Who are the People in Your Neighborhood?: Using Group Work to Encourage the Participation of ESL and Special Education Artists

Tara C. Carmichael
Garnett Patterson Middle School
District of Columbia Public Schools
Submitted June 2002

Introduction

I like to empower people with art. I want all young art students at the school to feel the power of paint, the sensation of sculptures, and the drama of drawing. What is the secret to attaining successes for all young artists? My research question: Does group works encourage participation of English Second Language and Special Education artists?

Background

I am an artist/art instructor transplant to Washington, DC from the Midwest. I come bearing gifts, like the power of paint. I am a University of Iowa graduate, with a BFA in printmaking and teacher certification grades K-12. One thing I'll always remember comes from a teacher I student taught with, he stated, one day as we were gazing out the window, “Look, there go the gifted and talented students off on another fieldtrip. Down the hall, there are special education students with an aid for every 8 students. What is there for the average kids? In the art room, we have them all, no aids, everyone together.” He seemed to sum up the art studio right there, fifteen years ago. Now question, how do you get everyone to participate?

My past also includes travel, waiting tables, and working in nonprofit art centers with small groups of people ages 3 to 75 years. I love empowering people with art. One of my favorite positions was at Mattie Rhodes Counseling and Art Center. An establishment on the West Side of Kansas City, MO which supports Latino families in the community, equipped with art therapists, social workers, psychologists, and more!

In my art instructor position there I created a variety of classes to entice learning in the arts. My fond memory of recruiting young artists includes running across the street to the Garcia Elementary School, telling the director of the after school program to send me his worst kids, they can come to the art center for a semester. He said, “Really?” I said, “Yes, all bad kids are good at art!” He laughed at this and hooked me up! I would say that majority of the young artists and staff at Mattie Rhodes was bilingual. This created a fabulous environment for students to create. Because of my extensive travels to Mexico and Central America I had enough linguistic skills to get by, and remember, a picture speaks a thousand words…. It was such a creative and stimulating environment at the art center; the ratio of students was 10 to 1 teachers. The program included ceramics, painting, sculpture, sewing, beading, leatherwork and more. We made
masks, celebrated Day of the Dead, and displayed art exhibitions. We created entrepreneurial opportunities for high school boys. The program was set up for every child to succeed, to learn and feel the power of art! It provided ample opportunities for self-affirmation as an educator. Now then, how do you take the fabulous experience of the Mattie Rhodes Art Center and apply it to the DCPS system? Well, that is a part of trying to create reality out of my dreams. Which, believe it or not, can happen!

Context

The transportation of my dream environment into DCPS was based on trial and error. Personal experience is a big component of my successes and failures. The day I left the art studio with clumps of clay stuck in the back of my hair it was apparent something had gone wrong that class. How do I go from groups of 10 students to 29 students and still maintain the active participation and success? My definition of success at this point is not so much let's make masterpieces, but rather, how about not throwing things? Which really means, I need everyone involved, which means participate. The solution came up, divide and conquer, by creating small groups in the art studio I have achieved some successes. Previously in the art studio, kids flow in, sit at tables according to race, gender, and academic level. In our school, 25% of our population is Latino, 75% is African American, and maybe 25% Special Education. So, I not only need to divide and conquer, I need to divide, diversify and conquer.

As the art teacher at Garnet-Patterson Middle School, located at 10th and U Street, NW, Washington, DC, I teach grades 6-8 for a semester at a time. I see the students daily when on a regular bell schedule, or every other day when on the 90 minute bell schedule. So the schedule varies. I also have the luck to serve duty on recess, the cafeteria, and the hall. I say lucky because it is there, without classroom constraints that I see how the students interact. I see who sits with whom, and who ‘goes with whom’ and so on. I think it’s lucky because it is time to catch up and between whistle blowing, hear about students’ lives and get to know them better. I also get to work the after school program, it used to be two nights a week, but now only one night. As stamina throughout the year decreases I have to cut back to do my best.

My Students

We support a low-income population, as the majority of our students eat a free lunch. Our community is drastically changing. Different opinions sway different ways here, some folks say it has changed since the late 70’s when the metro created the U Street Cardoza exit. They said businesses that were there could no longer survive. Then there has been an incredible real estate boom, with in the last four years that has started a gentrification of the area. Personally, in the two years I’ve worked there I’ve seen a change from $135,000 houses jump to $225,000. None of the new neighbors have reached out to the school as far as I can tell. The kids make comments about “This white girl was looking at me, and I don’t like those white people.” It became more and more obvious that some community outreach had to happen to give the students the support they
needed and not feel intimidated or threatened by the changes occurring. Other members of the community who have had businesses there for 30 years would complain to me at lunch, “Those kids don’t respect no one,” and “When I was a youngster we didn’t treat people like kids today.” I respond with, “Yeah, my mom would’ve come after me with a yardstick.” We giggle and swap stories. But, I was concerned about the overall climate of things. An Ethiopian boutique keeper was shot dead in his store one night. My Asian American friends who own the deli were worried because they thought it was a hate crime against people from other countries. I tried to find out the real story but never truly did; this is one block from school, where I eat lunch daily. What is happening to this planet? How do you reach out to a community that is somewhat intimidated by your student population and really doesn’t like them all that much? I’ll move on with that question later.

In an average art class I have 3-4 ESL students and 3-4 Special Ed students, and 20 Regular Ed students. Prior to the mural project kids segregated themselves by race, gender and academic level. I longed to see this change, but didn’t really know how to do it. My room is located on the first floor by the office. The art studio is set up in stations, as in large tables with 3-4 students at each table. There is one set place called “Supplyland” where all necessary tools are available for artists’ convenience. It is a huge beautiful room loaded with artwork and talent created by students. They make the most amazing work! I support them putting their hearts into their art, as in expressive and exciting. I want the room to be an inviting and safe environment where they can create and be themselves. I try to emphasize non-Euro-centric artists on the bulletin board for information. I post processes step by step on the walls so people know what’s going on in there when no one is around to give a tour. I want the to drop in and have a look around. I want everyone to know they are welcome! I keep students in the art studio, give them jobs and assignments during my prep time. I really want to empower youth with art, show them how it can keep you out of trouble, show them it’s ok to be really good at something, and demonstrate it’s ok to succeed.

My Teaching Style

I try to personalize the lessons to best suit the needs of the class involved. I keep a journal of observations to help reflect and assess situations. My entries are notes jotted in my daily planner, keep so and so away from so and so. I keep a multicultural journal focused on who perked up during which part of the lesson, who helped clean, who helped another classmate, and all other occurrences I witness dealing with racial interactions positive and negative. I also include special education students and sexual minority issues. In this I document classroom dynamics and ideas for better teaching for them and how to keep things super inclusive for everyone. I’m getting better at the group thing and was trying to focus on the interaction between the ESL students and the regular education students in the art room. I noticed that in several of my projects the ESL kids sit together, the Special Ed kids cluster together and the African American kids sit together according to gender. This varied through out the
school year after all of the group projects. Of course, there are those students who due to personalities needed to sit in the same chair all year, and would mesh with whoever was around them. Plus, there are the wanderers who float through out the room based on mood and needs. I realized that ESL kids sat together and explained things to each other. They spoke in Spanish or English and asked me whenever there were questions. My special education artists would cling together, need extra help, get distracted, not participate, wait and wait for me to get them a pencil when they could get it from supply land by themselves. Or some special ed. students would get dejected by not understanding right away and therefore giving up fast. Then again leading to disruption of others, etc. This journaling and documenting led to my research question of: Does Group Work/Cooperative Learning enhance participation of ESL and Special Ed students in the Art Studio?

I attended a Teach for Equity workshop presented by NECA. The workshop inspired Tricia Peterson and myself to create an interdisciplinary mural project. Tricia had this fantastic book *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleishman. An enlightening novel, where a diverse neighborhood creates a community garden. Each chapter is written from the perspective of that character and in that character’s dialect. The book is short. The information is big. It was just the thing to bring 8th grade English and Art students together. The 91 8th grade students participated in this project. We used the book to begin the process as a motivational tool. First, the students read the book, then divided into diverse groups and acted out each chapter or each character, including props, and accurate dialect. It was fantastic. The kids were absorbed in the fact that the diverse characters in the book worked together in their community. The book served as a role model of tolerance and respect. I think that because the book is written in different dialects it gave credit to the ESL students and validated different styles of English speaking. All readers participated and were opened to their own accents and acceptance of others. The *Seedfolks* book also connected to my prior mention that our community and school were not feeling so communal, and the students discussed this in class. “What’s up with these white people thinking they’re better than me?” were some of the students’ inquiries. “Why does that deli man always try to rip me off?” “My mom says you gotta’ be careful ‘cause they’ll try and take your money.” Well, Tricia and I had planned that we would create a mural including the community characters in our neighborhood, but we got the students to come up with the idea. She got them to come up with suggestions that could bring our community together. They mentioned gardening, like the book. “No, someone would rip it out and we don’t take care of things.” Was the honest response. They mentioned a street party, but decided that was not right. No one would mingle and people might not show up in the first place. Eventually they came up with; “We could paint a mural!” The magic solution, to give honor to representatives of our surrounding community, adds beauty to our street, and is low maintenance. I believe the open discussions of coming together helped the students realize that they needed to come together, too. At this point in the Art Studio I had 8th graders working
individually on self-portraits. Using multimedia materials they were to create images and entire pictures that represent themselves. My special ed. students were slow to go with this. My ESL students kept to themselves. My advanced perfectionists became frustrated. My average students would get stumped and sit and say, “I’m thinking,” for days. It was a drag.

The Mural

Groups of 8th graders had been chosen for the theatrical interpretations of the book Seedfolks, the students had selected their groups with some help from Ms. Peterson. The students would grab one talented artist to be in the group! Because, talented artists tend to be any sort of learner, not just Regular Ed, ESL and Special Ed students were included eagerly and desirably! It was wonderful how the groups emerged diversified with only a tiny touch of teacher guidance. The students were to go to the community and find one person they wanted to interview, keeping tolerance in mind and character development, our school focus this year, students picked people of all races. They were to interview the representative, tape record the interview, and then take 2 photos, one of them with the person and the second one of the person at their job. It was astounding the responsibility and assertiveness that surfaced here. The bubbly excitement was contagious with the “Oh, I know the perfect person, my uncle’s a contractor from Trinidad! My counselor is white! That cute carryout guy is Chinese!” In hindsight Tricia and I realized that perhaps an official looking letter on Garnet-Patterson letterhead might have helped in this communication process, but ultimately I believe that students turned into their best selves and took on professional public faces in their very real ways.

We had a few minor setbacks, like the school was robbed and the tape recorders and cameras were stolen. A few business owners didn’t believe the students and refused to be interviewed. The hoped for grant money never came through. The setbacks were overcome with support and determination. The stolen cameras and tape recorders meant interviews had to be redone. The community was incredibly supportive! We moved on, the photos were taken at which point I intervened and xerox copied them large so the students could make transparencies of their people to put on the overhead projectors to enlarge to 4’x4’. While the students were interviewing, Tricia and I were racing about town trying to get donations of supplies and paint. At this stage in the game we couldn’t give up. The school came up with partial payment of about 1/2 the supplies and my partner came up with the other half. Lucky for us! The painting was a GO!

Results

We had reached some fabulous goals. The literacy of the book was 100%. The ESL students received 100% in literacy; the Special Ed students received 100% in literacy! Hip hip hooray! A project that promotes the standards, teaches valuable life lessons and the kids are INTO it! Not just a few, but ALL of them. Yeeeha! The students shifted to the art studio, where I gave up all prep periods, stayed after school, and skipped lunches to get the mural
moving and shaking. With my eyes I watched the attendance beam up to 100%.
I know this to be true because Tricia would tell me, “oh, this class is only 12-15
kids, “ and low and behold all 23 were showing up. We walked around to the
Vermont Avenue wall. I showed the young artists what was going to happen; we
visualized the future mural. They started picking squares for where their painting
would hang. Confidence! We returned to the art studio to sand and prime the
4’X4’ Luane boards to paint. I have to tell you, it was the most hilarious thing
kids had themselves wrapped in grocery plastic bags, from head to toe. When
priming, where you use Kilz primer and rollers and fat paintbrushes they were
worried about their shoes getting this paint on them. Regular Ed, Special Ed,
and ESL students were equally concerned about their clothes! They covered
their shoes in grocery bags. They covered their hands in grocery bags. They
were already sporting the latest in ‘cleaning out the closet’ paint shirt donations
from staff. I laughed so hard. In this ‘shop’ experience it was delightful to see
students who normally take a back seat, get up and drive their groups with
authority in sanding and priming. “I help my dad on the weekends, he’s a
carpenter,” I heard. Throughout the year I still saw streaks of paint on students’
uniforms where some paint penetrated the plastic surface and secretly prided
myself on the fact that they feel the power of paint!

Back to the cooperative learning I had handed out a list of expectations for
each person and each group. It began with respect, and then followed a step by
step procedure that would be followed to create our masterpieces. I call them
Artistas Famosas and give each team a folder to keep information in and a
special box to put it in. I want them to feel welcome in the art studio and a part of
the workings of the room, so that there is some sort of pride concept when it
comes to clean up. It worked. Then I demonstrate my secret weapon that is
going to provide each student with an opportunity to create a piece of art that
looks like the person they are painting. At the middle school level it is very tricky
to get kids to want to suffer through all the practice that it takes to paint what you
see and not what you think you see. We’ll talk about that in another lesson. My
secret weapon is the trick of the overhead projector. Otherwise known as
incorporating technology into the classroom. Aha! The students are to take the
photo copy of the photo that I had enlarged, then place the transparency over it
and secure it with a piece of scotch tape and using an overhead marker pen
trace the person and his/her features. This gives you the image to project to the
overhead and then pencil in on the primed white board. Next the students will
paint over the pencil lines with black paint to secure the image on the board. The
overhead method provided success for all artists, it gave ‘non artists’ a feeling
they could paint. It gave special ed. and ESL artists a chance to shine and feel
confident. Later, when students were asked to assess this method of painting
and whether it was cheating or did the ‘big wigs’ do this? The replies were 50/50.
I explained to all of them that yes indeed some fancy artists do use overhead
projectors and no, it is not cheating. (Of course I don’t do this, but I did borrow
the idea from Tim Rollins, a very fancy art educator whose work out of the Bronx,
New York I admire and respect, his student work is housed in places such as the
New York Museum of Modern Art.)
Another amazing occurrence was happening right before our eyes. The young artists were realizing things about skin color. For example no one is really white, and no one is really black, and actually we are all these wonderful colors of brown. How do we paint this man as dark as he is and still show his features. We looked at the paintings Kerry James Marshall for guidance. Kerry James Marshall brought beautiful dark black people to post modern art. “Wow, Ms. Carmichael, it works!” Throughout the painting I would hear students processing, “It takes a lot of time to mix the right color.” “I think she’s too dark.” “That’s not the right color.” “Look at this lavender I mixed, Ms. Carmichael.” Questions arose like “How do you paint corn rolls? Hers are gray and yellow.” It was great! I giggled to learn that several students had picked their representatives of the community based on thinking they were from a different race based on looks. We discussed racism, what society had taught and what we had learned. I love it when that happens, because so many stereotypes can be broken down. This was great form of enlightenment. One group of girls picked a counselor from the Y and found out when she was asked, “What is it like to be white, helping black people?” She returned, “I’m not white, I’m black!” There is so much institutionalized racism in our worlds. We tore apart major thought processes here. Another great story came from the Asian American man who takes orders at the carry out, the students learned that he was not married to the Asian American owner, but to an African American woman and all his children ‘look black.’ They also learned that he has Parkinson’s disease and that is why he shakes. Plus they learned he grew up in Washington, DC, just like them! It was eye opening and a mutual respect was developed. I really can’t begin to describe the growth and pride that was forming before my eyes. Kids not only perceived their community differently but each other. No one was left out due to language or learning barriers. People seemed to seek out differences to pull each other closer. I mean it was every dream coming true right before my eyes. It was young artists becoming completely empowered by art and finding some form of tolerance and learning about people. Busting up stereotypes left and right. I had this feeling that we could really have that world of compassion I long for and don’t see as a grown-up anymore!

The interviewing and painting process gave all students an opportunity to look a person in the eye who might be a different race than themselves, to learn about others, to listen, to respect. It gave students chances to look into each other’s eyes, to work together and achieve. They were awakened to tolerance. One interviewee who participated couldn’t believe that her interviewers were low level learners and had truancy issues. One interview was conducted entirely in Spanish and translated, by three boys. Alas, the paintings were complete, and they are gorgeous. Our next step was to install the artwork.

The Installation

I put a flier out to every 8th grader in the lunchroom that the installation of the art was to occur on Saturday, they were to bring themselves and anyone from their family. Another empowerment opportunity occurred when the elective team and spouses, Ms. Peterson, and Mr. Butler a community activist/substitute
teacher at Garnet-Patterson plus 20 students showed up for installation. It took again some trial and error but soon enough the method was created and students were drilling and installing their panels with pride and authority. Neighbors would walk by and comment. I have a personal issue with the exhibition of artwork after it is created because I can’t stand that part. As artists you don’t have an audience standing up shouting and clapping for more when they look at your picture on the wall. The support of staff and students and community was vital to me. I couldn’t have done it without them. Twenty-one, four feet by four feet paintings were installed on the Vermont Avenue wall. Hooray! Next we planned an art opening of the permanent exhibit in conjunction with the Co-Nect all school reform model critical friends open house. It was February 14th, and we wanted to share the love and respect with the community. In the mean time Ms. Peterson had the students do a writing project of a character sketch that was then turned into a book of character sketches including all members of the mural. It is gorgeous. Again, 100% completion and submission! Outstanding! The book and the wall were available to view at the opening on the 14th. Each member of the mural received their very own copy, and many onlookers wished to buy them! It was great! A fabulous turn out for the opening with many mural members arriving and wanting photos of themselves with the artists in front of the paintings! One of my favorites is of a prominent African American woman, member of the community hugging and giving gifts to her artists, 2 Latinas, one African American and one African American special ed. student. All 5 of them squealing with joy! The weather was sunny and bright and we passed out chocolate kisses and hearts. Groups of students were in charge of touring viewers through the portraits. Spanish speaking guides, English speaking guides, all levels of learners proudly showing off their hard work, art, and mural. I was very impressed. I took all my classes out for the opening with a sheet in hand to assess their viewing. Each group completed an assessment and critique sheet in my class or Ms. Peterson’s. This also gave them an opportunity to grade themselves, write a few things that they learned, and revel in their glory.

This project created success for all 91 8th grade artists and authors. It prepared students for success and they achieved it! I forgot to mention one important factor. Throughout the shuffling of 91 artists in and out of the art studio I only encountered ONE discipline problem. It occurred when one group member painted black all over another group member’s masterpiece. The artist who had been sabotaged was furious and was ready to seriously injure the mischievous vandal. Luckily, the team members spoke quietly to the victim/artist and got him to the hall with the pass to get a drink of water. This quiet, amazing artist was ready to bust. He’s physically strong young man who has tons of talent and never got a chance until the mural project to share his skills with the school. The vandal, a huge talker and all around self-centered student couldn’t see what was going on, nor would he listen to his group. I removed the vandal from the room and to our neighbors the office to protect his safety. I explained to him that what he did was unacceptable, he finally realized his error and tried to apologize. His
team however, wasn’t having it, and he was not allowed to paint for quite awhile by them. Out of 91 students, I was ok with one discipline issue. Can you feel it?

Reflections

In reflection I realized that ALL students were participating. Special Ed students were placed into groups in the art studio and became vital contributing parts who were completely involved. The ESL students were all meshed in and super successful. Art is universal. We held a discussion on group work where each participant takes on a role in the group. It is like a mini family, I explained. Anyone who wanted to be the mom had to say things like, “Oh, baby, that looks good.” They had to nurture and be supportive. Anyone who wanted to be the dad had to make sure the work got done. As in “What’s going on here? Why aren’t you working?” Anyone who got to be the daughter or the son got to do what people said and not have to make huge family decisions. Just do what they are told. Of course, we discussed how our families are run a bit different, but we are getting to create our own family now. The stereotype/movie version of what a family can be. We realize that our families are not like that. As in, Ms. Carmichael just lives with her boyfriend, no kids, no pets, etc. It was great. The young artists really took to this. I’d hear them calling each other mom and dad. It worked. It provided another theme for inclusiveness. I told them how Garnet-Patterson works like a family where Dr. Usilton, the principal, is the dad, Ms. Rodgers, the assistant principal is the mom, and the teachers are the children and students are the grandchildren. They found this very funny. The messages were clear; we were doing this for the community. We want to be a part of it. The mural is important we are important. We can make changes in our worlds. Each one of us counts. Our subgroups create one huge group, and alas the class of 2002!

At this point in the research I must reflect on other cooperative learning experiences to fully appreciate the success of the interdisciplinary, community mural. I experimented with cooperative learning in my Tough Sissy Girl club after school. This group consisted of originally 21 young women who were interested in learning to sew and selling their wares. A racially diverse group formed whom I taught to sew hats with our Tough Sissy Girl logo on them. We discussed what Trough Sissy means to us and came up with keeping a balance between strong and cute, smart and beautiful, and basically keeping ourselves in balance. We sold our hats twice at Eastern Market, the Capitol Hill area of Washington, DC. The group definitely worked well. Hispanic and African American girls taught each other to sew and create hats. I would encourage Spanish-speaking girls to teach black girls Spanish words while learning to use the machines so that everyone was teaching each other something. Both people having strengths to share.

Well, the girls made some money and all was well, but as March rolled around the group began to fizzle out. Due to many schedule conflicts interest died down and the club was turned into a general art club accepting boys now, to meet the 15 student limit for Smart Choice regulations. Eventually we created individual pieces for a hand quilt, but that remains unfinished. The idea was
that working hands come together. Well, the intentions were good, but like I said that was that. I also did a Cultural Portrait of America collage with 7th grade class, which began with diversified groups interviewing each other. This was brilliant at first. ESL students, Special Ed and Regular Ed students interviewed each other based on pairing up with person most different from them selves. Groups of 4-6 artists combined to create collages to exhibit in the cafeteria based on their interview write ups and their concepts of what they think America is to them.

This project although culturally enriching turned me into a raging lunatic as the group thing turned into a loud, out of control class that I felt the need to stop due to behavior. ESL artists had wonderful input on the larger collages; two main ideas were that America represents money and Martin Luther King. I lost some of my Special Ed students with this, although I did get a glossy magazine ad with the American flag from a Tommy Hilfiger advertisement. My unspoken, unresolved intent was for kids to see the materialism and other parts of media’s impact on America, including racism. As a matter of fact, I tried this Cultural Portrait of America project after the Kagan workshop and thought "Good Lord, those Kagan people never had this class before, or they’d never recommend group work to these overly independent/super-social 7th graders!!! " Hello, now I see my errors post research. I’m sorry, Kagan theories. It wasn’t structured tightly enough. There was no step by step explanation. Expectations were not clearly defined. I see the flop mildly successful because after the interviews and follow up discussions, kids diversified the seating in art room. African American boys were sitting by Hispanic boys and African American girls. Special Ed students moved to sit with other students. It was a good start and just needed better teaching on my part. I did realize how to make it better. There’s always next year! Like I mentioned the seating chart changed naturally.

Though the Who are the People in Your Neighborhood mural project was hugely successful I never pin pointed the exact reasons for its success until I completed my research for the George Mason project. I strongly believe the cooperative learning encourages ESL and Special Education participation. One of my favorite paintings is by four students, 2 boys and 2 girls, 2 of which are Special Ed and truant concerns. They created spectacular masterpiece, Ms Ali of Ben’s Chili bowl, which Ms. Ali was super complimentary and noted that the logo was exact! Ms. Ali couldn’t believe the kids were anything other than genius level! The painting process gave certain artistically talented ESL and Regular Ed students a chance to shine and receive recognition for their talents. One ESL student wrote in her final essay for her ESL teacher that art was her favorite subject because she got to use her talent and paint big for the community and show what she can do. What I believe occurs is that once a young person tastes this success and self satisfaction they know it and might want more of it. I believe that the art studio is a place for ALL students to grow inside and outside of themselves. Which is also my whole basis of teaching in the classroom in the first place. I want to empower people with ART!
At this point I asked myself my research question, Does group work/cooperative learning enhance ESL and Special Ed participation? I answer it definitely YES! This project was hugely successful in my opinion because it meets the guidelines of cooperative learning set by the Kagan group and other cooperative learning experts. The mural project operated on the 4 basic principles of cooperative learning as stated in the Kagan Structures for Success workbook. (I attended a workshop in the spring/post mural project and learned this.)

1. **Positive Interdependence**: the idea that my gain is your gain. If you paint pretty and I paint pretty, we get the job done and we look good!
2. **Individual Accountability**: due to daily logs and group assessment each artist had to participate to meet the completion.
3. **Equal Participation**: all can participate with the large workspace, and it seemed all wanted to.
4. **Simultaneous Interaction**: where everyone is active all at once, and I didn’t plan it this way it just happened.

Artists had to help each other to reach the goals. If Artist 1 mixed the color, Artist2 could paint with it, while Artists 3 painted the background with Artist 4. It was excellent and funny to me now because it lines up exactly with Kagan structures for success. In my other unrelated attempts with group work in the art studio I have ended with success, depression and exasperation, now I see there’s a magic formula I’d met and not known it! Had I known then, what I know now…? In conjunction with my theory of teaching art based on learning from personal experiences, I too learned this based on personal experiences. Funny, how that works.

It also meets the “Essential Elements of Cooperative Learning in the Classroom.” ERIC digest. “A clear set of specific student outcomes/objectives were set”- we’re painting portraits, here are the steps. “All students in the group ‘buy into’ the targeted outcome, it is not sufficient for teachers to select these outcomes, students must perceive these as their own.” This happened by wriggling it to the students so that they thought of the idea; we’ll paint a mural! “Clear and Complete set of task completion directions of instructions”- students/groups received handouts and were aware of step by step signs to use for resources all around the art studio. “Heterogeneous groups”, students were placed and chose groups that were all mixed up- academically, racially, and some genderly. All had “Equal opportunities for success.” Same supplies, same supports, same skill, same information, and with the technology support, not so naturally talented folks looked like geniuses too! If I had created a To Do list for myself based on this ‘expert’ knowledge prior to the project I could have checked off each line down the list. A rare opportunity in my world! The list goes on, remember I’m referencing Robert J.Stahl and his work crosses over to double up with the Kagan structures. Students created positive interdependence. They definitely had face-to-face interaction. I like to think eye-to-eye. They created positive social interaction behaviors and attitudes in the community, English room, Art studio, and Garnet-Patterson Middle School. Access to Must Learn
Information, specific strategies with technology, technique and skill with painting, responsibility with tools and supplies, and respect to other humans plus the interdisciplinary writing and reading, assessment and critiquing. Ample opportunities to complete required information processing tasks were supplied by in class time, before or after school, lunch and prep times too.

Lastly, sufficient time is spent learning; 90-minute studio classes really provide this in the art studio. In addition the whole tolerance learning and respect giving and skin color matching, the painting process is a huge life lesson, if I must say so myself, fixing mistakes, not being intimidated by thinking it’s too hard, working with in the mini families, etc. Oh yes, there was a lot of learning going on. Brought to me by ERIC digest is the article “The Essential Elements of Cooperative Learning in the Classroom.” By Author Robert J. Stahl “Over the past decade, cooperative learning has immerged as the leading new approach to classroom instruction. One important reason for its advocacy is that numerous research studies in K-12 classrooms in the very diverse school settings and across the wide range of content areas have revealed that students completing cooperative learning group tasks tend to have higher academic test scores, higher self-esteem, greater numbers of positive social skills, fewer stereotypes of individuals of other races on ethnic groups, and greater comprehension of the content and skills they are studying. (Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec1993; Slavin 1991; Stahl and VanSickle 1992) This further supports the cooperative learning aspect to the project. It is funny to me that my educational studies in school stopped in 1990 at the University of Iowa with a BFA in printmaking and Teacher Certification K-12, right before all this group learning hit. Probably because I was at the tail end of the 80’s when the ME generation was raging in full force! I am grateful that this research gave me the opportunity to validate some of my personal experiences! How interesting that I discovered the logical reasons for the successes of the project after the fact. How funny that I learned from my personal experiences but couldn’t see the formula. Now it is clear to me, the crystal ball no longer has smoky clouds swirling through it but crystal clear data.

Conclusion

In conclusion of my research I believe that cooperative learning really does enhance ESL and Special Education students participation in the Art Studio. I think that the ‘Who are the People in Your Neighborhood?’ Mural project really brought out the best of all learners. I also think it met the requirements for effective and quality group work as stated in the research. The Tough Sissy Girl club and the ‘Cultural Portrait of America’ also brought about higher ESL and Special Ed participation, even with their untimely endings. Lastly, for all the Brick Walls I encounter as a second year teacher in the DCPS system, wouldn’t it be grand if we could change them into experiences and opportunities as wonderful as this?!