Collaborative School Culture Murals

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COLLABORATIVE MURALS

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Final Research Project

COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL CULTURE MURALS

by

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COLLABORATIVE MURALS

ABSTRACT

This classroom based study investigated the collaborative mural process with Drawing II students at Arundel High School. The research question asked: What social challenges and opportunities might students encounter while collaboratively planning a mural that reflects school culture? The research focused on both the positive and negative aspects of teenagers working together on the same piece of art. Observation notes were made regarding student behaviors, conversations, and logistics while painting. The completed murals, artist statements, pre and post survey comparative data, and teacher observations determined the results of the study. Recommendations were made for future application of the study.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Education Connection (2014) stated that collaboration was “working together to share, advocate, and compromise on issues critical to teams success” (para. 1). The art room provided an opportunity for students to practice this skill. Lindsey, Roberts, and CampbellJones (2005) discussed how working together opened the path for communication of ideals and values within a group. Through the collaboration process, students gain an understanding of their school culture and where they fit into the picture.

For this study, a unit was completed with the Drawing II students at Arundel High School in Gambrills, Maryland, and focused on a collaborative mural project that uncovered a sense of school culture, specifically the values and beliefs reflected within the population of the student body (Education Connection, 2014). The mural was completed on 4’ x 2’ ceiling tiles and installed in different portions of the school. Students worked in groups of four or five. Each group had a tile for their mural. During the planning process, each member of the group contributed their idea of what school culture meant and how it looked at Arundel High, how they fit into that culture individually, and worked collaboratively to fuse the groups’ ideas into one cohesive mural. At the completion of the unit, the students presented their mural to the class and shared their interpretation of school culture at Arundel High School.

Research Goals

The goal for the proposed research was to observe student interactions in order to learn the challenges they face in planning a collaborative mural. Another goal was to understand how students perceive their place within the school culture.
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Research Questions

The following question guided the research: What social challenges and opportunities might students encounter while collaboratively planning a mural that reflects school culture at Arundel High School in Gambrills, Maryland? Specifically in this case study of Drawing II students at Arundel High School, the following sub questions arose: How are students able find commonalities among their peers? How does the group interpret the idea of school culture?

Conceptual Framework

Utilizing collaborative art in the classroom and understanding how to translate ideas visually served as the foundation for the conceptual framework. One area of research was how the students reacted to creating and sharing their ideas while working with a group. Research was also conducted to discover what road blocks educators have encountered during collaborative units.

Research strategies for the proposed idea included a pre and post questionnaire for students about the collaborative experience. Observation of student behaviors and interactions between groups served as a major source of information. Completed artworks with statements were included in the research data. The study had many connections beyond the classroom: to foster student collaboration among the school population, development of communication, and meeting the needs for students to have basic twenty first century skills upon graduation. In the researcher’s experience, students at Arundel High School lack collaboration skills in the classroom. The initiative of the school was to teach real life skills and prepare the students for post high school experiences.
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Methods of Data Collection

Data collection included a variety of methods. Written responses through questionnaires about their personal views on the collaborative planning process were gathered directly from the students at the beginning of the project and after the final presentations. Interaction among the different groups of students was documented in memos. Completed group artist statements about the meaning of the mural and how it relates to the group’s understanding of school culture were collected prior to the final presentation. Observations of student’s behavior, contributions, and body language during the final presentation were documented.

Methods of Analysis

The researcher and three additional art teachers at Arundel High School worked together to analyze collected data. Together, the researcher and selected educators looked at the information gathered by the different groups to analyze what the students perceived as challenges and opportunities during the collaborative planning process. Before and after statements from the students, alongside the completed group statement and completed pieces, were the main data sources analyzed. The sub questions that were connected to the central research question were analyzed through memos based on observations of student’s interactions and conversations throughout the planning stages.

Theoretical Framework

Turk (2012) stated that “art experiences in the educational setting that are collaborative and inclusive in approach take the curriculum even further, as they are rooted in establishing cultural meaning, social values, norms, and truth” (p. 51). The students of Arundel High want to be included within the school culture, they want to share their values, and want to be accepted by their peers. Bringing the students together to work collaboratively was used in Turk’s case study
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to fulfill these needs. Turk discussed how art provides a unique setting for students to “come to
know themselves in new way and how they fit within a social structure” (p. 51). By working
collaboratively, Turk’s mural participants learned how to solve a creative problem within a group
setting and each student’s view was taken into consideration for the mural. One student stated
that “the mural setting gave her the confidence to offer help to those in need without the social
pressures she felt in the regular classroom” (p. 52).

The population of the Drawing II class had a mixture of gender, race, popularity,
economic status, grade point average, and behavior. The mural project was an avenue for
hearing each other’s voice, opinion, and combining their diverse ideas of school culture into one
visual composition. Bae (2012) discussed how working collaboratively exposed students to new
ideas and connections. Students need to be given the opportunity to contribute their voice to
society. Utilizing murals in the learning process has been shown to “advance cooperative
learning skills” (p. 48).

The case studies cited (Turk, 2012; Bae, 2012) demonstrated mural creation as a
successful method for bringing artists together to share ideas and differing viewpoints, which
was the foundation for the research. In order to observe the challenges and opportunities
students face while planning collaboratively, they were presented with a project that has been
proven to work effectively with bringing groups of students together at the high school level.

Significance of the Study

The proposed research was intended to inform the researcher of the challenges and
opportunities that arise during the collaboration process with the students of Arundel High. Data
from the proposed research was also intended to uncover both the successful and lacking points
of connection between individual students in a collaborative work environment in order to
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improve teaching practices. The same unit was used as a core part of the Drawing II curriculum. The data collected allowed for improved planning of the unit for future students in the course and demonstrate a progression of change in the students’ interpretation of school culture.

In addition to the need for teachers to better their professional practices by providing quality and rounded educational experience for their students, many school systems have turned toward the idea of 21st century skills. The proposed research focused on Arundel High School, but had similar roots and benefits in all high schools. Arundel High School’s mission stated; “Within the global community of Arundel High School, students are challenged to gain the knowledge, skills, and values that will enable them to become lifelong learners and productive, responsible citizens of the 21st century” (Arundel, 2014, para. 1). One of the goals stemmed from this statement was to find ways to develop school culture by connecting students to one another. Turk (2012) stated that by providing students with opportunities to collaborate in the art room, teachers can “give students the real-world opportunity to make carefully considered decisions and judgments” (p. 53).

Limitations of the Study

The proposed research presented the possibility of a few validity threats or limitations. Some students were not willing to participate equally with the selected group. Other students had previous group experience that might have caused them to either dominate the work to get it done or shy away from participating.

Another possible validity threat was that some of the students already knew members of their group. Each group provided a different dynamic of individuals. Since students took prerequisite art courses and are mostly upper classmen, there was the possibility that many of the
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students already knew each other very well. This might have affected the results with the comfort level analysis and active participation of each group.

Conclusion

Collaborative art has been an effective method for bringing groups of students together and has been utilized in developing 21st century skills. The goals of the research were to obtain an understanding of what challenges and opportunities students faced while working and planning together in order to increase teacher awareness and preparedness for future collaborative work in the classroom. The following chapter reviewed existing literature on the use of murals to create a collaborative learning environment among students.

Definition of Terms

21st Century Skills – A specific skill set that each child is required to know and be able to perform by high school graduation in order to be effective and quality citizens. These skills include understanding of core subject, career development, innovative and creative thinking, collaboration, and understanding of technology.

Collaborative Art – An art making method that utilizes the combined ideas and creative processes of a group of students/artists in order to solve a specific art problem.

School Culture – A shared set if ideals, experiences, and values by a community of students attending a particular educational institution.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Murals are an effective way to bring students together for the collaborative process. The aim of this research was to uncover the challenges and opportunities students face when planning a mural together. The research uncovered the question: What social challenges and opportunities might students encounter while collaboratively planning a mural that reflects school culture?

Conceptual Framework

The researcher utilized collaborative projects in the past with various levels of studio art, but did not develop the group planning stages in an effective manner for optimum learning. The mural project was focused on discovering the challenges and opportunities students face when working collaboratively.

The research utilized pre and post questionnaires from the students about the collaborative process to gain a concrete understanding of individual students’ perspectives on the project. Completed artist statements along with the mural were the second source of information gathered that provided insight into comprehension of school culture within the group. The conceptual framework for the research was organized into four categories: prior knowledge, areas of research, research strategy, and connections (see figure 2.1).
Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework
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Review of the Literature

The literature utilized to guide the collaborative mural art project was divided into two main areas of concentration: collaborative art and students’ reactions to sharing ideas. Each of the areas also included subtopics within the discussion.

Collaborative Art

Murals are a common form for collaborative expression in the art classroom. They have provided students with the opportunity for a cohesive group expression about a topic, a setting to express diversity, and more complex process during planning stages. Gregoire and Lupinetti (2005) discussed how the diverse population of a group working collaboratively directly adds to its success.

Three other reasons germane to the success of diverse students are: the arts are primary forms of communication, because they are driven by emotion and passion and are based in imagination and cognition; they are avenues of achievement for students who might not otherwise be successful; and they may focus on alternative forms of assessment and evaluation. (Gregoire & Lupinetti, 2005, p. 160)

Cabrera, Crissman and Bernal (2002) noted in their research that “learning communities are among the oldest and most revered models of education” (p. 21). Utilizing collaborative projects in the art room has value for the students in other subject areas. “Collaborative learning has the potential for realizing the general-education goal of promoting active and responsible citizenship in a democratic society” (p. 30).

Bae (2012) discussed how each member’s contribution to the group is assured when they are all expected to contribute verbally and visually to the mural (p. 49). Each student shared portions of the process to encourage interaction with peers. Delgado and Barton (1998) stated
that due to the amount of planning that goes into a mural project, “youths, as a result, develop an appreciation for the importance of planning and the compromises that are associated with implementation” (p. 352).

“For collaboration to succeed, all participants need to be willing to modify their ideas based on feedback from the other participants” (Hubbard, 2010, p. 68). The success of the mural was based on the ability for the students within each group to compromise without sacrificing their contribution entirely. Bae (2009) discussed how students should connect their plan to their own experiences. According to Parameswaran (2007), it is “important to stress and communicate tolerance of diverse opinions and being open-minded to points of view that do not resemble one’s own beliefs and traditions” (p. 52). In order for the collaboration portion to work, the group needed to be aware of their differences and embrace them as opportunities to strengthen the meaning of their art in their studies.

**Group expression.**

Murals are an effective method for visually demonstrating the combined ideas and feelings of a group about a given topic (Turk, 2012). “Our mural was planned to evoke a feeling in the participants that this creation was personal to them and something that existed as a form of expression for the group as a whole” (p. 50). The research was driven by group expression of a shared idea. Collaborative planning engaged students in “higher-level thinking, active inquiry, and real-life problem solving” (p. 52). Working within a group setting is a realistic experience that students face in their future. Lawton (2010) supported this idea of connecting students to real world experiences and placed a large portion of that role in the hands of the teachers. Reibman, Hansen, and Vickman (2006) also discussed how collaboration is used to create lifelong learners with 21st century skills (p. 75). In the article, they applied it to students working
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collaboratively to do research in a library setting, but the same principles are present when collaboratively planning a mural in the art room.

Diversity.

Bae (2012) discussed, in the observations of American and Korean students working together on a mural, how different group dynamics caused the presentation of the end result to be unique to each group (p. 53). This was most likely the case when applied to the students of Arundel High School, since it has diverse population. The students are a unique mixture of military, migrant, national government, and generally transient youth. The population of the Drawing II class included Native American, South African, New England, inner city Baltimore, Japanese, well-traveled military, German, and Hispanic backgrounds within the mixture. “In order to engage students with different native languages and cultures in cooperative learning, teachers must learn about the major impediments to intercultural communication, as well as the culture of their students” (Bae, 2012, p. 54). Each of these provided unique perspectives to a given topic.

Delgado and Barton (1998) stated, when applied to the youth of Latino communities, that it is important to view “murals from an asset perspective to better understand community strengths and the issues and struggles of its residents” (p. 347). This statement applied not only to the struggling youth of struggling Latino communities, but to the youth of a diverse population within a high school setting. Students share different experiences, both positive and negative, that give them a unique perspective to bring into the collaborative process.

Students’ Reactions to Sharing Ideas

Briggs (2007) stated “connecting subject matter in the art classroom with student concerns can open the door to transformative dialogue” (p. 40). Students have both positive and
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negative reactions when working collaboratively on a mural. In Turk (2012), students supported one another, provided positive assurance and feedback, and encouraged those that “doubted their abilities” (p. 52). This art process provided students with the opportunity to see their inner potential and to value it in others. Bae (2012) discussed how older and younger students work together in a positive manner during mural planning to ensure all the ideas of the group were considered and incorporated throughout the entire planning process (p. 49). Working in a collaborative setting provided a stage for active listening (Heid, 2008). “Active listening involves learning to attend to the person who is speaking by acknowledging what they are saying” (p. 92). By having members of the group participate in active listening during the process, students feel their voice and opinion is important.

Mixing grade levels together within a group setting provided older students the opportunity to take on leadership roles and to give advice using their experience (Turk, 2012). Younger students provided fresh excitement and gave new perspectives to the process. The two complement each other. This was the case for the research due to the multiple grade levels mixed in the course.

Cabrera, Crissman and Bernal (2002) noted that some of the positive effects of utilizing collaborative projects within the classroom included “academic and cognitive development, knowledge acquisition, clarity in educational goals, interpersonal skills, and the quality of student effort spent in academic areas” (p. 20). It also promoted tolerance among peers by focusing on a collaboration format of work, rather than a competitive format.

Negative interactions could occur when students from different backgrounds work collaboratively. Bae (2012) noted that one of the complaints from specific test groups were that
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some of the students “just did what they wanted to” (p. 53). This type of interaction is expected in any classroom setting.

Conclusion

Murals have provided educators with a method for bringing students together to work collaboratively utilizing a subject that is meaningful to the entire group. The aim of this research was to uncover the challenges and opportunities students faced when planning a mural together with a subject they are all familiar with, but have different viewpoints in their understanding. The methods in the next chapter assist in guiding the study to answer the research question: What social challenges and opportunities might students encounter while collaboratively planning a mural that reflects school culture?
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CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This chapter is focused on explaining the methods of research for this study. The research was completed as a classroom-based study. It is designed to provide insight to the proposed question: What social challenges and opportunities might students encounter while collaboratively planning a mural that reflects school culture? Specific research methods, data collection processes, and data analysis are explained in detail.

Research Methods

The researcher constructed surveys to collect data. The surveys focused on understanding the students’ perspectives on working with others throughout the process. Completed murals and artist statements served as data for further understanding of students’ experiences while working collaboratively. The teacher selected the group structure ahead of time and placed students that are less familiar with each other together.

Questionnaires / Survey

At the beginning of the study, students were placed into groups of 4. After a full class discussion on school culture they were each given a survey that discovered their current perception on working with others and their comfort level with the chosen group. The survey was in an open-ended format to encourage student narrative.

At the completion of the mural and group presentations, the students were given the exact same survey. The pre and post surveys were compared to discover any differences or changes students faced during the collaborative process. These were intended to discover if any students’ views about working together had changed over the process.
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Murals and Artist Statements

Each group completed a 2’ x 4’ ceiling tile mural combining their ideas about school culture. All students were required to contribute to the process by participating in planning, sketching, image transfer to the large panel, painting of the final composition, and provided input into the group artist statement. The artist statement was a compilation of all the group member’s contributions and perspectives to the mural.

The completed mural and artist statement were utilized to determine how the groups view school culture at Arundel High. It was also intended to reveal whether a student has dominated over the group or has been suppressed during the process.

Observation

The teacher observed student behavior, specifically issues that arise within the groups that demonstrate cooperation among the members throughout the planning and painting stages of the process. The observations were written in a daily log and used in conjunction with the questionnaires to identify challenges and opportunities students face during the process. This method was intended to act as supplemental information to the main questionnaires and completed works. The researcher specifically looked for social aspects within the group that involve exclusion from the group and cooperation among the members.

Data Collection

Data collection took place on site in the classroom. All information was gathered while students were working. The unit took place over a course of six or seven days with eighty-seven minute period for each class. Charts were utilized to collect the data for comparative analysis at the end of the study.
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Methods for Data Collection

Data from the pre and post surveys was combined together on a chart that divided the responses into three categories: challenges, opportunities, and other observed responses. The chart listed each student by group, with pre survey information for each category next to post survey information (see figure 3.1). Completed murals and statements were analyzed for comparison between visual and narrative proportional breakdown of student participation.

Figure 3.1: Questionnaire Comparison Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Challenges (Pre)</th>
<th>Challenges (Post)</th>
<th>Opportunities (Pre)</th>
<th>Opportunities (Post)</th>
<th>Other (Pre)</th>
<th>Other (Post)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographics

The students at Arundel High School reflect the diversity of the suburban area. 61% of the students are white, 27% African American, 8% multiracial, 6% Asian, 4% Hispanic, and 1% American Indian and Pacific Islander. 13% of the population is part of the special education program (Arundel High School, 2014).

The students in the Drawing II course have similar demographics compared to the school. The class consists of twenty-five students. Thirteen students are female and twelve are male. Fifteen students are white, seven are African American, two are Hispanic, and one is Asian. Two of the students have section 504 plans. Their ages vary from fifteen to eighteen years old.
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Description of the Classroom

The classroom is one of the larger rooms in the school and accommodates up to thirty five students with adequate working space. The room is divided into five tables, two of which seat six students and three that seat up to nine students. A smaller back table is utilized for expanding workspace for larger works. One side of the room has a large wall of windows that provide an abundance of natural lighting. The view is into a well-kept courtyard with trees and bushes.

The classroom provides a large amount of storage for all sizes of artistic surfaces. Artwork from all classes taught in the room is displayed. Foundations of Art, Drawing I, II, II, and AP Drawing are all taught in the room at different times of the day. All supplies are readily accessible and easy to get to with established clear traffic lanes.

Materials.

The groups completed murals on 2’ x 4’ ceiling tiles. Each group worked with one tile. A total of six tiles were used in all. Individuals used their sketchbooks to brainstorm their personal understanding of school culture. A group planning sheet was utilized to bring all the ideas together and begin creating imagery to use in the mural (see Figure 3.2). After planning, the students created their final sketch on a paper with the necessary proportional dimensions (see Figure 3.3). For the planning process, students used pencils, rulers, erasers, reference images on their electronic devices, and colored pencils.

Students used yard sticks and pencils to transfer their final design to the ceiling tile. They used acrylic paint for color application. Additional supplies for this process included paint brushes, paper towels, cardboard palettes, and the final composition planning sheet for reference.
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After completion of the tile mural, students worked together to write an artist statement about the meaning of their piece utilizing the group artist statement paper. This document was used during their group’s presentation of their piece to the class. An easel was utilized to display the tile in a visible location during the presentation.

Figure 3.2: Group Planning Sheet

*****PLANNING SHEET****

Collaborative “School Culture” Mural

Use this area to sketch some ideas for your mural

Ideas about what the school is at Arundel High School: (everyone in the group must contribute)
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Figure 3.3: Final Mural Plan

Final Mural Plan (with color)

Group members: ____________________________

Approval Signature _________________________
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Data Analysis

The classroom based research method used a comparative method of analysis to see patterns, changes, and any other variations from the students’ experience. The researcher utilized the assistance of three art teachers at Arundel High School to assist in analyzing responses in the pre and post surveys and to compare the completed mural to the group artist statements. The researcher used the observational data to provide additional insight into any inconsistencies or areas of confusion that are not clarified in the questionnaires and artist statements. The results of analysis determined whether, if any, social challenges or opportunities occurred during the collaborative process.

Conclusion

The research methods, data collection, and data analysis process were designed to determine the challenges and opportunities student face while working collaboratively on a mural. The methods were intended to formulate a triangulation research method to ensure the information is accurately recorded (Maxwell, 2012). Student questionnaires, group artist statements along with completed murals, and teacher observations were addressed in further detail along with results of the research in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: REPORT OF FINDINGS

This study was conducted to examine the social challenges and opportunities high school students encounter when working collaboratively on murals. The focus of the study was a comparison of student comfort levels and written descriptions of their view on collaborative work with their group before and after the study. The research was conducted at Arundel High School in a Level 2 Studio 2D class. Twenty five students participated in the study. During the course of this study three lessons were taught over the course of three weeks. Data was gathered from the students in the form of surveys, planning sketches, completed murals, artist statements, and teacher observations. The results of the study were discussed in this chapter and analyzed for applicable data.

Significance of the Study

The study was used to identify areas of growth regarding the use of collaborative art projects in a high school level classroom. By focusing on the social aspects and visual combination of student ideas about a familiar topic to the students, the researcher created a rich structure to study “standard” behavior at Arundel High School.

In his work, Turk (2012) suggested that working collaboratively provides students with opportunities to learn more about their peers and in turn create deeper relationships. Relationships are a heavy focus in current high school curriculum. Developing skills that students will need once they enter the workforce and higher education is a priority among teachers of all subject areas. Collaborative work is a significant part of that focus. By utilizing murals as the method, students are placed in a higher level thinking situation that causes them to grow in relationship development skills, despite how comfortable or not they may be during the process. Cabrera, Crissman, and Bernal (2002) noted that it also promoted tolerance among
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peers by focusing on a collaboration format of work, rather than a competitive format. Bae (2012) suggested that one of the challenges was having an equal share of responsibilities among the group.

This study allowed the students to work together and combine their ideas about the school culture of Arundel High School into a mural. The study findings showed that students, for the most part, did show a change in their perception of collaborative work in the art studio and developed comfortable relationships with their peers, which is discussed in detail in the results portion of the chapter.

The study specifically adds to an understanding of high school student’s feelings about working with others, specifically people they do not know very well. Both positive opportunities and negative challenges were identified. This information, combined with prior studies, provides teachers with an understanding of ways to enhance the climate of the classroom through collaborative art projects at the high school level.

Bias and Validity

It is believed that the information provided in this study is accurate to the research conducted. All data was collected through multiple forms of direct interaction and observation of students. Triangulation was used throughout the study to ensure accuracy of information. This was accomplished by comparing student pre and post surveys, completed artwork with artist statements, and observations of student interaction and behavior. When written descriptions were unclear, the teacher clarified with the student.
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Data Analysis Procedure

Prior to the beginning of the unit, students were given a survey to determine a baseline and starting point for the study. The post unit survey contained the same questions. The analysis of the surveys was guided by the research question to uncover themes that related to the social aspects of working collaboratively. Teacher observations were used to reveal additional or supplemental information to the written responses. Artist statements and completed murals were analyzed to reveal data results.

Written Survey Analysis

Written responses from students were analyzed for positive and negative themes. Responses were grouped together on charts by group. Pre and post challenges were placed together. Pre and post opportunities were placed together. Arrangement of the categories on the chart allowed for visual comparison and changes of views from each student and provided comparison of patterns within different groups (see Figure 4.1). Responses that did not fall into either category were placed in a different column. Student responses were read and reread several times to determine categories, themes, and underlying information for analysis.

Figure 4.1: Written survey analysis chart

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Challenges (Pre)</th>
<th>Challenges (Post)</th>
<th>Opportunities (Pre)</th>
<th>Opportunities (Post)</th>
<th>Other (Pre)</th>
<th>Other (Post)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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COLLABORATIVE MURALS

Comfort Level Analysis

The first question on the pre and post survey for the unit was about the comfort level of the students with their group (see Figure 4.2). Students were asked to rank their comfort level on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being very uncomfortable and five being extremely comfortable. The data from the student responses provided analysis for changes over the course of the unit. The information was charted for the total class pre-unit levels and the same for post-unit levels to reveal any changes. It was also used to chart individual growth. Students increased, decreased, or stayed the same on the numerical comfort level.

Figure 4.2: Comfort level scale

On a scale of 1 – 5, how comfortable are you working on a piece of art with your selected group? (Mark with an “X”)

1 ———— 2 ———— 3 ———— 4 ———— 5
Very Uncomfortable Uncomfortable Comfortable Very Comfortable Extremely Comfortable

Teacher Observations

Teacher observations provided additional data for analysis of student perceptions and behavior. Observations were written on a daily chart and were sectioned off by groups. All groups were on the same page for overall viewing and comparison of information. All observations were completed by the teacher and only during class time (see Figure 4.3). After getting students ready with materials and murals, the teacher would walk around the room every ten minutes to monitor behavior and progress. The teacher would stop at each group for approximately five minutes to listen to conversations, provide feedback, and answer questions that the students would encounter. Interaction and conversation between students was a heavy portion of the observed material. Observations were utilized in conjunction with the student
survey responses, artist statements, and completed artwork to identify any information that both confirmed and conflicted with data.

*Figure 4.3:* Teacher observations chart layout

**Teacher Observations Chart:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Observed Challenges (Negative)</th>
<th>Observed Opportunities (Positive)</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Observed Challenges (Negative)</td>
<td>Observed Opportunities (Positive)</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Observed Challenges (Negative)</td>
<td>Observed Opportunities (Positive)</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Observed Challenges (Negative)</td>
<td>Observed Opportunities (Positive)</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>Observed Challenges (Negative)</td>
<td>Observed Opportunities (Positive)</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 6</td>
<td>Observed Challenges (Negative)</td>
<td>Observed Opportunities (Positive)</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COLLABORATIVE MURALS

Artist Statement and Completed Mural

Completed group artist statements and murals were utilized specifically to provide additional insight into reoccurring social themes for data analysis, specifically how the group divided the work and how they chose to visual convey their combined idea of school culture. The murals were analyzed for cohesiveness and combination of group ideas. Photos of the completed murals were placed with the artist statements. Both were analyzed alongside the written responses charts by group. Visual analysis of the information confirmed the data revealed in the written responses. The teacher and three other art teachers at Arundel High school analyzed the artist statements, completed murals, and group written responses chart to maintain consistency in views and provide additional insight to themes for data analysis.

Results of the Data

The following question guided the research analysis: What social challenges and opportunities might students encounter while collaboratively planning a mural that reflects school culture? The data analysis shows that students exhibited mostly positive social opportunities throughout the collaborative process. The data showed that the overall comfort level of students with their group increased, disagreements were handled constructively and in a positive manner, and that there was a general optimistic view of collaborative work. Analysis revealed further findings worth being noted. Students demonstrated a lack of confidence in their own artistic skills. Real world applications were made by a few. They compared the collaborative process from the study to situations they would face in the workforce.

Comfort Level

Students conveyed an overall increase in comfort levels with their group over the course of the mural process. At the beginning of the unit, students were asked to rank their comfort
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level with the pre-selected group of peers before working collaboratively to establish a baseline. The scale was from one to five; one representing very uncomfortable and five representing extremely comfortable. At the end of the unit, students were asked to label their new comfort level with their peers on the same scale. The comfort level specifically refers to how the students feel about working with students that they do not know very well and usually don’t associate with outside of the classroom. The groups were designed to place students together that did not know each other.

The chart below reflects the changes in students comfort levels with their groups over the course of the unit (see Figure 4.4). In both the pre and post survey, most of the class responded with a 3 as their comfort rating. In the pre survey, all the majority of students that didn’t respond with a 3 chose a lower number on the scale. This created a heavier weight in students that felt uncomfortable with their group. The post survey results showed quite the opposite for weighted areas on the scale. Once again, the majority of students responded with a 3 for their comfort level. This time, the majority of students that did not respond with a 3 responded with a higher number on the comfort scale. Overall, students became more comfortable socially with their peers. A small fraction of the class showed no change from their initial comfort level with their group. Most students increased by one or two points (see Figure 4.5).
Figure 4.4: Individual comfort levels with peer group.
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Figure 4.5: Change in comfort level by points.
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Disagreement

Disagreement among group members was identified as a concern with several students in the pre-survey results. One student in the first group stated, “Our different opinions may cause conflict”. Their “different opinions” was in specific reference to the symbolism, imagery, and artistic styles the different group members preferred to use in the mural. Many students were concerned about the different styles and ideas coming together and were unsure if the group would accept all viewpoints. Several students specifically noted this concern in their written survey.

After completion of the collaborative project, only two students noted a disagreement within their group. In the post-survey results, over half of the students described the planning portion of the project to work better than they had expected. One student noted “no one really took tyrannical control of the group”.

Group 2 and Group 5 had opposite results. One student from each group did the majority of the planning. One student stated that “working with other people was easier than I thought, but mainly because my group members had very little input and just kind of went with whatever I suggested”. Another noted, “I didn’t like it because we can’t split work well”.

Overall, observations of group behavior mirrored the student responses regarding challenges faced while combining their ideas. Three of the groups immediately accepted all ideas and began finding ways to combine everyone’s viewpoint and suggestions. Group 1 decided to present all ideas without compromising or changing the viewpoints. The students decided the best way to accomplish this was by painting a series of school lockers on the mural and having each group member fill a locker with their ideas (see Figure 4.6 & 4.7). Group 2 had two members that wanted to include a rainbow somehow in the mural to emphasize the schools
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heavy population and acceptance of the LBGTQ student community. The remaining members of the group wanted to focus on subjects that define the culture of the school in their mind, such as art, sports, and AP classes. They compromised by creating a rainbow transition of colors in the background and symbols to represent the subjects in the foreground. A clock was placed in the middle to represent how little time is spent in high school and how it is the center of their lives (see Figure 4.8 & 4.9). Group 3 chose to show the main theme to describe the school – Pride. Every morning the principal makes sure to remind the students that they “can’t hide that Wild Cat pride!” Taking her words literally, they chose to represent that pride in the center of their mural, with written descriptions of their view on the culture of Arundel High School around the word (see Figure 4.10 & 4.11).

One group began with a heated debate and argument among the members. One student is an all-star athlete, another wanted to focus on social media and how the student body is consumed by the internet, another wanted to show the huge gaming community, and the last student really wanted to “look into the soul of the school”. After a short time and with a little humor, the group was able to come to a mutual agreement on how to combine all ideas (see Figure 4.12 & 4.13). The remaining two groups did not offer much discussion or debate. One student became the leader out of necessity, attempted to gain input from the other members, and proceeded as best as they saw fit. After combining all ideas together, several students became excited with the results. One student noted that “it doesn’t end up being what you thought exactly, but it’s diverse and awesome and shows difference”.


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Figure 4.6: Completed mural for Group 1

Figure 4.7: Completed artist statement from Group 1

GROUP Artist Statement

How does your mural reflect your group’s perspective of the school culture at Arundel High?

- We’re all different people but we share the same space.
- We used lockers as a representation of school culture.
- We’re all different yet we compromise for the things we enjoy.
- We are very diverse.
- We may all be different but our heart is green.
- We all have hidden parts & some open doors.
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Figure 4.8: Completed mural from Group 2

![Completed mural from Group 2](image)

Figure 4.9: Completed artist statement from Group 2

GROUP Artist Statement

How does your mural reflect your group's perspective of the school culture at Arundel High?

The clock represents all of the time the students spend in school. How we all look forward to getting out of two of five. We chose to represent all of the different aspects of the school with academic and extra curricular subjects. Art is represented by the paint palette, sports are represented with a baseball, a basketball, a football. Music is represented by three music notes. Academics in general are represented by a paper and a pencil. We chose to represent the students in a fairly literal way with stick figures that are arranged around the clock, once again, to show how the students' lives revolve around time.
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Figure 4.10: Completed mural from Group 3

Figure 4.11: Completed artist statement from Group 3

How does your mural reflect your group's perspective of the school culture at Arundel High?

Our mural reflects our group's perspective of the school's culture because we all believe that our school is diverse, and that pride is a big part of our school's culture and what we all represent. We have different types of sports balls and eye color and the silver and black people to represent diversity. The tiger stripes and pride represent our school's wildcats and motto. The paw and claws also represent the wildcats. The words represent different groups of people and pride (positive, responsible, involved, diligent, and efficient). The rainbow surrounding the people also shows the diversity of the student body and the unity. Also, the rainbow can be interpreted as the symbol of the RSA. The eyes represent how we are all working together and united around the wildcat's eye. The perspective makes everyone feel like part of athletics in our school.
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Figure 4.12: Completed mural from Group 6

Figure 4.13: Completed artist statement from Group 6
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Figure 4.14: Completed mural from Group 5
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Figure 4.15: Completed artist statement from Group 5

GROUP Artist Statement

How does your mural reflect your group’s perspective of the school culture at Arundel High?

Everyone is different, and represented in this tree of Arundel. Some are academic, represented by sports equipment.

The tree represents Arundel High School as a whole. Each person is unique. The flowers represent nice and cheerful people that bloom in their own way. The leaves represent the diverse people that participate in sports. Everyone at Arundel participate in.
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Collaborative Optimism

When presented with the idea of working together, many students noted their concerns in their pre-survey writing. Several students talked about their preference for working alone on art projects. “I don’t feel comfortable with someone on the same piece of artwork, especially if it is with people I don’t know”. Most students noted that they were willing to give it a try. A few thought that it would be “cool and fun”. One student noted, “I don’t know these people personally, so anything can happen working with them”.

While working on the murals, observations revealed that after the first day, a heavy majority of the students were actively engaged in conversations with their group members. Conversations ranged from how to proceed with parts of the mural, what each other had done after school the night before, to finding commonalities among each other such as sports or theatre. The volume of the class increased each day. On occasion pauses in conversation were noted. Observations on these moments revealed that it was not due to a lack of interest in the members of the group, but a newly developed comfort with group members that allowed for relaxed focused moments of concentration.

Group 3 demonstrated a drastic increase in optimism with the mural over the course of the study. The group members had the most variety of survey results of the entire class. One student was very confident in their skills and enjoyed working with others. Another student was the shyest student in the entire class and was concerned about the end results and that their peers would be disappointed. One student preferred talking with other people than those selected to be part of the group and didn’t want to do the study. The final student was very free and easy going. Their goal was to complete the task in whatever manner necessary. The artwork came together in a manner that met all of their tastes (see Figure 4.10). The student that preferred other people
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in the class wanted to incorporate school pride into the mural. All students in the group loved the idea and decided to each design a letter in their own style. The shy member of the group was okay with discussing what they wanted for their design, which was the tiger striped letter P, and expressed her discomfort in drawing the design. The leader of the group drew the design for her, which provided an easy to follow template for the shy student to follow. The group worked together to expand on great ideas and had fun in the process.

Post-survey results mirrored the observations of optimism. “I like them” was a frequent comment among several students when asked about their group. Another comment was “The people in my group worked well together”. One student stated, “I’m completely fine working with my group after talking with them and getting to know something about them”. Another student noted, “I feel really comfortable now because these people are really funny and I had a good time painting with them”. Once the members of the group started talking to one another, they found that they had several things in common and enjoyed the personalities of their peers. New friendships were formed over the course of the study.

**Confidence in Artistic Skills**

Five students reported in their survey that they were uncomfortable with collaborative work because they felt their skills were not as strong as other members of the group. One student noted that they didn’t want to “let their group down” because they couldn’t match the level of the other students. Observations showed that three of the students were able to work past their concerns and participate fully with the group. They were accepted by the members and contributed their style to the mural (see Figure 4.6). Two of the students were not able to work past their lack of confidence. One student had their head down frequently and the other only painted as directed by the other group members. The student that went along with the group
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stated in the post-survey writing, “I’m uncomfortable working with others on the same piece of art because I feel that I am not as strong of an artist as them”. The other student stated that they “feel bad because they probably think I’m not trying”.

Real World Application

Post-survey questions revealed mostly information about the social interaction of the group members and the immediate effects it had on the students. One student was able to make a direct connection to the real world application of the collaborative process. They stated, “I feel that it is great to collaborate on a project because in the real world people need to develop these skills”. Observation of this student’s behavior revealed that this student was focused on making all opinions and styles work together at each part of the creation process. After finishing the mural, before putting supplies away, the student asked each member of the group if they felt that it needed anything additional. The student demonstrated a concern for ensuring all members of the group had equal say in the final product.

Conclusion

Results showed a number of significant and secondary findings in response to the primary question of the study: What social challenges and opportunities might students encounter while collaboratively planning a mural that reflects school culture? Significant findings included a general comfort level increase of the student population through the mural process. Disagreements among group members were handled in a positive and constructive manner. The class also showed an increased sense of optimism regarding the collaborative art process. Secondary findings revealed a lack of confidence in artistic skills among a small population of students and the ability to relate the idea of collaborative work to the real world. In Chapter 5, specific application of the data results to the classroom will be discussed. The
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results of the study will be shared with the staff and utilized in the future planning of collaborative art projects at Arundel High School.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY

In this chapter the researcher discusses how she was personally affected by the study on the collaborative mural process and how their perceptions changed over time. A discussion on the reasoning behind this topic of research and its importance for students is noted. The researcher also provides information on what would change about the study and recommendations on how this information could be shared in order to benefit other art educators.

Discussion

Personal Impact of the Study

Collaboration within the art studio classroom is a familiar subject to the researcher. Knowledge from past experiences led the researcher to choose the topic of collaborative art for the conducted research. The goal was to gain an in depth understanding of what specific social challenges and opportunities students encounter during the process. It was believed by the researcher that some of the outcomes of the students would include discomfort with the group members, distaste for collaborative art, and a long amount of planning time due to major differences between group members. The results of the study provided more information than the researcher expected. Increased comfort levels by the majority of students, enjoyment through the process, relating the experience with real life situations, and how the students worked out their differences quickly and successfully were items that were unexpected.

The study enlightened the researcher’s view on collaborative art in the higher level drawing classes. Previously, the introductory classes were the only ones to have a collaborative art unit included in their curriculum. The focus on developing the higher drawing level students into AP quality students inhibited the researcher from seeing the social benefits of collaborative art. The experience gave students new insight into other art styles and opinions. It also gave
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students continuous peer critique and feedback. These are both important skills for the students to develop from Drawing Level 2 all the way to AP Drawing. The researcher has decided to now include one collaborative art unit in each semester of the higher level drawing classes. The researcher also intends to encourage the Photography and Ceramics teachers to include collaborative units in their curriculum.

Impact on Practice

Collaboration is an important skill for relationship development. It is used to engage students in “higher-level thinking, active inquiry, and real-life problem solving” (Bae, 2012, p. 52). Cabrera, Crissman and Bernal (2002) noted in their research that “learning communities are among the oldest and most revered models of education” (p. 21). Working within a group setting is a realistic experience that students face in their future. It also provides students with exposure to new ideas and perspectives on the same topic. “Collaborative learning has the potential for realizing the general-education goal of promoting active and responsible citizenship in a democratic society” (p. 30). Murals are an excellent art method for bringing groups of students together. Students are able to take time to listen to each other’s ideas and plan. Logistically they are able to all work on the art at the same time. They are also able to focus on contributing to the group’s mural with their own artistic style.

Recommendations

Implications for Further Research

The results of the study assisted the researcher in identifying areas that could be altered if it were to be repeated. A daily log of student comfort levels and journal entries would provide valuable information directly from the students on how they were feeling day to day. High school students have a lot of responsibilities and stress that can occur over a couple of hours to
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several days. Understanding the students’ daily comfort levels would assist in understanding if their results were skewed from daily life experiences. Another point that would be changed is to have the students provide input on who they would like to have in their group. The researcher would provide a question to the students the day prior to the unit that asked “If you could work with anyone in the room who would it be and why?” This question would possibly help the few students that did not like the experience to change their perspective.

Possibilities for Further Research

This study was conducted in one school with one art class. Each student body is different and the individual classes are comprised of various mixtures of students. This is not a ‘one size fits all’ study. It is intended to be a starting point for assisting other teachers. The results are likely to vary depending on the school and class. This provides teachers with insight on possible outcomes or road blocks to be considered while planning their curriculum.

Further research on collaborative work could focus on how students react when working with pre-selected groups verses groups of their own choosing. Another area of consideration could be how students work in smaller groups of two students or how they work as an entire class on a large scale mural. The idea of collaborative work could also be applied toward installation sculptures for three-dimensional studio classes.

Application of Research

The study would benefit other high school art teachers in the form of a county wide workshop. Teachers from several different art areas, such as Ceramics, Photography, Drawing for Fashion, and Foundations of Art, could come together with their ideas of possible collaborative unit topics and utilize the information from the study to adapt their idea to their
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individual fields and classes. Essentially, it would be a teacher collaborative practice and brainstorming session on how to get started or improve collaborative art units.

Conclusion to the Research

Advice to the Field of Art Education

High school is the final step for students before they officially enter the adult world. It is important to teach them how to work together, think critically, and not be afraid to try new experiences. Collaborative work in the art classroom is crucial for developing all these points. The researcher advises all art educators to include collaborative work throughout their curriculum and not discount its importance.

Advice to Art Teachers

When considering collaborative projects in the art classroom, the researcher suggests that the teacher take into consideration the students decision on who to work with. Students know what they do and do not like. By allowing them to have a partial decision on the group makeup, the teacher provides them with ownership over the work. Collaborative work is both exciting and daunting, but completely worth the effort and experience.
References

http://www.arundelhigh.org

Bae, J. (2012). An intercultural peace mural project: Let’s make a peaceful world hand in hand! Art Education, 65(1), 47-54


Education Connection (2014). Center for 21st century skills. Retrieved from:
http://www.skills21.org


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## UNIT PLAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
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</table>
| Unit Rationale:   | Collaboration is an important skill for relationship development. It is used to engage students in “higher-level thinking, active inquiry, and real-life problem solving” (Bae, 2012, p. 52). Cabrera, Crissman and Bernal (2002) noted in their research that “learning communities are among the oldest and most revered models of education” (p. 21). Working within a group setting is a realistic experience that students face in their future. It is also provides students with exposure to new ideas and perspectives on the same topic. “Collaborative learning has the potential for realizing the general-education goal of promoting active and responsible citizenship in a democratic society” (p. 30).

Murals are an excellent art method for bringing groups of students together. Students are able to take time to listen to each other’s ideas and plan. Logistically they are able to all work on the art at the same time. They are also able to focus on contributing to the group’s mural with their own artistic style.                                                                 |
| References:       | Bae, J. (2012). An intercultural peace mural project: Let’s make a peaceful world hand in hand! *Art Education, 65*(1), 47-54
### Descriptive title for the unit:
Wild Cat Culture – Collaborative Murals

### Goals:

**Students should...**

**Understand:**
- How to organize knowledge and ideas or expression in the production of art. (MSDE 3)
- Art vocabulary to describe and analyze the role of design in expressing unique visions. (MSDE 1, C. CR)

**Know:**
- How to identify a design problem and propose a solution, incorporating elements of art and principles of design in a visual model of the proposed solution. (MSDE 3, C. CE)
- How to analyze visual qualities in nature, art, and the built environment, and develop creative works of art in response (MSDE 3, C.)

**Be able to:**
- Apply knowledge of aesthetic traditions and conventions including contemporary criticism to find value in diverse artworks. (MSDE 4, A.)
- Describe sources of ideas for personal work and discuss how ideas were generated, how representational problems were solved, what visual references or information was used, and how the work changed from beginning to completion, and what was thought about in the process of making the work. (MSDE 3, B. CR)
- Critique artworks, applying different theories of art to judge personal artwork and that of others. (MSDE 4, A. CR)

### Instructional Concepts:
This unit is about the collaborative process. The students will work in groups to create a mural that reflects the group’s interpretation of the school culture at Arundel High School. Students in this class intend to take the Honors level and AP Drawing in their future. An understanding of different artistic styles and perceptions will help benefit them in the higher levels.
Lessons:

• **Lesson One:** Students take a pre-unit survey on working collaboratively. After the survey, they sit with their groups and participate in a discussion on the school culture of Arundel High School. Students are asked to share their different viewpoints. The teacher presents the unit method – group murals. The parameters of the project are discussed; individual pre-planning ideas, combined group plan, and a completed sketch of the mural. Students utilize the remainder of class to work with their groups and plan their mural.

• **Lesson Two:** Students begin transferring their sketch to the mural tile. Group members divide up the painting process and begin painting their tile. Studio time is provided for working on the mural.

• **Lesson Three:** Students complete their mural. The group works together to create an artist statement reflecting the meaning of their work and how the imagery represents the group’s view of school culture. After completing the artist statements, each group presents their mural and statement to the class. The class has the opportunity to provide feedback on their view of the presented works. After presentations, each student completes a post-unit survey that is the same as the pre-unit survey.

Materials:

**Students:**

- 6 ceiling tiles (2’x4’)
- Planning sheets for students to use in creating their final sketch of the mural
- Pencils
- Erasers
- Rulers
- Acrylic Paint
- Paper Towels
- Paint Brushes
- Cardboard pieces for painting palettes
- Colored Pencils (for applying color to the planning sketch)
- Questionnaire
- Paper for group artist statement
- Easel (for groups to place their tile on while...
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| Data collection/documentation: Camera (take photos of completed murals) Scanner (might be needed for written responses) |
| Assessment: Observation, dialogue, completed murals, group artist statements, pre-unit survey, post-unit survey, planning sketches, and individual discussion with students. |
| Bae, J. (2012). An intercultural peace mural project: Let’s make a peaceful world hand in hand! *Art Education, 65*(1), 47-54 |
Appendix A2: Student Pre-Unit Survey

Pre-Unit Survey Questions

On a scale of 1 – 5, how comfortable are you working on a piece of art with your selected group? (Mark with an “X”)

1------2---------3---------4---------5
Very Uncomfortable | Uncomfortable | Comfortable | Very Comfortable | Extremely Comfortable

What is your opinion about working with other people on the same piece of art? Explain your reasons for feeling that way.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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What are your feelings about working with this group on a collaborative mural?

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### Teacher Observations Chart:

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<tr>
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*****PLANNING SHEET****

Collaborative “School Culture” Mural

Use this area to sketch some ideas for your mural.

Ideas about what the school is at Arundel High School: (everyone in the group must contribute)
Appendix A5: Final Mural Plan Form

Final Mural Plan (with color)

Group members: ____________________________

Approval Signature ________________________
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Appendix A6: Group Artist Statement Form

GROUP Artist Statement

How does your mural reflect your group’s perspective of the school culture at Arundel High?
Appendix A7: Student Post-Unit Survey

Student Name: 

Post-Unit Questionnaire

On a scale of 1 – 5, how comfortable are you working on a piece of art with your selected group? (Mark with an “X”)

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5

Very Uncomfortable | Uncomfortable | Doesn’t bother me | They’re okay | I know these guys

What are your feelings about working with this group on a collaborative mural?

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What challenges or opportunities did you encounter while working with your peers?

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## Appendix A8: Survey Comparison Chart

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<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Comparison Chart:</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Challenges (Pre)</th>
<th>Challenges (Post)</th>
<th>Opportunities (Pre)</th>
<th>Opportunities (Post)</th>
<th>Other (Pre)</th>
<th>Other (Post)</th>
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<td>Student 2</td>
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<td>Student 3</td>
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<td>Student 5 (Only One Group)</td>
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