My thesis project is designed to help me establish a connection between children and the reality of their futures. There are two primary functions: to connect with a generation based on their cultural cues; to spread information about alternative forms of education, rather than traditional university, with said generation.

Cultural Cues

Culture cues are a primary function of communicating with any body of people. Every culture is defined by the way that they communicate through their words, their art, their music, clothing, and dance. The goal of Future Bound is to create the most effective bridge of communication by highlighting the most effective ways of portraying a message of hope. Aside from treating each culture with respect, the most popular form of communication involves some sort of visual language, as visual language can surpass any barrier. The second most popular communication bridge is as simple as telling the truth.
Information Sharing

Since the rise of the internet as a public entity in 1991, we have come to an age of mass information sharing. Most everything is a public resource, so long as you have a connection and you know what you are looking for. If you only have one part of the puzzle, you are, frankly, out of luck. This is what the lack of resources has become for those living in poverty stricken neighborhoods: a puzzle. They receive what they are granted. Often times, it is not accurate to their actual needs. The idea of publicizing information about forms of education that alternate from tradition is hardly heard of in some zip codes, The goal of Future Bound is to plant ideas into students that they have the power to make fully educated decisions about their futures and break the cycle of poverty.

Process

I began by creating a chart of my intentions, domain, audience, and the method I wanted to communicate in. That chart, when refined, looked like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intention</th>
<th>Space/Domains</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Method/Technology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Educate</td>
<td>1. STE(A)M</td>
<td>1. Socioeconomic</td>
<td>1. Installation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Improve</td>
<td>2. Advertising</td>
<td>2. Education</td>
<td>2. Tangible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Influence (for good)</td>
<td>3. Medical</td>
<td>3. Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My goals heavily involved educating and improving socioeconomic status and age groups through tangibility and installation.
This led to a series of questions:

1. How can we improved medical education through mobile application?
   (educate/medical/socioeconomic/tangible)

2. How can installations be an effective tool for different socioeconomic groups to gain interest in STE(A)M education?
   (educate/STE(A)M/socioeconomic/installation)

3. How can installation design involve different age groups and education levels to create more effective advertising?
   (improve/advertising/education, age/installation)

4. How can installations and tangible effects improve advertisements for different socioeconomic groups? Example: the musical stairs in the Stockholm subway that encouraged commuters to take the stairs instead of the subway.
   (influence/advertising/socioeconomic/installation, tangible)

5. How can installations or tangible design influence socioeconomic groups to gain interest in STE(A)M?
   (influence, educate/STE(A)M/socioeconomic/installation, tangible)

Ultimately, I chose to explore the fifth question: how could I create an installation or tangible object that would influence unreached socioeconomic groups to gain interest in their educations and STE(A)M? My first idea was to create an educational advertising campaign that would convince an underprivileged population that a STE(A)M education is the only way to change their situations. Then I came to a realization: not everybody’s brain works the same way. To force a STE(A)M education on an entire group of people would be doing the same exact thing that the current education system is already doing: not taking into account different learning styles, patterns of comprehension, and interests.
This turned my study to find the differing ways people are successful. Did it involve higher education? Did it involve vocational training? What kind of vocational training? Would it involve some sort of specialized education in a niche field? What already exists, and how could somebody be successful in that path? My concept had turned into a way of finding out what education path would be most effective for each individual person.

The question from this point was clear: how would I manage to reach this group. Having spent undergrad with a minor in sociology and anthropology, I went back to the bookshelf and found a book by Sudhir Venkatesh titled The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor. In this account, Venkatesh finds his way to Maquis Park, a poor black neighborhood on Chicago’s South side. Here, he seeks to explore the ways residents of the neighborhood struggle to earn enough money to survive. The most effective form of research I had found from this study is to completely immerse yourself in the culture in which you want to aid. Therefore, immersion is what I set out to do.

Research

I found that communication differs on any person’s perceived status within society. In order to solve how to effectively communicate, I, a Slovak woman raised in the north country hardly outside of New England, USA, ventured into the neighborhoods of the audience I wanted to reach. It is safe to assume that we initially had vast differences in our cultures. We spoke about shared interests, the problems we faced, we asked each other questions, we realized that we aren’t that different. Most importantly, we established common ground and treated each other like human beings. I learned that art is a major component of minority culture. Without art, music and dancing, there isn’t much to live for. I studied the art they produced through their hair, clothing, murals, and their understanding of color. As a highly visual culture I found that the most effective form of communication was through bright, bold graphics and a simple, honest, and clear message.
I was already living in downtown Rochester, only across the railroad tracks from one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city, and I found that I didn’t have to go far to get my answers.

**Surveys and Interviews**

The interview process started with my neighbors. I interviewed 10 of my neighbors: finding out what they were really looking for out of life. All of their answers were reflective of one thing: stability in their finances, housing, and jobs. This answer was consistent no matter what their employment status was.

My interviews started with another local organization, Wall\Therapy, co-curated by Erich Lehman. Wall\Therapy is an art and community intervention project that utilizes public murals to transform the urban landscape, inspire, and build community, in the words of the organization’s about page. My research with Wall\Therapy involved an interview with Lehman on street art, the intentions of the program, and the process by with the program is achieved. Post interview, I followed Wall\Therapy’s map of murals located on their website for a tour of artwork that has successfully brought together the Rochester community.

My second series of interviews was with the students involved in Justin Suarez’s program for inner-city youth, ROC Paint Division. Seven students were available for interview when I met with them at RIT’s City Art Space for an exhibition on street art. Their comments reflected that they were in search of several concepts:

1. A way to enter their futures without the burden of student loan debt.
2. An honest advertisement, they were sick of being lied to.
3. Their culture to be embraced, rather than rejected by the media.

From my interviews I learned that honesty, embracing, and stability were the dreams of the future for almost every interview I conducted.
Following the advice of Lehman, I also sought after Graffiti Alley in Toronto, Ontario, CA. Graffiti Alley is just as it sounds: an alley off of Spadina Avenue, located some shops in the fashion district of Toronto. The backs and sides of buildings are covered from the ground to their roofs in murals by a multitude of street artists. This venture aided my process by giving me a concept of what kind of hand I wanted to use in my visuals.

Upon the start of my third iteration, I had decided to take a slightly different approach to creating visuals that would be more effective and be more true to my hand in art and design. In my undergraduate work, I had studied fine art and intentionally sought after a Classical Renaissance training in painting: the same style of training that Degas, Monet, da Vinci, and Renoir had all received. I turned to my knowledge of art history for this. My third iteration is based on a cross between the Cubist painters of the early 20th century and the paper cutouts of Henri Matisse. Particularly, I was influenced by Cubist painters Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. Their use of bold shapes to influence the idea of a particular subject without immediate recognition or a photo-realistic image influenced my work heavily. Henri Matisse's series of paper cutout paintings influenced my work by his use of flat, bold colors as the basis of figurative images. Furthermore, I was influenced by Francis Bacon due to his graphic and surreal-ist breakdown of the human figure. Bacon's generalization of shapes not only creates some level of dimension, but his use of color theory advances his paintings to a sculptural dimension. My goal was to imitate factors of each of these artists.

**Competitive Analysis**

I wanted to explore existing platforms for programs that focused on life choices and potential paths for existing students. The most effective advertisement offering an alternative to traditional education was for an art institute in Detroit, Michigan, The College of Creative Studies. The College of Creative Studies had produced a series of advertisements featuring parents accusing their children of becoming involved in art, but with the atmospheric qualities and a linguistic qualities of being scolded.
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Alternatively, I had not found much in way of competition due to the fact that this is not an issue that has been addressed within poverty stricken neighborhoods. I do not know why this information is not public knowledge, particularly in impoverished neighborhoods, but my surveys and research had found that students had only been informed about their options when going to university.

**Personas**

My intended audience is inner-city, grade school aged, minority students who are born into low socioeconomic, poverty stricken neighborhoods. Due to this audience, I have decided that the creation of personas is not only not effective, but would ultimately create a rift in the integrity of the project due to the fact that there is so much of a political and racial tension within the United States at this point. With the goal of this project being the spread of education as a benefit to the masses, I believe that the creation of personas would only increase the stereotypes of minorities and reinstate segregation. Therefore, I am not creating individualized personas, but addressing a group of human beings who are born into the least fortunate circumstances as they are: human beings who could only benefit from this information.

**Design Ideation and Validation**

After identifying the most effective points of communication within the campaign, I started out by brainstorming what aspects needed to be addressed. First and foremost, if I am to market about different options, what are those options that I wanted to address? This involved a study into the different paths that could be addressed. With the consultation of my father, a former foreman for Ironworker’s Local 60 out of Syracuse, NY With his aid, I addressed different marketing groups: public servants, armed services, vocations, and general labor. My focus for this project was directed to vocational labor.
From this point, my direction led to identifying what vocations really are. My understanding of this is that vocations are different occupations of tradesmen or union workers.

**Figure 1: Vocations Ideation**

My next step involved justification of my decision to pursue the marketing of vocations: How is this going to play out? Why am I deciding to pursue this venue? Who is the audience? And, where is the primary audience located? To answer the questions:

**How?** VIA information campaign with visuals and bold, simple statements.

**Why?** A better standard of living, to reduce and eventually end poverty, and to promote the American Dream of the next generation.

**Who?** Kids and teens in the inner city, rural or suburban environment.

**Where?** Inner-city and urban youth.
Following the production of an audience chart, I created a series of sketches that would represent this concept to the audience of my choice. I created sketches of different tools used within vocational jobs: bulldozers, welders, mechanics, dump trucks, etc.
For my first iteration of visuals, I wanted to stay with the gritty, handmade quality of street art murals and graffiti. With this in mind, I created a series of illustrations on cut and painted paper by use of acrylic paint marker. I then scanned and imported the illustrations to a digital file, and manipulated them in Photoshop. I also created a background for the visuals to live on by teaching myself to effectively spray paint, and then utilizing my new skill to paint a landscape in bright, bold colors.
My first iteration was ultimately unsuccessful in the digitization of hand created pieces. They lacked the energy that was present within the analogue pieces. This lead me back to the drawing board. I created a series of drawings based on the same concept, but by way of a Wacom Tablet to create life-like, energetic elements. Features of this series of drawings included the use of a bulldozer, an oil rig, and a cement mixer. I also digitized the logotype to feature a magic marker textured, hand written font.

**FUTUREBOUND**

*figure 6: logotype, second iteration*

*figure 7(left): bulldozer asset*

*figure 8(right): oil rig asset*

*figure 9: cement mixer asset*
When inserted into advert posters, these assets brought significantly more life to the digital specter. These posters, however, were not ultimately successful in communication.

![figure 10: second iteration posters](image)

After the completion of these posters, I determined that the imagery was not as successful in its artful creation as I would have liked. This lead me ideation a third time. This time, with the intent to stay as true to my own hand as possible within a digital sector.

I started the search in my library of art history reference. Eventually I landed on Francis Bacon, with his surrealist shapes and use of strong color. This introduced the idea of a piece reminiscent of Bacon’s strong anatomical features, the breakdown of structure in a similar manner of the early cubists, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. These shapes, in combination with a color palette heavily inspired by Wes Anderson's filmography, served as the visual basis of the third iteration.
Wes Anderson is a filmographer who is notorious for his advanced use of color theory and his creation of highly unique, obscure, and borderline seductive color palettes. Thus, Anderson is the perfect inspiration for my own palette. I intended on creating a palette that is not only what Anderson represents, but represented a certain level of brightness that would catch the attention of a city drowned in grey, literally and figuratively.

*figure 11: color palette*
As shape represents visual communication: my inspirations of surrealist, figurative, and cubist painters meant a successful breakdown of shape and an introduction of figurative elements to the composition. This process started with figurative sketches of figures and the tools that they use.

**figure 12**: mechanic figurative sketch

**figure 13** (left): welder sketch
**figure 14** (right): welding glove sketch
Results

The application of these elements resulted in a series of posters of modernist design which utilize modernist design, an edgy color palette, and typography that is clean, utilitarian, but with a touch of personality.

figure 15: iteration 3 poster series
These visuals made their way onto multiple products:

1. Web Banners
2. Tee Shirts
3. Sweatshirts
4. Mugs
5. Sketchbooks
6. Lanyards
7. Journals
8. Phone Graphics

*figure 16: web banners*

*figure 17: tee shirts*
figure 20: sketchbooks
figure 21: lanyards

figure 22: journals

figure 23: iphone background
A web presence is also necessary for this project. I chose to create a presence via a website for informational purposes, and a social media presence via Instagram. For this process, the first step was to create a web page.
For a social media profile, I chose to pursue the most effective social media platform of the moment: Instagram. Instagram is a photo sharing app where users can create their own photoblogs. It is more relevant than Facebook, and it is a much more accessible platform than musically or Snapchat.
For Future Bound to be truly successful, it would have to be truly accessible to everybody without the interference of education interference. For this reason, I have opted to keep this as an underground campaign and forego an in-school option.

Evaluation and Discussion

When discussing the concept and ideology behind Future Bound with the public and with my peer group, I received severely mixed reviews. Parents, on one hand, were the biggest group of mixed reviews. Some stated how it would be horrible if we were really to encourage students to stop learning, and others were ecstatic to hear that there was a project in the works to educate their children who weren’t academia bound. Few parents had truly positive attitudes for the idea of sending children into vocations, but those who did held similar perspectives: that it really isn’t fair to expect the exact same educationally from a massive body of students when everybody’s brain works in a different way and has their own strengths.
Alternatively, students were shocked to hear that they do have options other than university as their future paths, with one individual stating, "I never knew that I could do anything else...now that I know I don't have to go to college, I'm going to do something else." This individual seemed adamant about the fact that he did not want to continue into higher education, even after hearing the risks of going into vocational school.

**Solution Statement**

The wealth gap between impoverished neighborhoods and the wealthy is a consistently growing phenomena. Future Bound is an informational campaign that is meant not only to close the gap, but create an awareness of potential abilities to end poverty. By creating a web of information about alternative choices that students have, we can begin to balance out the crisis with over education, student loans, and a the general discontempt with the current standard of education, all while empowering students to take charge of their own futures.

While the initial focus was creating a better plan for the preexisting educational standard, I have found that it is not a method that works with everybody and their learning styles. In this situation, options are not a bad thing and no solution is discouraged, rather, highlighting all of the ways one can be successful for their own futures creates a culture of sans-culottes.

**Future Directions**

I believe that this project holds real potential in society given the existing and upcoming political tension that is facing the American public. There has been talk of creating this as a non-profit organization in the city of Rochester, NY. This leads me to believe that there is a commercial educational aspect to this project that I plan on exploring. Ideally, this project would be able to become a fully formed non-profit with the sole intention of educating and helping every student, not only those who suffer from an inadequate and underfunded inner-city education.
Conclusion

Future Bound was developed from the concept that creating individualized education patterns could be the solution for crippling debt and dissatisfaction for many who are subjected to traditional education paths. With the introduction of more accessible career paths and methods of education to achieve those goals through effective advertising of a social movement, the future of an entire nation could be altered. I believe this idea, in combination with human nature, would compel an audience to spread knowledge through accessible technology and word of mouth, thus recreating compassion and community.
Bibliography


Bibliography


Bibliography


