

## Chapter 3

# Collaboration, Teamwork and Service Learning within an After School Community Arts Project: After School Mural Arts Project

**Hazel L. Bradshaw-Beaumont**  
*Delaware State University, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*Students learn better when they can see, touch and visualize. This chapter documents the processes experienced by two groups of elementary students as they participated in a collaborative after school mural project within their school community. The collaborative visual art experience provided the students with a voice to express ideas as they were brought together with their community. Consequently, the students were able to focus while working together on their personal mural with unity and cooperation. Given the vehicle to communicate a message to the community by symbolic and abstract images with deep meaning, evidence indicated that students' confidence besides visual arts was elevated. The project also exposed the participants to teamwork, planning, brainstorming, organizing and collaboration as they worked together on the mural project.*

### INTRODUCTION

Efforts to create a sense of consciousness for students to be productive members within a school environment have continued universally. However, most public schools concentrate on learning within the confines of the classroom resulting in a lack of involvement from the general educational system in teaching students to extend their knowledge and skills beyond the regular classroom. In addition, as suggested by the Afterschool Alliance, in partnership with MetLife Foundation (2012), with emphasis being placed on English Language Arts and math test scores, the possibilities of schools facing budget cuts at the federal, state and local levels are escalating. Therefore, “providing a robust and comprehensive arts education during the school day becomes increasingly challenging” (p.1). The committee on the Arts

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and the Humanities adds, “when young people are involved with the arts, something changes in their lives” (p.1). Suggestions for afterschool programs are perfectly situated to bolster the efforts of schools and ensure that a variety of arts learning experiences are available to students. One where students can build on art content learned during the school day, learn new art forms and deepen their connection to the world of art. Researchers such as Stiegelbauer (2008) have partnered with the U.S. Department of Education in making a case for the arts and after school programs, supporting the researcher’s belief that opportunities such as mural and after-school art programs can enhance students’ ability to be more productive throughout the school environment. In addition, possibilities for collaboration and teamwork within the school community and the community at large can also be realized connecting art enrichment with afterschool arts programs. The researcher’s aim was to increase equity and access to quality art education and enrichment opportunities for children and youth throughout the community during afterschool programs. This was based on the understanding that young people do not have equal opportunities to participate in arts and enrichment opportunities during school or throughout their communities, mainly because of financial constraints.

## **BACKGROUND**

As an art educator for several years, the lack of after-school programs has always been a concern. From personal visual arts collaboration within communities over the years, it became obvious that students’ engagement in mural making was of interest to them, teachers, and community participants. Examples of these arts collaboration and mural making sites include the Boys and Girls Club, where the researcher engaged in after-school art instruction, but instead of focusing on traditional art teaching strategies, emphasis was on helping students develop their creativity, compassion, confidence, and critical thinking skills while building meaningful connections with peers and positive role models with the aim of becoming successful adults in their communities. Other mural making experiences were often integrated into the school’s curriculum where the researcher collaborated with content area teachers in creating murals as culminating activities for end of semester performing arts productions. The researcher also frequently partnered with other organizations to create specific community programs outside of schools that include activities for community specific projects such as festivals, summer camps, workshops, and conference presentations both nationally and internationally. However, throughout a typical art classroom, students are led through instruction that are often close-ended ordered to meet the needs of the school’s curriculum. Even though students are required to be creative and productive, social skills are sometimes compromised resulting in a lack of interaction with peers. On the contrary, during a collaborative working experience in after school art projects the researcher identified several positive outcomes from the participants. Based on her experience she was convinced that both social skills and levels of learning can be enhanced, hence the design of the following mural arts projects.

The following objectives guided the implementation of the after- school mural arts projects.

### **Project Objectives**

1. Students will be able to effectively transfer concepts learned within formal art classes to the after school program.

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