

Empowering Youth through Participatory Mural Making

By

TIVA JEAN LASITER

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Approved:

Professor Patsy Eubanks Owens, Chair

Professor Stephen M. Wheeler, Member

Kate E. Humphrey, Member

Professor Michael X. Rios, Member

Committee in Charge

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Abstract

A case study of a large scale participatory mural project is presented. The mural project was accomplished through a community participation approach, with over 80 high school students guided by a community researcher and artist. Students were involved in the project in a variety of capacities from inception to completion. The case study is evaluated using surveys, photographs, participant observations, and one participant interview, and is contextualized within the current research on the topic. Findings indicate that the students involved were empowered through the process of creating community art and making a meaningful contribution to their school. Youths gain social capital through teamwork, skill building, relationship building, and access to leadership opportunities. They develop a sense of pride and ownership for their community space while creating lifelong memories. Key forms of empowerment emerging from the project are discussed and recommendations for best practices for creative placemaking projects are offered.

For the art students of Winters High School, classes of 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016.

I learned so much from you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Abstract</i>	ii
<i>Dedication</i>	iii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iv
I. Introduction	1
<i>A. My Standpoint and Background</i>	4
<i>B. Contextualization within Current Literature</i>	7
<i>C. Brief Project Description</i>	11
II. Methods	19
III. Key Findings	24
<i>A. Forms of Youth Empowerment through Community Art</i>	25
1. Building relationships through collaboration.....	25
2. Building self-esteem through accomplishment.....	27
3. Leadership opportunities.....	27
4. Building skills.....	29
5. Creation of a meaningful place.....	30
6. A sense of project ownership through decision making.....	32
7. High levels of responsibility and accountability.....	34

<i>B. Insights for Recommended Practices.....</i>	<i>35</i>
IV. Conclusions.....	45
Bibliography.....	49
Appendix A Lesson Plan 1- Project Introduction.....	53
Appendix B Lesson Plan 2- What Inspires You Most.....	54
Appendix C Lesson Plan 3- Sharing and Discussing Design Ideas.....	55
Appendix D Teams and Duties.....	58
Appendix E Changes Made to Research Plan.....	60
Appendix F Visual Arts Content Standards for CA Public Schools.....	61

List of Figures:

Figure 1 Winters High School Art Building Before	64
Figure 2 Winters High School Art Building After.....	65
Figure 3 Design Charrette.....	66
Figure 4 Leading Site Assessment and Repair.....	67
Figure 5 Students Transferring Design.....	67
Figure 6 Student Workday.....	68
Figure 7 Bottom of Mural is Detailed.....	68
Figure 8 Students Collaborating.....	69
Figure 9 Leading Students to Work Together.....	70
Figure 10 Students Operating and Working in the Scissor Lift.....	70
Figure 11 Community Donated Solutions to Reach the Top of the Mural.....	71
Figure 12 Students Having Fun.....	71
Figure 13 Mural Detail-Art Entrance.....	72

Introduction

This thesis presents a case study of a large scale mural project created through collaboration with over 80 high school students and myself as a community researcher and artist in education. The mural project was accomplished through a community participation approach, where students were involved in planning the project in a variety of capacities. This project not only created a beautiful place to be enjoyed by all, it also created social change in the lives of the youths and other community members involved. Youths were empowered through the process of creating collaborative large scale art and transforming a lifeless outdoor area of their school.

In this paper I will begin by introducing the parameters of the project and the context of art as a tool for empowerment. I will discuss my background, standpoint, and how I came to the project. The introduction will serve to contextualize the project within the current literature on empowerment, youth development, and participatory community art. I will present overviews of several community art case studies that I referenced in developing my methodologies and offering new insights into community art projects focused on youth empowerment. I will provide a detailed but brief project description, and I will include in the appendices the lesson plans created for the project.

In the methods section of this paper, I will detail my research design process and my methodology used to create and evaluate a case study model. This case study is evaluated using surveys, photographs, participant observations, and participant interviews. Through my analysis, I attempt to offer the reader stories of student successes, presented as key findings which

illustrate how youths are empowered through the community art process. I will discuss recommended practices for engaging communities, particularly young people, in public art making. Several specific engagement tools to encourage optimum empowerment are offered. Finally, I will offer conclusions discussing the main themes that emerged from this community placemaking project.

This research project focuses on the empowerment of a group of high school students at Winters High School. When I refer to “youths,” “youth,” “students,” and “young people” in this paper, I am referring to the specific students who were involved in the project. I do however make recommendations for working with young people in general. Each group of young people will be different and it is important to tailor projects to the specific needs and desires of the population. Winters, California is a small rural town. Over 80 high school art students were involved in the project, and many students are from families of farm workers and migrant farm workers, and there are a large number of students from a Hispanic background.

Throughout the paper, I will define empowerment as “the development of individual leadership skills and knowledge regarding the practice of leadership, and formal recognition by the community of their newly acquired skills (status) in the community” (Pigg, 2002, p. 118). I will refer to youth development as “the process all young people undergo as they build the individual assets or competencies needed to participate in adolescence and adult life” (Listen Inc., 2000, p. 6). Youth leadership development helps young people look beyond their personal needs and interests to see their relationship to a collective group, organization, or community (Listen Inc., 2000). Youth civic engagement is defined as “young people developing the skills and habits

needed to actively shape democratic society in collaboration with others” (Listen Inc., 2000, p. 8). Social capital is referred to by Robert D. Putnam (2000) as “connections among individuals—social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (as quoted in DeFilippis, 2001, p. 19). I will use the definition of community art as “art removed from the present commercial art world and market systems, not commodified objects but contextualized specific, sited group expression” (Mosher, 2012, p. 43).

Community mural-making is a tool for youth development because it teaches young people to think outside of the box—outside of the norms of art to be made for an elite class of educated museum goers. Murals take art to the streets, to the public, they even the playing ground, and they allow anyone to be an artist. Through participatory creative placemaking, students develop the courage to try, the skill to execute, and the resources to accomplish something new. Youth-led action research can be a powerful means to inform and catalyze community organizing and revitalization (London, 2007). Art empowers young people because they gain social capital in the form of resources such as new skills, mentorship from community leaders, and connections with their peers through teamwork and peer leadership. Art is a tool for empowerment because people build connections through networking, receive recognition, and foster creativity through art making (Grams, 2010). Students involved in the Winters High School Mural were able to provide insights into their collective experience and create a vital gathering place for their high school community. As Putnam (1993, 2000) implicates, talking to each other and working collaboratively on projects is a powerful tool for young people to share their ideas, experiences, information, and concerns, and helps students to take different approaches to problem-solving in their own communities (as cited in Moore, 2002; Putnam, 1993).

Community art is a tool to make change for the community and for the individuals involved in the project. When you teach collaborative community art, there is the creation of more than just the art itself. Lives are changed because people have become empowered through the process. Students developed relationships, skills, and ability. Here are a few quotes from the students involved in this mural project about how art has impacted their lives: “Art has changed how i visualize the world. It made me see things in so many different ways and changed my opinions on stuff.” “It made me take more risks.” “It has saved my life in many ways.” “It gives me a way to express myself.”

A. My Standpoint and Background

I am interested in seeing art presented as an essential tool for community development and empowerment, with creative thinking as the foundation of learning, benefiting both individuals and communities. I believe we are all artists. Being able to produce art takes our innate creativity and imagination and combines it with learned skill and confidence—artists gain confidence through building skills, including the skill of learning to face things fearlessly. Art is an inspiring practice that can truly transform the lives of youth and also of adults. Students have the opportunity to empower themselves to make powerful, positive changes for their futures by creating beautiful and meaningful places in their communities. Through the transformation of space and creation of place, lives can be transformed. Murals create a gathering place and tell a story that is rooted in common inspirations. Art and creativity is a way to grow, explore, and experiment for high school students.

I feel passionate about youth organizing and positive youth development, because I know young people need amazing mentors in their lives. As a young person, I relied on opportunities outside of school as a means to flourish and express myself creatively. The mentorship I received from teachers and community members helped me cope with life as an adolescent. From a very young age, I developed an unstoppable imaginative power that helped me learn to tap into the creativity within.

Young people need mentors who can see them for something deeper than face value. Young people face real problems and need real guidance and opportunity. They need to be taken seriously and their opinions need to be valued. My own work with youths has shown me that young people are highly capable and have the ability to have a high level of self-efficacy. In order to utilize this potential, they need strong and clear expectations, and high levels of responsibility and accountability.

The way I came to this project stemmed from wanting to give youth a creative outlet, understanding the power of positive role models and new ways of thinking. I wanted to be able to create a program that responded to the need for empowering youth development and organizing, and that provided a safe place for youths to “hang out” while gaining life-changing skills and experience. I wanted to combine my background in fine art with my community development skills to create transformative public art projects with communities.

Before the Winters High School Mural Project, I was lucky enough to help lead another collaborative community placemaking project. I worked together with another artist and

community developer, Katie Fitzmahan, to spearhead a community mural project at a local preschool. Katie and I wanted to incorporate a community participation approach in the mural making process, and we found several ways to involve the community. We held community painting days and had families submit their own family flag to be incorporated into the mural. We also had all of the parents of preschool children vote on their favorite mural design and give us comments and feedback on the proposed designs. Katie and I took the comments into account and were able to incorporate the most favored elements of all three designs into our final design proposal. We went through an approval process and had the garden committee approve our final design.

I had a revelatory moment while painting the mural and leading over thirty community members in a fun community work day—I realized that this was exactly where I was meant to be, that this place, this sacred ground of communal creating, was where I could do my absolute best work. I had found my calling, my place in the world where my strengths could be utilized and I could grow and help others. Community mural making gives me the opportunity to use my greatest strengths which are my visionary creativity and imagination and also my natural leadership ability and my desire to create social change.

When I began to conceptualize my next project, which would become the Winters Mural Project, I knew I wanted to build my skills in leading community murals, and wanted to incorporate an even higher level of participation from the community the mural would belong to. I knew I wanted to work with young people who were old enough to be fully engaged in the mural

making process and who would be capable of creating a large mural that met high standards for the visual arts.

I started asking around for insiders in local high schools, but my leads in my local community of Davis were all ending up short. Then one day while I was working at Davis Art Center, one of the art teachers I knew mentioned that she was a high school art teacher, and I instantly thought it would be a potential match. I talked to this art teacher, Kate Humphrey, and told her that I was looking for a high school to do a mural at, but that I wanted to involve the students in every aspect of the mural creation, which was a huge project and would take several months. One other thing was that this needed to get started within the next couple of months because it would serve as my thesis project—we didn't have time to wait to get started. Kate said, "We need a mural! Our space is really ugly!" I assured her that we could beautify the space through the transformative power of murals. I made arrangements to take measurements of the entire building in detail, and noted any potential areas where a mural would work. I then put together a project proposal, and sent it to the principal and Kate. We scheduled a meeting where I presented the project proposal, and the principal was on board with the project and took it to the school system level to get final approval. Once the mural project got approved with the school board, I got started immediately with introducing the project to the students.

B. Contextualization within Current Literature

The literature indicates that community art is a powerful tool for youth engagement, and that murals involving youth have the power to teach skills and history (Conrad, 1995). In Elizabeth

Garber's (2006) article, *Why Teach Public Art? A High School Primer*, findings show that public art projects motivate students and engage them in meaningful learning experiences. Community art gives students hands-on experiences, helps at-risk youth develop positive behaviors, increases their self-esteem, and provides them with a sense of ownership of the project (Garber, 2006).

Judy Baca (2009) speaks of the power of murals in Los Angeles in her article *Public Memory*, stating, "Sites of public memory were created by hundreds of artists and thousands of community members and youth, and these sites creatively solved myriad problems in blighted neighborhoods" (Baca, 2009, p. 29). The literature on community-based public art emphasizes an important balance of control and structure with playfulness and unpredictability (Baeumler, 1998).

Public works of art are a form of discourse, helping communities communicate and work toward empowerment and unity (Buffington, 2007; Prigoff, 2005). Public art has the ability to address key community concerns such as urban sprawl, lack of visual identity, crime, poverty, race relations, and the underestimation of the benefits of public art (Nikitin, 2000). Successful creative placemaking crosses boundaries to act as a catalyst that can address social, cultural, and economic issues. It is an approach that invites artists and communities to work together as a cooperative team (Stephens, 2006). Public art has far-reaching ability to engage communities, even with very little support money (Berk, 2001).

I researched several case studies of similar projects to get background information on community driven art as a catalyst to empowerment for youths, and for communities in general. The overarching findings from these studies indicate that young people who are intimately involved

in community mural projects experience great joy through the process, and more importantly, they gain social capital and become empowered. Student empowerment is directly related to holding important roles in the project. When young people are involved in the decision making and design processes, they gain skills, build relationships, and create meaningful places that can lead to community change in and of themselves.

Similar studies in the field indicate that there is a great need for evaluation of community art (Craig, 2002). There is little first-hand feedback from participants that is published on the topic, rather, most evaluation is done through participant observation and phenomenological study. With this need mind, one aim of this thesis is to provide evidence of youth empowerment through direct student feedback, solicited through surveys and interviews. I aim to provide a detailed case study that will not only repeat the success of similar projects, but will add a thoroughly researched example illustrating how students become empowered through participating in community art. I candidly offer recommendations for future projects so that others who would like to lead community art projects have a resource guide for empowering community members through art making.

One similar case study to the Winters High School Mural Project, *The Diversity Mural Project: A Partnership between the University and the Community*, illustrated youth empowerment through community muralism by providing local teens with the opportunity to work in a diverse group to design and paint a mural that represented diversity. Research findings indicated that participants enjoyed meeting people different from themselves, and the experience of working together as a team (Chin-Newman, Min, & Fleming, 2011).

Another case study, Janelle Turk's (2012) *Collaboration, Inclusion, and Empowerment: A Life Skills Mural*, uses action research, phenomenological study, participant observation, and interviews to illustrate how youth are empowered through active responsibility and input on a collaborative community mural at their school (Turk, 2012). The outcomes of the mural are similar to those of the Winters High School Mural Project in that what was created was a collaborative mural, social transformation, and transformation of space. Turk's mural project was based on authentic instructional practices in that it engaged students in higher-level thinking, active inquiry, and real-life problem solving. In this study, student interactions took a completely different approach than what the researcher often saw in the regular classroom, and I observed this with student interactions on the Winters Mural Project as well. Similarly, in this case study, students gained an understanding of what it takes to work on a large-scale project over an extended period of time and while working in a group. As Turk states,

When students play an active role in making important decisions, especially in an inclusive environment, they are given the chance to develop self-esteem, empathy, and dependability. These values foster social justice, rendering art education a very powerful part of the K-12 experience in American public education (Turk, 2012, p. 53).

The community action research case study, *Reconstructing a Community, Reclaiming a Playground: A Participatory Action Research Study*, illuminates how the development of community art with a strong collective identity can be a catalyst for social change and inform community-based art education. In this study, participants increasingly realized their own ability

to affect change in their community to improve the landscape through art, and the community art curriculum contributed to social change in the neighborhood (Hutzel, 2007). I used information from this study in developing a mural curriculum that sought to connect students to their collective identity as a community through shared inspirations.

The power of collaborating across the community to raise awareness about public art is referenced in "*Panorama Jamma!*" which presents a case study where collaboration on a public mural design for railroad cars was fostered between three counties. Art teachers in middle and high schools presented the idea and theme to their students, and student designs that best represented the city of Fayetteville were combined into the finalized designs (Thomas, 2009). Another case study I referenced, *Negotiating to Engagement: Creating an Art Curriculum with Eighth-Graders*, recommended strategies for involving decision making and student-designed projects as a tool for arts engagement and ownership (Pennisi, 2013).

C. Brief Project Description

The aim of the Winters High School Mural Project was for it to be a student-driven, student designed, and student produced project, with my collaboration as a UC Davis Community Development graduate student and visiting artist, who led and facilitated the creative process from design inception to mural completion. I set out to create a participatory community mural at Winters High School with 80-110 high school art students. I developed two **research questions** for the project, which were as follows: **1. How are individuals and communities affected by participating in public art making? Are they empowered? By what means?**

2. What are recommended practices for community empowerment through public art

making? The research project involved a large scale community mural project that incorporated opportunities for relationship building, mentorship, teamwork, leadership, and student ownership of ideas, concepts, design, and the mural itself. I wanted to fully engage the students in participating from the conception of the design to the finalization of the painting. I wanted to then evaluate the mural making process and outcomes. The desired outcome of the mural was to create social change in the lives of the youth and other community members involved.

My theory is that youth will be empowered through the process of creating collaborative large-scale art that transforms space. Empowerment has two inter-related dimensions: resources and agency (Pigg, 2002). In *Art to Bring About Change: The Work of Tyree Guyton*, Melanie L. Buffington (2007) found, “Public works of art are a form of discourse and open conversations and dialogue. Such works of art can help communities work toward unity and empowerment” (Buffington, 2007, p. 25). Public art can help support and even generate community empowerment by honestly and respectfully depicting a wide range of people's experiences. When we listen to others' experiences we begin to understand why we should sit down together and discuss our community life (McCoy, 1997).

The Winters High School Mural project set out to meet and exceed California standards for the visual arts. I wanted to have a high level of artistic integrity in the design, because the product of the artwork is important. It is a visual reflection of a collective identity and communal experience, so it needs to be reflective of professionalism and high standards (Rice, 1999). It is important that the art created meets certain standards of artistic integrity because it not only

makes it a better learning experience, but the students also have more pride and sense of accomplishment when the finished piece is created with high aesthetic standards. Students need to be invested in the outcome of the mural. Support for this idea is illustrated in the following quote from Elizabeth Garber's (2006) article, *Why Teach Public Art? A High School Primer*:

Public art offers insights into many dimensions of art beyond the expression of self, the art becomes something larger than the individual and self-expression. Public art in high schools motivates students, engages them in meaningful learning experiences, gives students hand-on experiences, increases their self-esteem, and provides them with a sense of ownership of the created space (Garber, 2006, p. 29).

This project was made possible through a partnership with Winters Joint Unified School District and Winters High School Art Teacher, Kate Humphrey, and myself, a UC Davis graduate student in Community Development with a BA in Studio Art. Students had many choices of how to participate in the mural making process, including mural design team, photo documentation, project planning, team leadership, fundraising, contributing themes and ideas, painting, drawing, and participating in evaluation. I used the *Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools* as a guideline when I was building the curriculum for the mural project. Many of the key learning areas from the mural project exemplify these standards at the "Advanced" level for grades nine through twelve. (See *Appendix F* for a list of the specific standards met or exceeded by the project).

Students learned how to design a mural, how to paint on a large scale non-traditional surface, how to work in collaboration on a large-scale project, and basic point and shoot photography skills including photo composition. The design was created collaboratively with high school students and myself, an artist and community facilitator. Student photography, drawings, and words were used to aid in idea sharing and theme determination. Diane Grams (2010) supports the theory of learning through public participatory art in *Producing Local Color: Art Networks in Ethnic Chicago*, where she states, “Localized public art, historic places, and cultural facilities function to stake out urban space by providing public evidence of the shared values and beliefs found within a local place” (Grams, 2010, p. 188). Youths explored the history of mural making and sought inspiration from viewing current and past mural projects and public art. Students had the opportunity to share their stories and ideas to create the themes of the mural. Students had a high level of involvement and were held accountable for the project outcomes.

The project was approached open-endedly with the mural representing the students’ voices. My objective for involving the students at such an intimate level with the project, was to empower them through this sharing and self-expression. The idea of everyone’s voice being heard and expressed as a source of empowerment is supported in the literature on youth empowerment through art (Baeumler, 1998). It is important to give people the opportunity, hopefully in a comfortable environment, to learn about each other (Lee, 2004).

In order to introduce the project and engage in group development, I showed all students a PowerPoint of what I do as a muralist and community developer, and showed them many examples of how spaces were transformed through various types of murals. I had each student

take an assessment survey of the skills they had and the skills they wished to develop. They also were able to select their team preferences. Students could opt to take leadership roles and be involved in team training. I assigned students to teams based on the answers to their intake surveys. I coded the answers for what skills the students wanted to develop, and I cross referenced the skill sets with the teams they selected as their top choices, in order to give everyone the greatest opportunity possible to both develop the skills they wanted to learn, and give them a team they preferred as a top choice. I wanted each student to help paint the mural while also expecting them to fulfill another aspect of the mural planning process by being assigned to a team. This process allowed the students to take on responsibility for a part of the project they selected.

Next, students submitted ideas about what inspires them most and designed mural ideas on a template of the building. The process of sharing ideas, visions, hopes, and dreams created a bond that seldom is incorporated in a high school curriculum. This hands-on engagement of students sharing their design inspirations got the youths out of their comfort zone—literally out of the seats they were assigned, with tables moved around and the students facing each other in a circle, possibly for the first time. The relationship changes in a circle—the power dynamics shift and everyone becomes equal. This equal playing ground allowed the students to feel more confident about sharing their ideas. We did activities as a whole class to choose what inspirations to move forward to the mural design team. We had group discussions and design charrettes to determine what themes emerged and how a collective voice could be represented through imagery.

I met with each team to discuss the duties and timeline for that team, and to establish team captains. I set aside the first few days to work with the site repair people, and we got the repairs done quickly. I met with the teams each time I came to the school, and got them organized and prepared to conquer their assigned tasks. Each team had a leader, and there was a repeat of the teams in each of four classes.

The mural design team started working with inspirations and brainstorming ideas in writing and through drawing. By collaborating in design, we were able to bring in complex ideas and graphics and meld them into one design. Four periods of design teams each received all the inspirations and design templates to work with and start a process of brainstorming designs based on the idea of a collective voice being visually represented. It was important for the design teams to think beyond their own needs and desires and try to design something that spoke of the shared ideas and experiences of the community of youths. It was a difficult and strained process to communicate across class periods. The students wrote each other design notations and met during lunch to represent their design teams to come to a finalized collaborative design between the four design teams. After coming to a finalized design for the mural, we divided the design into four sections and made each team responsible for drawing one section, which allowed all design team students to work on the final design drawing.

Meanwhile, I led the site repair team to repair the minimal damage to the site. They filled cracks, primed, and painted all fix-ups, and they taped off the windows and detail areas preparing them to be painted. Repairs were done with spackle paste and stucco mix at minimal cost.

Students were also involved in some coordination for fundraisers, taking photos, sorting and setting up materials, and learning important safety precautions.

Design teams selected the mural colors and we held two fundraisers at local restaurants to gain funding for the mural. I also sought and received a Henry A. Jastro Graduate Research Award from UC Davis. I worked with students to grid the wall and transfer the design section by section. We had to use the mechanical lift to draw on the top areas of the mural. We divided the mural into sections and set goals for each period for an area of the mural to be transferred on. Because we were using a mechanical lift to access the top areas of the mural, and we needed to conserve power, we were gridding the mural section by section with the lift, and drawing the design on the wall right after gridding in the same section. It took two days to transfer the whole design coloring-book-style onto the wall. We were now ready to start painting. Unfortunately, the lift we were using stopped working and we needed to find another way to access the top of the mural.

Students started by painting the mountain range, layer by layer. This was a large area and required many layers for the effect the students wanted, so it was a great starting foundation. With murals, you have to start somewhere, so, it is a good idea to build a foundation that the rest of the mural can be built upon. Once we laid the foundation of the mountain range, we were still waiting for a solution to reaching the upper half of the mural. We detailed the entire bottom portion of the mural before we even started the top half, and luckily for us, the small community of Winters supported our project. We asked for a mechanical lift from the local nut-picking farm and factory, and the owner of the business gladly let us borrow a mechanical lift, free of charge,

for a number of weeks, in order to complete the mural. By this time, we needed to focus almost all of our attention on the top half of the mural, and the mechanical lift could only hold three people, and only I could operate it. One of the students told me that her father was a construction contractor and had a scissor lift that we might be able to borrow. She made the arrangements to have her father drop off and pick up the lift, and he allowed students to operate it, and this was instrumental in our ability to accomplish the finished mural. This way, six people could be painting the top portion of the mural at any one time. The mural would not have been possible without the generous help and trust of the local community.

For most of the painting days I was able to be there for the entire day, but on the days that I was not available to come to the site, the students took it upon themselves to take out all the materials and lead the mural painting process themselves. Students were left in charge of certain areas of the mural, and they were instructed on the right colors to use in which sections. Students then led their teams to paint the mural according to our plan, acting as peer trainers and leaders. It was quite remarkable how well the students did when I was not there, how they took so much responsibility and made sure to create with a thoughtful and careful process. This demonstrated that the students felt ownership of the mural. They were empowered with the knowledge imparted on them to take on a project and go full force ahead, when this was a completely new experience for virtually every student involved.

We worked extremely hard to complete all the painting in only three weeks. Because we were on a time crunch, we had students painting on the mural every school day for the entire three weeks. Once the mural was finished, we held a commemoration event to honor the completion

of the mural. This event was attended by former Winters mayor, administrators and teachers at the school, students, parents, and the community of Winters. Finally, students took a post-project survey to share their experiences with me and one student participated in an interview about the project.

Tools for student engagement and participation included design charrettes to collaboratively design the mural, story sharing in the design process, working collaboratively on teams with various responsibilities, leadership development opportunities, peer trainer opportunities, problem solving, and being involved in decision making processes. The outcome of the project created a beautiful mural on the entrance side of the school art building. It also empowered students through the participatory process with a multitude of empowerment tools. The forms of empowerment obtained by students will be detailed in the findings section of this paper. *(See Appendices A, B and C, Lesson Plans 1, 2, and 3 for detailed lesson plans. See Appendix D for team assignments and duties).*

II. Methods

As part of my Qualitative Research Methods in Geography course at UC Davis, I researched many different qualitative methods and found the Case Study Method to be the best fit for the research project I wanted to engage in. I decided which evaluative tools I would use to create a case study and spent six weeks developing a research design around doing a community mural with high school students. While I was developing my research protocol, I was actively seeking a community collaborator to help me find a mural site and a group of high school students to

work with, and I found a collaborator and partner in Kate Humphrey, the art teacher at Winters High.

The participants were selected through the partnership fostered between Winters High School, Kate, and myself. At the time, Kate was teaching six high school art classes, totaling 110 students. I wanted to involve as many students as possible, while still allowing for each student to be meaningfully engaged. Together, Kate and I decided that I would work with the four two-dimensional design classes, which together consisted of 85 students.

I used a case study methodology to evaluate the process and outcomes of this participatory community mural project at Winters High School. I used several tools to engage the students in the project so that they gained a variety of skills through participating in both project planning and painting the mural. Included in the Case Study Method were group development, team building, participant observations, process tracking through journaling and project planning documents, photograph analysis, and evaluation of participant interviews and pre- and post-participation surveys taken by all willing participants (Clifford, French, & Valentine 2010; Creswell, 2013).

All students present in class on the day of the project introduction took a project assessment survey, where they selected teams and roles for the project. There were a total of 82 students who took the initial assessment survey, which was administered via paper after students saw a PowerPoint presentation introducing the project. I hand coded the surveys and created a database in Microsoft Excel that enabled me to cross reference students' desired skill building

areas, their present strengths, and their top choices for teams. Everyone was able to have their first or second choice team. I placed students together who would offer a variety of skills to their teams, and each team was assigned a captain who would keep their team motivated.

Because there was a second project happening simultaneously, an altered book project that Kate was leading, we allowed students to choose not to participate if they did not want to, and one or two students in each class did choose to opt out of most mural related activities. The students who opted out of the mural process did however participate in some of the preliminary project stages such as the introduction to the project, taking the assessment survey, and participating in the formal lesson plans surrounding story-telling, inspiration and idea sharing, and design charrettes. Students who opted out of the mural process did not participate on planning teams or mural painting. Based on standards for unbiased research, I wanted the students to have the option to opt out of taking surveys and/or of participating (Creswell, 2013). However, if we had only one project instead of two, we would have needed to reconsider the opt-out option.

Seventy-nine of the 85 participants took the post-project survey, which was administered via an online survey host. Kate and I decided together to have the students take the final survey online because the adolescent students respond well and are comfortable with technology, and it would be easy to administer and to analyze. The students all took the survey on school computers in the art classroom and at the school library during the last day of school, just days after the mural was completed. Everyone in periods one-four took the survey who was present in the class that day. We did give students the option to opt out of being surveyed, but no one opted out. Those who took the survey included the range of students from those who participated entirely to those

who participated somewhat, to the few students who opted out of most or all of the process. The large majority of students were engaged in painting and on planning teams, while a few students in every class did either planning or painting, but not both.

With the vast majority of participants taking the post-project survey, the percentages and comments are a good reflection of students' actual experiences. The online survey host made analysis easy, as it created charts and percentages from all non-textual answers. I analyzed and coded the student survey comments to see what was repeated most and which comments were representative of popular opinion or were especially poignant. I selected student quotes and survey data points that represented the project with the most clarity to include in this paper.

Throughout the project, I took extensive notes that reflected upon the project, process, and research. At the end of each day spent at the mural site, I wrote in my field journal about my project reflections and participant observations. After the project was completed, I studied and analyzed all of my participant observation entries to see what patterns emerged. I created a list of key findings based on reading all student comments from the post-participation survey, and analyzing the percentages of students engaged in the process. I combined these findings with my analysis of the project, participant observations, and analysis of project photographs taken by students. Once I had established that the large majority of students were empowered through participating on this project, I formulated the key factors that influenced the empowerment experienced by participants. Through this analysis, I created a list of recommendations for future projects, and I went through my journal entries and participant observations and coded them into categories supporting my key findings.

Only one student wanted to participate in a post-project interview, which I largely believe was because the timing of the project end was right when school let out for the summer. The interview was conducted via email, where I emailed five questions to the interviewee, and she emailed me back her answers. She was given a \$10 gift certificate to a local business in Winters for her willing participation. With only one interviewee, the interview responses will obviously be biased. The student who was interviewed was deeply connected with the project—she helped design it and was a lead painter and team captain. However, her interview answers do align with many of the comments from the post-project surveys, so I still included her answers in my analysis, coding them to support the key findings.

The project length was eleven weeks, from measuring the site and submitting a proposal to completing and commemorating the mural. We spent one week introducing the project and selecting teams, several weeks in group development and design creation, and one week doing site repairs and gathering materials. This timeline only allowed for three weeks to complete all the painting. With the mural being 735 square feet, this was quite a rushed time frame, especially considering that we had to use mechanical lifts to access half of the mural surface. I would recommend no less than six weeks to complete the painting portion of the mural. In addition to the eleven weeks on the project, I spent three weeks analyzing the data and six weeks writing.

III. Key Findings

The way individuals and communities are affected by participating in public art making are multifaceted and complex. It is important to provide an experience in which all people involved can be critically engaged, which is the space in which empowerment happens. Students' responses to the mural experience indicate that there is positive personal development from participating in the collaborative mural project. The students' feedback indicates skill development, confidence building, and leadership experience that has empowered them. Their comments indicate that they felt involved in decision making processes. The dimension of power underlies the progression from the traditional approach to change to the transformative vision that leads to empowerment (Aigner, Raymond, & Smidt, 2002). The post-project survey indicates that 74% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that creating the mural was a "positive experience" for them. Based on the survey data, a significant majority were empowered through participation on the project. Students are empowered through claiming and creating their own cultural space (Griswold, 2007).

I found that the youths involved were empowered through the process of community mural making and creative placemaking. The students' empowerment emerged in seven key forms, which include the following: **1. Building relationships through collaboration, 2. Building self-esteem through accomplishment, 3. Leadership opportunities, 4. Building skills, 5. Creation of a meaningful place, 6. A sense of project ownership through decision making, and 7. High levels of responsibility and accountability.** In this section, I will detail these seven forms of empowerment illustrated through student stories. These stories emerge from

participant observations, photo analysis, project analysis, and analysis of student feedback from surveys and one interview. I will incorporate student comments to validate the empowering nature of the collaborative artistic process.

The following student survey comments indicate deep satisfaction with the project:

“everything went well, we had alot (sic) of fun making this hopefully next year we could do the whole building.” “This was a really great project and i hope to do something similiar (sic) in the future.” “Very fun experciance (sic) and id (sic) like to do it again.” “i loved it.” “i realy (sic) liked working on the mural.” “I would love to make more murals.” “Fun.” “It was cool.” “Awesomeness.” “it was worth it.”

A. Forms of Youth Empowerment through Community Art

1. Building relationships through collaboration

Through the Winters High School Mural Project, youths were empowered from gaining social capital in the form of building relationships through collaboration, teamwork, mentorship, and community participation. In his article, *Painting Material Culture: Community Art Research in Saginaw, Michigan*, Michael Mosher (2012) says, “A community mural is democratic politics in the best sense of the word, a process of incorporation of many voices, addressing multiple agendas and needs so everyone benefits” (Mosher, 2012, p. 44).

Of the participating youths, 77% indicated that they enjoyed working with others on this project, while 74% agreed or strongly agreed they would like to work with others on a project in the future, and 56% agreed or strongly agreed they would be more likely to participate in a community project in the future. One of the many roles I played was as a mentor to the youths. Many students asked me questions about being an artist and a college student. One female student confided in me and asked me for advice. She said she looked to me as a mentor. As a community artist working with youths, it is important to always be in the role of mentor and leader. Of the students surveyed, 62% agreed or strongly agreed that they liked having a mural artist as a mentor.

Students indicate that they enjoyed the collaborative aspect of the mural making experience. A selection of their survey quotes about what their favorite part of the mural making process was is as follows: "Painting and working together." "Coming up with the design and being able to incorporate (sic) everyone's (sic) thought and ideas." "Seeing it come together!" When asked what the most unique or special aspect of the mural making process was, students indicated, "Talking about ideas," "Communicating with others," "That we all did something," "Collaborating ideas," and "Everybody had a part." Additional student comments about working together included, "it was great working with a small group on the last day, even though it was a challenge with the little time we had." "It was a great experience that I will remember doing in high school." "It was fun experience, and I had fun working together with my art class."

2. Building self-esteem through accomplishment

Youths were empowered through building self-esteem, which resulted from the students having tremendous pride for their accomplishment of the completed mural, and from having an important part in the process. I found that high school students for the most part are shy and unsure of speaking up or coming forward. Providing an example of excellent leadership offers model behavior that students look up to. They need to be nudged, because they grow when they are out of their comfort zone, and this project took them out of their normal routines.

One deliberative moment for me was the shock followed by satisfaction resounding in the room when one student asked what the mural was going to be of, and I replied that it was going to be a student created design. The students were so happy and satisfied that they would be given the trust and responsibility of designing the mural. Students felt that they could do something meaningful and important, and that their opinion does matter.

One female student involved in the project seemed really shy at first, but by the end of the project she was expressing herself more. One student said that “seeing everyone work together to create something great” was the most special aspect of the mural.

3. Leadership opportunities

Youths were empowered through participating in leadership opportunities. Developing leadership among community members is crucial to community organizing, and also important

to passing on the legacy of engagement to youth (Bobo, Kendall, & Max, 1996). There were quite a few young people who took on leadership roles and would even make suggestions for specific ways they could help. A few students acted as set up or clean-up crews, and some students would be my personal assistants and just be ready to do anything I asked them to do. This was great because we utilized so many students and gave them important roles. I saw so many students develop leadership roles, give each other accountability, and step up to make the project happen.

One student took a role as a team leader and assistant. He took on extra responsibilities and treated it like a job. He had finished his book project and was able to receive extra credit for helping me. Another student took initiative to ensure that all the pieces were in place and helped initiate the idea of where to have a fundraiser. It was her and her teams' idea and suggestion of where we should hold the event. Another leadership example is when one student asked her dad if we could use a mechanical lift, and he let us borrow it and allowed students to operate it. This was instrumental in the timely and successful completion of the mural. The student led the process of getting approvals and liability waivers, as well as making arrangements to have the machine delivered, picked up, and secured nightly. On the survey, 57% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they would be more likely to participate in a leadership role in the future after participating in the project.

When asked if the mural experience enhanced her leadership potential, the student interviewed wrote,

A piece of knowledge I acquired about my leadership was the ability to release control. I am the person who has to always be in charge so that people don't mess things up, I learned through the mural project to relinquish some of this control, that others are competent and capable, just as I am.

4. Building skills

Youths were empowered through gaining social capital from building skills and participating in a complex process. Murals involving youth have the power to teach skills and history (Conrad, 1995). Students had many choices of how to participate in the mural making process, including mural design team, photo documentation, project planning, team leadership, fundraising, contributing themes and ideas, painting, drawing, and participating in evaluation. Students learned how to design a mural, how to paint on a large scale non-traditional surface, how to work in collaboration on a large-scale project, and basic point and shoot photography skills including photo composition. Students explored the history of mural making and sought inspiration from viewing current and past mural projects and public art.

The one female student interviewed said,

I learned that when looking at a large task in life it is simpler to break it down into parts, making the whole much more manageable and less daunting. This

new knowledge will help me greatly not only in art but in future challenges and adversities I am forced to tackle in life.

5. Creation of a meaningful place

By creating a meaningful place through the expression of a shared identity and experience, youths were empowered. Students were able to create life-long memories and leave a legacy of what was important to them. Through creative placemaking, students added vibrancy to a place that mattered to them. In their article, *Neighborhood Change and Urban Policy*, Kenneth Temkin and William Rohe (1996) found, “Social mobility and spatial mobility are inherently intertwined” (Temkin, & Rohe, 1996, p. 160). This emerged in our project in that the mural making process not only created a special and sacred place for the students, it allowed them to explore new frontiers in socialization.

Mural making teaches skills and allows the community to leave a legacy of shared understanding and common vision. Youths were able to express what matters to them and let that become public knowledge. The youth’s voices became publicized, and were made vulnerable to being seen and heard. Young people are not accustomed to their opinions and stories being recognized and acknowledged, and this project attempted to shed light on youth voices and ideas, and to validate those as important and worthy of being told through a mural. This is a case where the story was a collective of shared ideas and inspirations. Students had recognition, hope and belief and learned to set goals that are extremely challenging.

One student would use self-deprecating language to show that he didn't believe much in himself and his abilities. He was very thankful that I even let him paint and that I let him write his name. He was able to have his self-esteem lifted by being allowed to paint while on the mechanical lift, and being able to write his name in the mural.

Student survey and interview quotes about the importance of sharing their ideas and creating place included the following:

"I felt empowered to know I helped make something so great, and in collaboration with my schoolmates!" "This was a great project inspiring. Wish it could happen more around our community. Murals add a beautiful touch of art and life to blank canvases." "Great experience, definately (sic) something i will tell/show my kids." "I think the planning and designing was a special aspect because there were so many great ideas and desings (sic) we could have used."

When asked what was special or unique about the project, students said, "seeing our thoughts being included in the mural," "being able to put personal material in the mural," and "aggreing (sic) on something that everybody will like."

Student surveys also indicated that 71% agreed or strongly agreed that they feel the mural has created a place in front of the art building. Students who agreed or strongly agreed that they think they will return to the mural in the future were 68%, while 72% agreed or strongly agreed

that the mural leaves a legacy of their classes, and 67% agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to paint another mural in the future.

This concept is supported in Judy Baca's (2009) *Public Memory*, where she says,

Growing directly out of the hopes, dreams, and desires of the surrounding population, community-driven public art gives a voice to those who inspire it and provides a breath to all those who pass it as it speaks from the streets (Baca, 2009, p. 29).

6. A sense of project ownership through decision making

Youths were empowered through gaining a sense of project ownership. Ownership of the project was achieved through students participating in planning and decision making. One way we broke up the project was to have certain teams be in charge of specific areas of the mural. Each team captain was responsible to encourage and motivate his or her team, and to act as a peer trainer. Many students took ownership of certain areas of the mural or of certain aspects of planning. For example, one student took ownership of the fundraiser in planning the logistics. She acted as party hostess and spread the word about the fundraiser. Because the students felt the project was their own and the success of the project depended on them, they have a sense of ownership of the mural.

One student took charge of painting the tree. Sometimes this would get in the way of production so I compromised with her and had other students do the background and she painted the details.

Another student took ownership of painting the warrior head. She needed me to be there at all times to help assure her and help guide the process of translating the warrior from a drawing on paper into a larger than life eight-foot face. One student took ownership of painting the word “Art” on the mural, and she wanted to have creative oversight of that part. Each of these examples illustrates how students took initiative and took control of the project. Some student survey quotes in response to the question, “What was your favorite part of the mural making process?” were, “I like planning how it was going to look,” and “Organizing it.”

One part of the mural did not turn out as planned, but students took it upon themselves to change it, illustrating they felt ownership of the mural and had the skills and initiative to change it. It was difficult to control all the students and many of them had differing opinions from each other so it was hard to keep everyone happy. There was a big issue with the final product of the wind, because that part of the mural was done hastily and got completely out of control with students signing their names. The wind was not originally planned to have student names written in it, but ended up with a lot of students signing their names who were not intimately involved in the entire mural process—they were from another class and were just helping us on the last days of mural painting, when we were trying to make up time lost from not having equipment to lift us high enough to paint the top of the mural.

Students wrote their names in the wind which caused disapproval from a lot of the students who worked hard to perfect the mural and come up with a meaningful design. At the time of the mural completion, school was ending in just a couple of days; we had planned the commemoration event for the mural, and we didn’t have the time or ability to change it. Many

students were unhappy about the result of the wind on the mural. One student survey comment that exemplifies the student opinion about the wind was, “I do not like all the names written in the swirls. It takes away from the connection with the message the mural TRIED to give.”

Students really were invested in the project and they took it upon themselves, with the assistance of their teacher, to paint over the wind and fix the areas that had huge signatures on them. This action they took to change the mural themselves and make it how they wanted it, shows that the students took pride in the mural, from the design to the execution, and when they weren’t happy with the result, they had the leadership ability, the passion, and the skills to make change happen.

7. High levels of responsibility and accountability

Youths were empowered through having high levels of responsibility and expectation placed on them, and for being accountable for the process and final product. Only when students have a high stake and high responsibility, can they build skills to become agents of change. Students are empowered, but their level of involvement in the project and their direct involvement with decision making are intrinsically connected to the level of empowerment obtained. Those students who opted out of the process or only took part in some of the painting were not empowered by the project to the extent that the students were who were deeply engaged in the decision making and planning processes for the project. Certain students relished in the responsibility of operating the mechanical lift. As one student said in the post-project survey, “i like driving the fork left (sic).”

One of the things I tried hardest to convey was that I believed in the students. An important aspect of youth development is a high level of responsibility and expectation. The students being entrusted with the design and painting of the mural led them to initiate and paint themselves on a few days without my guidance, which really helped the process. The student interviewed said, “I did like the ability to divvy up the task and have my own area to be in charge of and work on. This empowered me and made me feel more important.”

B. Insights for Recommended Practices

1. Prepare for delays.

We had a lot of issues trying to use a bad piece of equipment which took up a lot of time and was a hassle. I recommend that you plan for things that may delay the project like equipment failure and bad weather.

2. Have a small group that can be fully engaged together.

I recommend that you have all students engaged fully in the mural-making process at once. Students who are not doing painting or prepping can be working on fundraising or outreach campaigns. Unfortunately, some students in this project were not fully engaged because we tried to involve too many students at once. When working with such a large number of students, there is naturally a loss of interest and engagement for some of them, which is why it is very important

to have a group of students small enough to fully engage them, and also to have at least two adult leaders focused on the project.

For mural design, everyone has to be in the room together. We had problems with communication across classes, and the design team had to come in during lunch in order to discuss and finalize the design. Some of the students opted out of the process, while others were able to shy away from working on the mural. Because of this, I recommend working with a small group of students, for example, one high school class of 25 students, with two adult leaders.

A great way to involve students is to have them be the photographers of the process in action. This requires some hands-on training with the students who will be taking photos—they don't want to be left with a blank slate as many have not been exposed to much photography instruction hitherto.

3. Spend time on group development.

Group development is critical to build trust within the group of students you are working with, and to develop a relationship with the students as the researcher or visiting artist.

4. Develop many ways for the community to participate.

It is important to have a balance between artistic leadership from the artist, versus independent expression from the participants. You want a guided experience, where creativity is able to blossom through increased confidence, which is encouraged by artist-led skill building and personal achievement. Build tools for empowerment into the curriculum by involving students in leadership and decision making roles.

In *Making Public Art Work*, Cynthia Abramson Nikitin (2000) provides sound insights on participation and collaboration:

Ultimately, public art projects will be most effective when they are part of a holistic, multidisciplinary approach to enlivening a city, neighborhood, or downtown and are produced in collaboration with the people for whom they are meant. Each public art endeavor should be connected to larger community building or citywide goals (Nikitin, 2000, p. 49).

5. Create a place that transforms the space and reflects the story of the people and the place.

Transform the space and invigorate the place. Choose something ugly and revitalize it. Community created art should create a space that engages the audience. If the mural is planned to be permanent, consider the timelessness of the design. Strive for unity and cohesion in design when working with diverse communities (Conrad, 1995).

6. Have two leaders if you are working with more than 15 young people.

I recommend having a team of at least two adult mural leaders so that students get more one on one attention and there is more supervision for higher risk situations like using tall ladders and machine operated lifts. Kate Humphrey and I decided to divide each class in half where I would work with one half of the class and she would work with the other. Kate had a project planned for the curriculum, an altered book project, and we decided to run the two projects side by side in order to be able to manage the students and have enough space for both projects. Looking back, I would have done this differently and had more collaboration with Kate. If we had partnered together more on the mural project, and had that as the graded project, we could have had a team working outside while the other team worked inside the classroom on mural related activities such as planning and publicity. I think our project would have been even more successful if we had worked together on a shared vision rather than two competing projects. One benefit of collaborating together would have been a better ability to guide and supervise the process. Because we were painting the mural at two different height levels, I had to operate the mechanical lift each painting day and could not completely control what was happening on the ground.

7. Have one focused and dedicated project to keep students engaged.

One big challenge for this mural project was that we had two projects happening simultaneously—there was a competition between the two projects and it was sometimes hard to

recruit students to work on the mural. Everyone needs to be fully engaged in the project at once in order to best utilize and capitalize on the available resources.

Working on two simultaneous projects was commonly mentioned as an obstacle to the completion of the mural. Student survey comments about project challenges support this as follows: “During the course of the project, I feel like this would of gone better without it running side by side with the alter book project. Other than that, the mural looks great!” and “i also had to work on my alterd (sic) book.”

8. Have a balance between process and outcome, as they are equally important.

Have a process for ensuring design integrity. Ensure that the final product will be enjoyed and appreciated by a wide audience. In *Making Public Art Work*, Nikitin (2000) illustrates how to create meaningful art projects that engage participants and have a positive impact: “By tapping into a community's intrinsic creativity and establishing a design process that elicits public input early on, some public art projects successfully create artworks and establish an arts presence that has meaning for the public” (Nikitin, 2000, p. 44). Geographers need to shift thought processes from the material to the immaterial, as both are necessary for a more complete, or “truthful” picture of space and place (Södertröm, 2006). The community development process is as important as its products (Green & Haines, 2001). Encourage open communication between the artist(s), students, and school leaders. Sense of personal achievement is tied into appreciation for both the process and outcome. I suggest practitioners employ helpful resources such as

published standards for high school visual arts as a guideline to the project. Ensuring a great outcome will also help in getting collaborators on board with the project.

9. Have guidelines and a project plan but remain flexible throughout the process.

Students need a moderate amount of structure and guidance. They need clear and attainable goals and a method to ensure accountability. You need to have plans, structure to the process, and calendars, but also maintain flexibility in order to take advantage of opportunities or work around delays and obstacles.

While designs do need to remain flexible during the mural painting process, changes to the design should be made with a thoughtful and careful decision process, and not haphazardly in the moment. What may seem like a good idea in the moment may not turn out to be such a good idea when carefully examined for possible outcomes.

One area of this project where flexibility helped us was with the trouble we had with the mechanical lift provided by the school. The lift worked a few times but then stopped working in the middle of our project. We were left with a drawn design on our 16-foot building, and no way to paint it. One half of the mural was drawn out from the top, and the other top half of the drawing was yet to be transferred when our one piece of equipment failed to work. We were on a very tight time budget to complete the painting of the mural, and we had to forge on even though we could not access the top, so we painted the entire bottom of the mural in detail first while we were seeking an alternative solution to reaching the upper areas of the mural.

10. Involve the greater community through various means.

We must create and insert ourselves into partnerships, joint-ventures, and collaborations with others who have real development and programmatic capability. Ask for donations and supplies from local businesses, hold local fundraising activities and events, publicize through local media outlets, and hold a celebratory mural commemoration to honor the participants and raise community awareness about the mural. A clear vision reveals how significant benefits, serving these common interests, can be generated for the community as a whole, as well as its individuals, organizations, and institutions (Capraro, 2004).

It is important to keep in mind that a large scale community mural cannot be done single handedly. This project used community resources including two borrowed mechanical lifts, restaurants for fundraising, catering, teachers, administrators, other students outside of the core mural group, and discounts at local businesses. We relied on all of these resources. The students did most of the painting themselves. They stayed after school, came in during their lunch breaks, and worked across multiple class periods.

11. Have realistic project goals.

Having funding secured for the project ahead of time will help your project run smoothly. However, if you are employing fundraising for the project, plan an extra two to three months for fundraising. It is best to work on outdoor murals in the spring and summer and when the weather is dry but not too hot. I recommend starting small for your first community mural so

that you can hone in on a process that works for you before tackling a very large scale project. Although starting small is ideal, it is even more important to custom fit the project to the environment. The first community mural project I led was 90 feet by 8 feet and I would not have changed that, because it was a perfect fit for the community and the space.

Mosher (2012) supports the idea of grassroots community organizing through public art engagement in his article, *Painting Material Culture: Community Art Research in Saginaw, Michigan*:

Rather than top-down, community art should be bottom-up, grass roots, and ad hoc in its inception, the result of a process that balances various stakeholders' agendas. The artist must compromise, especially with those who will live with the work when the artist is gone from the neighborhood.

Artist(s) and participants decide the shape of content and the appropriate look and feel for the project, which should be one that makes use of the skill of all participants. (In the classroom, this must be turned into a manageable procedure, whose completion is possible in one semester, leading to a dedicatory celebration) (Mosher, 2012, p. 44).

12. Collaborate with local businesses, people, institutions and organizations.

Collaboration is highly encouraged because it gives people the opportunity to be part of the process and gives them more enjoyment of the community-created place. Partnerships between local professional artists, schools, city planning agencies, teachers, students, universities, and

local community members are all possibilities. Collaborating is a great way to have access to more resources such as equipment rentals, supplies, monetary support, and volunteers.

13. Students should have a high level of responsibility and be held accountable.

High stakes or high risk plus high expectations equals high results. I gave students clear expectations and reiterated that the only way the mural would get done was by many students working on it and making it happen.

14. Allow plenty of time for securing project funds, preparing the site, group development, and building relationships.

Allow time for an approval process of the mural site itself and the mural design. I recommend at least 14 weeks to be spent on a large scale community mural project with secured funding. The amount of time needed should be tailored to the project depending on group size, mural size and location, approval process, need for fundraising, amount of your time available to spend on the project, and other available details and resources. Allow time to work collaboratively, share ideas, and create a design based on collective identity and experience.

Jon Spayde (2005) speaks insightfully about the mural process in *6 Loaded Questions for Contemporary Muralists*:

Muralists continue to do what all artists do-work within the limits of their medium, their resources, and their time, while stretching both as far as they

can. After all, the various political, social, artistic, and historical elements that go into the mural tradition make for an inherently unstable mix, one that's uniquely reflective of social reality and its instability (Spayde, 2005, p. 28).

15. Plan to incorporate a method to give participants recognition.

Students at this level want recognition—they want to be able to claim the place as something they created, so a space to sign names or have acknowledgements would be excellent to have incorporated into the mural. Plan space to recognize them on the mural or provide an opportunity to make a unique individualized contribution to the mural (Baeumler, 1998).

16. Have an approval process lined up for the mural or community art.

Include a contract of agreed upon terms and long term management. Creating a mural contract helps all parties involved be at ease with the situation and allows everyone to be aware of the project expectations. You will need to go through a network of approvals for the mural location and design. You will need to protect your liability and your own personal injury potential. You should avoid precarious situations and putting youths at undue risk.

Prior to the beginning of the project, I went through an approval process by first meeting with art teacher Kate Humphrey to discuss the idea of involving her art classes in a large scale community mural at the high school. I went and measured the building before submitting the proposal, and had two students assist me with measurements. I made hand drawn sketches with

measurements notated. Meanwhile, I developed a detailed curriculum, schedule, and plan. I developed the survey protocol and applied for an exemption from the Internal Review Board (IRB) process. Because the project was conducted at the high school during school hours, and was incorporated into the art class as part of the curriculum, the project was exempted from the IRB process.

17. Evaluate the process and share the results.

The current literature on the topic indicates that further research is needed on the benefits of participating in artistic placemaking with youth. Especially critical is first hand feedback from youths and other participants (Chin-Newman et al., 2011).

IV. Conclusions

Through this creative placemaking project, I teamed up with over 80 high school students to transform their school art building into a beautiful gathering place. Together, we created a mural that exceeds the California standards of excellence for visual art. Students were empowered and experienced an increase in community and school pride. Students learned mural history and trends through a mural curriculum provided by me, and learned skills from leadership to site assessment and repair, to large scale design and non-traditional painting.

This project was possible only through cooperative collaboration of the high school students, their art teacher, principal, and school board, and myself as a graduate student researcher,

visiting artist, and community developer. This project fostered positive relationship building between youth and adults, and provided new social possibilities for students. The students who participated created lifelong memories and transformed a space by creating a mural that enhances the area and indicates “what happens here inside the art building.” The mural created a place to be enjoyed by the entire school and all passers-by for years to come.

Community participation and engagement in public art making transforms space, creates lasting memories, and changes lives. There is a special kind of joy experienced when working with a group of young people on a community mural. There is joy from working together, and from leading youths to create something meaningful for themselves. The young people involved in this project transformed a bleak building at their school into a vibrant entryway that symbolizes the collective experience for youths at Winters High. Students were empowered through building relationships and collaborating on teams together, gaining self-esteem through taking pride in their accomplishments, and learning leadership through peer training, team captain experiences, and taking initiative when planning the mural. Students gained a plethora of skills that will be applicable in life situations. Students felt ownership of the mural because it was a meaningful place to them. They had created an amazing place through working together that represented their own collective consciousness. Because students were involved in important decision making processes, and were given high expectations and responsibilities, they became empowered to be able to make decisions for themselves and take action. Students had obtained the agency needed to affect change. When students were unhappy with the final outcome of the mural, they banded together and took action to paint over the wall so that the mural was a closer

reflection of their original intention. They also organized funding and volunteers to apply sealant on the mural after they changed it.

Participating in large scale community art gives students the efficacy to make decisions, to voice their opinions, to take control of their situation and their environment, to act as a team, and to rally together to take initiative and take action to create change. Students involved in this project learned how to persevere and carry a project with multiple challenges through to completion. The many challenges were part of what made this project such an incredible learning experience for the youths involved, as they must learn to make adjustments and remain flexible.

Creating places where members of the community can engage meaningfully with one another is a means in itself of creating viable communities. Through creative placemaking, community members engage in a shared experience and create a beautiful place together. Young people are highly capable and should be engaged in community planning and placemaking. The students involved in this project created a space for themselves to commune and enjoy, fostering positive interactions and relationships, and simultaneously created social change. Youths are empowered by participating in the creative process and they desire to be recognized and to be appreciated. Adolescents are often excluded from the picture of community, and their inclusion is paramount to a positive future for all. Communities that include access and opportunities for youth provide for a positive community experience. Community developers and communities working on large scale projects together need to keep tools for empowerment at the forefront of the process of community art making. Including everyone in the community in public art projects, and

encouraging collaborations between community members and artists are great ways to revitalize communities and give a sense of place and meaning.

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Appendix A

Winters High School Mural Project

Lesson Plan 1- Project Introduction

- I. PowerPoint presentation that presents my skills and background, my interest in the project, what the project is, the fact that it is a research project where I will be evaluating the experience for my Master's thesis. History of murals and a multitude of design possibilities and ideas. Explain different teams and what they will do, how everyone has a chance to give input, to help in some way, and to learn. Emphasis on student voices being heard and visually translated.

- II. Students take a survey asking them what skills they have, what they desire to develop, and what teams they are interested in, based on top 3 choices. Next we will be exploring student inspirations for the mural design, then teams will be assigned.

Appendix B

Winters High School Mural Project

Lesson Plan 2- What Inspires You Most

Object and design explorations:

- Think of what is inspirational to you—it could be a person, a thing, an activity, a place, an experience, whatever you can imagine that has inspired you or that you find inspirational.
- For our next meeting, bring in a photo, object, word, poem, or idea about what inspires you most.
- We will look at your items of inspiration to help come up with design ideas for the mural.
- Everyone is asked to submit one or more design idea drawings to be drawn on top of a photocopied template of the building. Draw your ideas of what you would love to see painted on the building, and base this on the idea of what is inspiring to you.
- How can you translate your inspirations into a visual form?
- It doesn't have to be perfect—the idea is to get your ideas flowing and to envision multiple possibilities on a large scale.
- What do you do about windows and doors? You can incorporate them, pretend they are not there, go beyond the limits of the walls—mural design is full of possibilities, so this is your chance to explore different ideas and treatments of the space.

Appendix C

Winters High School Mural

Lesson Plan 3- Sharing and Discussing Design Ideas

Mural Design Process step 3

1. Fill in the Blank Exercise:
2. If I were to choose what inspires me most, I would choose_____. This inspires me because_____.
3. Question will be written on white board, students will write on paper.
 - a. Share and discuss your inspiration item with your small group. Why does it inspire you? What is the story behind it or what do you want to tell about it?
 - b. Inspiration inventory and discussion activity
 - i. Everyone place your inspiration item on the table.
 - ii. Take a mental inventory of what is on the table.
 - iii. Is there anything you want to share about the inspirations? Are any of them particularly striking to you?
 - c. Inspiration to Design—focusing on themes and ideas
 - i. Walk around the table, and place items and inspirations into categories to see what themes and ideas emerge.
 - ii. We want to look for similar items and put them into common categories based on themes and ideas that emerge.

- iii. Some items might not fit with other similar items, and that's okay, we will have a category in the middle of unique ideas that don't fit with other themes.
- iv. You can move things around once they are in groups, to refine the categories.
- v. We will be finished once everyone is satisfied with the themes and categories.
- vi. What are the themes?
 - 1. (I will write on the white board.)
 - 2. (Student recorder will write on notecard and place with items.)
 - 3. I'll take photos of the items with theme labels (notecards.)
 - 4. Are there any particular items, either your own or someone else's, that you definitely want the design team to consider for the mural?
 - a. We will set aside the items and photograph or submit to design team.
- d. Next we will look at the "Wall of Inspiration", where we have hung all the design templates.
 - i. Are there any that stand out or that you particularly like?
 - ii. Are there certain aspects of some that you like, such as a certain image, word, phrase, or design idea?

- iii. We set aside the templates the students liked best, with post-its used to make notes indicating specific design elements that were recommended by the students.

Appendix D

Teams and duties:

1. Project Planning and Logistics

- Mix paint and inventory items
- Create a project plan and detailed timeline

2. Site Repair and Assessment

- Learn basics of site repair and assessment
- Assess and repair site, clean and prepare site for painting

3. Design

- Design collaboratively and draw out the final design
- Work with templates of the building to create a design
- Choose colors and select paint for the project

4. Design Transfer

- Learn methods for transferring a mural design
- Transfer design to wall

5. Fundraising

- Plan fundraising event logistics
- Distribute and post flyers for fundraising event
- Create decorations for event
- Send thank you cards to event host restaurants

6. Photography

- Learn photography techniques

- Take photos of students and of the mural.
- Document the mural making process including site repair and painting, plus fundraisers, events, and the commemoration.

7. Painting (everyone)

- Learn large scale painting techniques
- Paint background and detail, teams responsible for specific mural sections
- Set up and clean-up of all materials
- Team leaders peer train and motivate their team
- Ability to control and have ownership of the process

Appendix E

Changes Made to Research Plan:

I originally planned to incorporate a video voice project for the students, but did not have the resources—time, money, equipment—to be able to carry it out, so I decided not to pursue making a video as part of the project, although I think this would be a valuable addition to a community mural project if time and resources allowed for it. I also anticipated that a communication team could handle the publicity of the mural through local media networks, and could help plan the events such as the commemoration of the mural, but I ending up doing these elements myself because I did not have the time to explain and lead all of this in addition to meeting with the fundraising team, design team, and site-repair team. I had to prioritize what was most needed, and focus on the production of the mural itself rather than all of the enrichment activities that we could build around it. I also wanted the fundraising team to handle more local fundraising, but I did not have time to fully engage them in this process either. The fundraising team did more of the event planning work around fundraising events rather than raising funds themselves, which did reduce the potential for them to gain leadership skills through community networking.

Appendix F

Visual Arts Content Standards for CA Public Schools

Concepts and Development specific to the mural project

Grades Nine Through Twelve– Advanced

Note: The advanced level of achievement for students in grades nine through twelve can be attained at the end of a second year of high school study within the discipline of the visual arts and subsequent to the attainment of the proficient level of achievement.

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information. Through the Language and Skills Unique to the Visual Arts Students perceive and respond to works of art, objects in nature, events, and the environment. They also use the vocabulary of the visual arts to express their observations.

Develop Perceptual Skills and Visual Arts Vocabulary 1.1 Analyze and discuss complex ideas, such as distortion, color theory, arbitrary color, scale, expressive content, and real versus virtual in works of art. 1.2 Discuss a series of their original works of art, using the appropriate vocabulary of art. 1.6 Describe the use of the elements of art to express mood in one or more of their works of art.

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Visual Arts Students apply artistic processes and skills, using a variety of media to communicate meaning and intent in original works of art.

Skills, Processes, Materials, and Tools 2.1 Create original works of art of increasing complexity and skill in a variety of media that reflect their feelings and points of view. 2.2 Plan and create works of art that reflect complex ideas, such as distortion, color theory, arbitrary color, scale, expressive content, and real versus virtual. 2.3 Assemble and display objects or works of art as a part of a public exhibition. Communicate and Express Through Original Works of Art 2.4 Demonstrate in their own works of art a personal style and an advanced proficiency in communicating an idea, theme, or emotion. 2.5 Use innovative visual metaphors in creating works of art. 2.6 Present a universal concept in a multimedia work of art that demonstrates knowledge of technology skills.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of the Visual Arts Students analyze the role and development of the visual arts in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting human diversity as it relates to the visual arts and artists.

Role and Development of the Visual Arts 3.1 Identify contemporary styles and discuss the diverse social, economic, and political developments reflected in the works of art examined. 3.3 Investigate and discuss universal concepts expressed in works of art from diverse cultures.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments About Works in the Visual Arts Students analyze, assess, and derive meaning from works of art, including their own, according to the elements of art, the principles of design, and aesthetic qualities.

Derive Meaning 4.1 Describe the relationship involving the art maker (artist), the making (process), the artwork (product), and the viewer. 4.2 Identify the intentions of artists creating contemporary works of art and explore the implications of those intentions. 4.3 Analyze and

articulate how society influences the interpretation and message of a work of art. Make Informed Judgments 4.4 Apply various art-related theoretical perspectives to their own works of art and the work of others in classroom critiques.

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS They develop competencies and creative skills in problem solving, communication, and management of time and resources that contribute to lifelong learning and career skills. They also learn about careers in and related to the visual arts.

Connections and Applications 5.2 Compare and contrast works of art, probing beyond the obvious and identifying psycho- logical content found in the symbols and images.



Figure 1 Winters High School Art Building Before



Figure 2 Winters High School Art Building After



Figure 3 Design Charrette



Figure 4 Leading Site Assessment and Repair



Figure 5 Students Transferring Design



Figure 6 Student Workday



Figure 7 Bottom of Mural is Detailed



Figure 8

Students Collaborating



Figure 9 Leading Students to Work Together



Figure 10 Students Operating and Working in the Scissor Lift



Figure 11 Community Donated Solutions to Reach the Top of the Mural



Figure 12 Students Having Fun



Figure 13 Mural Detail-Art Entrance