IU, Project School students collaborate on art of sustainability

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A unique lamp made from those ubiquitous Pizza X plastic cups was one of several sustainable art projects generated by a recent collaboration between fourth- and fifth-graders at the Bloomington Project School and Indiana University students.

Its creators hope the giant luminescent sphere will eventually hang in the charter school. Project School art teacher Sara Irvine said the project accentuated both IU’s “Themester” on sustainability and her school’s annual theme.

“One of our topics we’re studying yearlong is ‘What is power?’ With governmental status, rights and the impacts we make each day, it fit in seamlessly,” she said. “It was just perfect.”

The students worked together to create four projects that connect art to concepts, including the Pizza X lamp, which contains more than 300 cups; a Giving Tree-inspired creation of cans and coat hangers, with objects made from recycled paper hanging from its branches; an Andy Goldsworthy-inspired human figure made of sticks, leaves and other natural objects; and an original theatrical performance, complete with costumes, that focused on the dangers of oil spills.

“I really loved it,” fourth-grader Joseph Ermey said of the project. “It kind of opened my eyes to interweaving technology with nature. ... It kind of got me in tune with what’s there.”

Fifth-grader Alex Brackee said he enjoyed piecing together what he referred to as the “stickman,” but also said he particularly liked the work students did photographing their portraits with their faces decorated by items found in nature. “I found a fork under a pine tree,” he said. “That was kind of weird.”

IU senior Nathan Haddix worked on the Pizza X lamp, which he said was initially prompted by his own modest, 60-cup collection and the discovery of a similar project online made with Dixie cups.

The project took on a life of its own after Pizza X featured the students on its Facebook page, and students solicited donations of extra cups from parents, teachers, fellow students, the restaurant itself and total strangers to complete the project, Haddix said.

“It was really cool to see how people came together to help,” he said. “And it turned out neater than anybody could’ve imagined.”

Yara Cluver, who teaches IU’s art and community class at Collins Living-Learning Center, said her class is ultimately about the role the arts play in society.
“It’s integral to living. It’s about how important to our mind it is to be creative,” she said. “And it’s best learned through hands-on experience.”

Project School fifth-grader Ursa Johnson works diligently on a spherical lamp created from plastic cups, part of a collaborative sustainable art project between the charter school and IU students. Courtesy photo

Sarah Rudzinski, left, and Steven Walkowiak view "The Giving Tree," made by students at Bloomington's Project School and displayed during Indiana University's Themester on Sustainability Closing Exposition at Alumni Hall. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times
Detail shot of "The Giving Tree," made by Bloomington Project School students and Indiana University students. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times

Indiana University students Lily Kinder, at left, and Ashleigh Smith work on a sustainable art project with Project School fifth-grader Gavin Thomas. Courtesy photo

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