



Sandra Creando

HEALING THROUGH ART THERAPY

October 2023



Minnesota
Humanities
Center



adler GRADUATE
SCHOOL

ABOUT HISPANIC ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT THROUGH RESEARCH (HACER)



HACER's mission is to engage Latino Minnesotans through research, evaluation, and community action to promote equitable representation at all levels of institutional decisions and policy change.

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A special thank you to Nico Diaz de Leon (previous HACER Research Associate), Aurora Charter School, Adler Graduate School, Gustavo Lira Garcia, Erin Raffert-Bugher, and all the parents and children that participated in this program.

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Anchored in the pillars of the therapeutic effects of art activities and the muralist tradition in Latin American culture, the project Sanar Creando (Healing Through Art) was designed to use culturally inclusive expressive art therapeutic activities as a tool to assist students in processing and decreasing the impact of the traumatic events of the last few years in Minneapolis, increase students' sense of belonging and invite them to participate as artists and storytellers in their community.

The initiative was a four-way collaborative partnership between HACER (Hispanic Advocacy and Community Engagement through Research) – design, management and evaluation, Aurora Charter School (host and logistics), Gustavo Lira Garcia (muralist artist), and Alder Graduate School in Mental Health (art therapy support). This work was funded by the Minnesota Humanities Center with a grant from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

Sanar Creando (Healing Through Art) was hosted by Aurora (Elementary and Middle) Charter School in Minneapolis, located in Lake Street along the corridor that was most affected by the 2020 riots that followed the killing of George Floyd. Aurora school serves a population 100% Latino of low and middle-income families, mostly first-generation and some second-generation immigrants. The proximity and the intensity of the events, layered on top of the pandemic-mandated lockdown, had a disproportionate impact on Aurora families.

Through guided conversations and art therapeutic activities – focused on cultural identity, impact of the events of the last few years, color exploration on early drafts and hope for the future – students expressed their feelings and the impact that the events of the last few years had in their lives. Children also explored the concept of identity as a tool to increase self-esteem and improve their mental health. These practices allowed them to find paths to explore and express their thoughts and feelings -individually and collectively- and ultimately elevate their sense of self-efficacy.

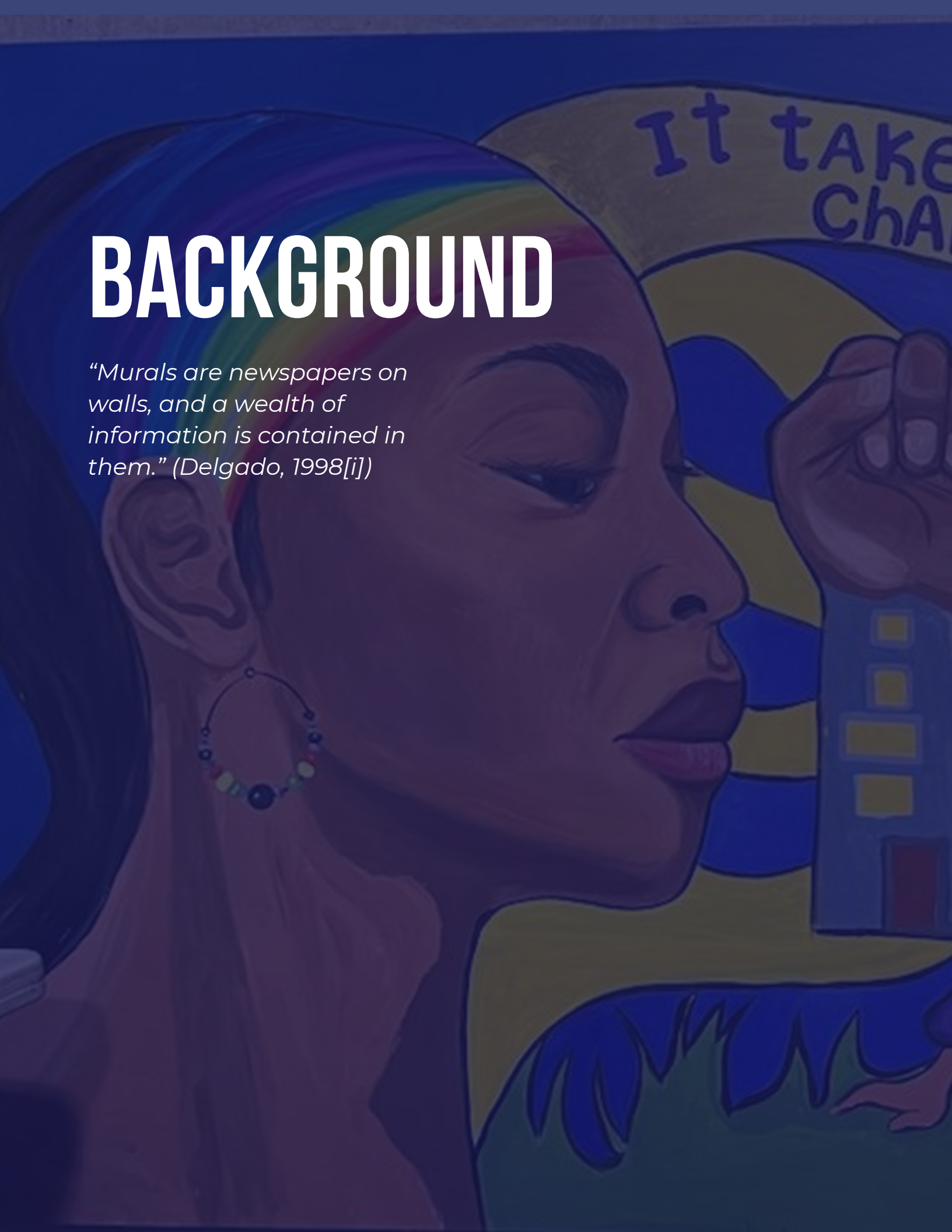
Evaluation data collection methods that yielded the richest data were conversations with the students in class, team observations and debriefs, and the artist statements. Additionally, we held conversations with school staff, gathering their observations, as well as a small number of conversations with parents.

The murals are the most tangible product of the project, yet the most valuable outcome is delivered to the community that participated in its creation.

HACER aims for the learnings from this project to be used to create similar projects in other schools and learning environments, where underrepresented communities can use this art therapy model to strengthen their voices, process their feelings in non-verbal ways and engage others in conversations.

BACKGROUND

“Murals are newspapers on walls, and a wealth of information is contained in them.” (Delgado, 1998[i])



BACKGROUND

Our Team



Gustavo Lira Garcia,
Latino Artist &
Muralist



Erin Raffert-Bugher,
Professional Art
Therapist ATR-BC



Rodolfo Gutierrez,
Executive Director



Hana Bibliowicz,
Artist in-Residence



Sam Kosel,
Social Worker



Bill Kobe,
Art teacher



Matt Cisewski,
Executive Director



Nico Diaz De Leon,
Research Associate



Patricia Mudoy
Research Associate



Pamela Grimaldi



Marlisa Karpeh



Kellie Benson

Sanar Creando (Healing Through Art) is a four-way collaborative partnership between Alder Graduate School in Mental Health, School, artist Gustavo Lira Garcia, Aurora Charter School, and HACER (Hispanic Advocacy and Community Engagement through Research).

Adler Graduate School:

Adler Graduate School's role in the project was to provide context and therapeutic art component to the project and facilitate the conversations to avoid further traumatizing the students.

Erin Rafferty-Bugher led the art therapy team, bringing her extensive experience in trauma-focused work with children and adolescents in educational, therapeutic, and clinical settings. Erin is committed to trauma-informed community care, social justice, advocacy, and integration of neuroscience-informed art therapy approaches. Erin holds a master's degree in Art Therapy from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Three Art Therapy graduate interns joined the team Marlissa Karpeh, Pamela Grimaldi, and Kelly Benson.





Muralist

Gustavo Lira, a highly skilled Latino painter, sculptor, and muralist, was born and raised in Mexico and has resided in the United States for over 27 years. He received formal art training at the University Benito Juarez in Mexico City and has since honed his skills and expertise through his impressive installations and artwork, such as murals at Minneapolis South High School, the Seward Co-op Friendship Store, and Centro Tyron Guzman. Furthermore, his artwork has been showcased in exhibitions at the Weisman Art Museum and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. In addition to his artistic pursuits, Gustavo has also dedicated himself to teaching, serving as an art elementary and middle school instructor, where he shared his passion and experience for art with his students.

Aurora Charter School:

Aurora Charter Public School is a fully bilingual immersion institution situated in Minneapolis. Its mission is to provide exceptional education and support to Latino families, many of whom are first-generation immigrants to the United States. Besides a strong focus on academics and bilingual language, Aurora's comprehensive approach is designed to address many social and resource barriers that families face to enhance the chances of success for their students.

Aurora's team was composed of Matt Cisewski (Executive Director), William Kobe (K-8th Art Teacher), and Sam Kosel (Social Worker). Aurora's support for the project also included the use of an art room and coordination between the project and the participating families.

HACER Evaluation Team:

Hispanic Advocacy and Empowerment through Research (HACER) was founded in 1988 as a collaborative effort between Ramsey County Human Services, Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES), and Metropolitan State University. HACER's mission is to engage Latino Minnesotans through research, evaluation, and community action to promote equitable representation at all levels of institutional decisions and policy change.





Currently, HACER is the only Latino-led research nonprofit in the Midwest. HACER's team is composed of Rodolfo Gutierrez (Executive Director) and Carolina De La Rosa Mateo (Director of Operations), who designed the project and established the evaluation goals, and the execution team, composed of Nicolas Diaz de Leon and Patricia Mudoy (Evaluators), and Hana Bibliowicz (Artistic Facilitator). All HACER team members are of Latino origin and fully bilingual in Spanish and English.

HACER's role was design lead and coordination and execution of the project, as well as the lead of the evaluation.

Minneapolis and Aurora Charter School Community

In 2020, Minnesota became the epicenter of social unrest, as the death of George Floyd detonated the built-up tension in the community. Lake Street, which has been transformed and developed by communities of color — including the Latino community — was destroyed when anger and outrage over an unjust and timely killing of another person of color occurred.

Aurora Charter Schools operates within the zip code 55404, with the majority of their students' families living within a 30-block radius in the vicinity of Lake Street. (4) The school serves a population 100% Latino of low and middle-income families, mostly first-generation and some second-generation immigrants. English fluency levels vary among adult and young family members varies, with many having limited proficiency in the language.

Aurora school administration was concerned that the proximity and the intensity of the events, layered on top of the pandemic-mandated lockdown, was having a disproportionate impact on its families, and started a project interviewing parents and students to gain an understanding of how best to support their needs in this time of uncertainty. The feedback that they received was worrisome.

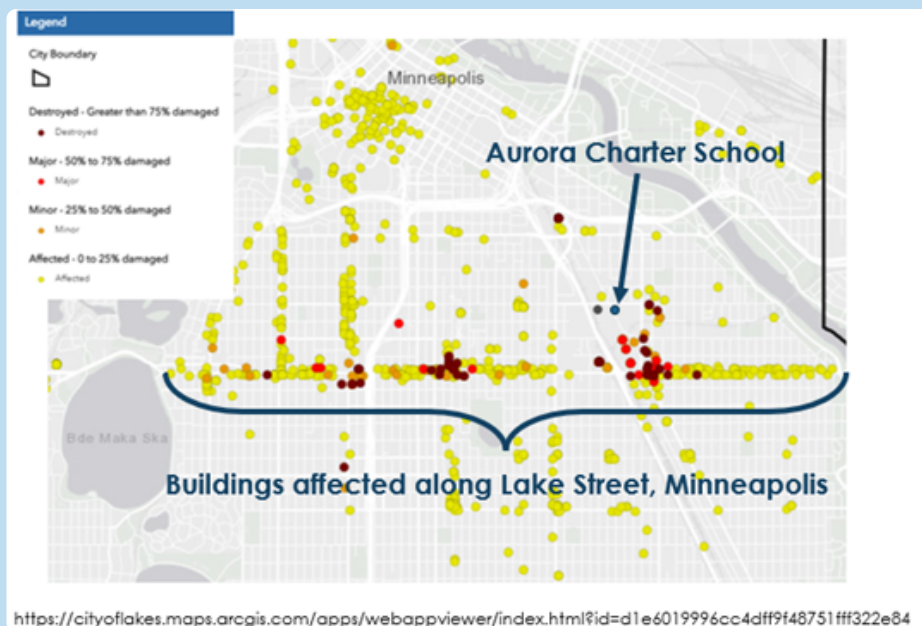




Aurora Charter School families witnessed great horrors in their neighborhoods; some students witnessed shootings on buses, the burning of buildings, and confrontations with the police right in the streets where they lived. Many of these families migrated from their countries, running away from uncertainty and violence constantly threatening their families, and living in constant fear and unable to focus on the future. The riots and unrest from both the people and the police brought stress and fear to a new level.

Street violence, riots, fires, and military presence on the street made some families relive the fear and anxiety they once felt in their home countries. The shutdown and violent aftermath made their neighborhoods more unsafe, where drug dealing, and gangs were taking over. This heightened their concern for their children's safety. Older siblings were often left in charge while parents were at work or out buying food as essential workers. Many children experienced increased anxiety and depression as they were confined to their homes, often small apartments, because of their parents' fear of the violence happening outside their doors.

The school had been reaching out to mental health providers to find ways to alleviate the effects of these events, so when they were approached to partner for this project, the school welcomed the initiative.





INTRODUCTION

“The inclusion of multiple disciplines into educational settings such as art educators, educators, school social workers, cultural liaisons, artists, art therapists, promotes a unique intersection highlighting the collaboration within the fields of study that ultimately highlights the significance of including social-emotional learning within our schools. The model underscores a trauma-informed approach that supports the complex mental health needs of our youth.”

Erin Rafferty-Bugher, former Associate Professor, Adler Graduate School — Department of Art Therapy

INTRODUCTION

The importance of murals in Latin American culture



Murals in Latin American as well as other communities of color across the United States have been historically used as a cultural-based form of self-expression for communities that have limited voices in public discourse. These public spaces have become a platform for people to learn about their cultural history, gain a deeper sense of self- and group identity, and offer an opportunity to build civic ties for social justice. Murals connect “private lives and large-scale institutions where ordinary citizens can act with dignity, independence, and vision.”(1) (Delgado and Barton 1998)

Beyond their aesthetic value and the role of demonstrating racial and cultural pride, murals play a crucial role in the struggle for social justice. They serve as impactful billboards that chronicle events and injustices, prompt critical examination of the root causes, and offer a platform to provide solutions to move forward. By igniting discussions, they serve as a reminder of the hardships and obstacles and an engagement mechanism in the ongoing pursuit of social justice. (1,2).

However not all murals have to have a significant social role to be meaningful to a community. Just by itself, a mural can rally a community to take pride in the environment. Murals, as well as other activities that invite and involve the community, are means to invite dialogue and engagement. (3)





Art therapy and its role in improving mental health

The process of art making and art therapy are evidence-based tools to improve mental health. Art therapy supports the relationship between the arts and positive changes in mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and trauma. (5,6,7)

Engaging with art has been found to activate different parts of the brain other than those taxed by logical, linear thinking. As new pathways are opened, scientists propose that “art-making can be a basis to consider experiences differently, reorganize thought and gain personal insights” (8,9)

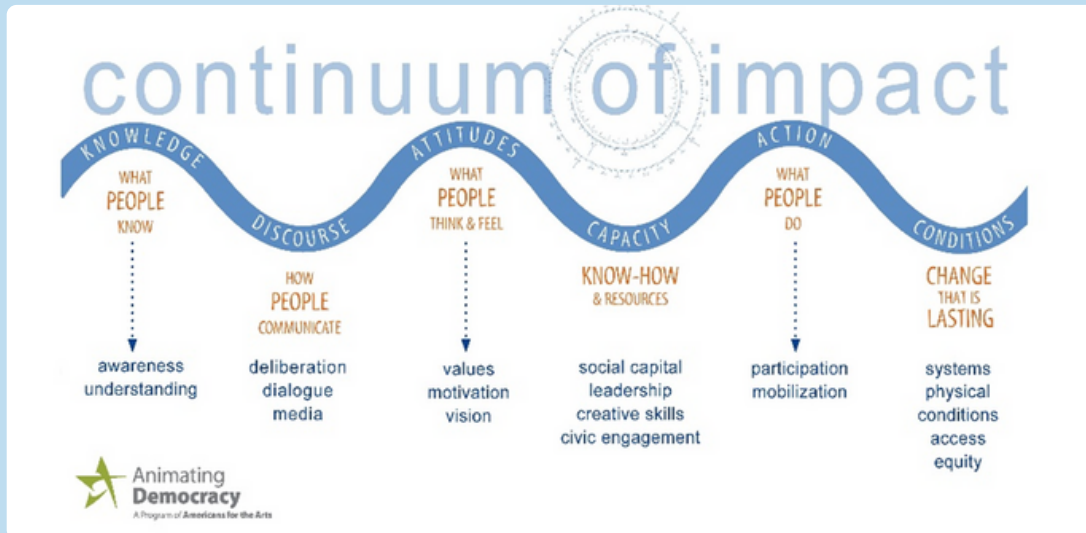
Some psychologists propose that identity precedes self-esteem - “The stronger their identity, the more aware individuals appear to be of their strengths and weaknesses and the stronger their self-esteem. Conversely, the more diffused this identity structure, the more confused individuals seem to be and the weaker their self-esteem.”

Other scientists propose that “identity and self-esteem are interdependent and mutually reinforcing mechanisms in a common self-system” In either case, having a strong sense of who we are, where we come from, what our strengths and weaknesses are, prepare the individual better to face adverse conditions. (10)





Evaluating Art Therapy: The Continuum of Impact



Measuring emotional and psychological impact of art, art therapy, and art making has many challenges. In preparation of this report, we will refer to the work of Animating Democracy, a program from American for the Arts, the “Continuum of Impact” (13), to frame the change observed in participating students.

The Continuum of Impact defines six dimensions to measure outcomes of art programs that “are aligned with the change strategies used in community organizing and demonstrate how the arts can drive change.”

The authors indicate that there is no necessary sequence or hierarchy of importance among these dimensions but acknowledge that outcomes in the dimensions are all interrelated. Results in one dimension might affect those in another dimension. For instance, increasing awareness of an issue or a concept (knowledge), could lead to more discussions (discourse), feeling of empowerment (capacity), and inspiration to act (action).



Project Goals

Anchored in the pillars of art therapy and the muralist tradition in Latin American culture the project “Sanar Creando” was designed to use culturally inclusive expressive activities as a tool to assist students in processing the impact of the traumatic events of the last few years. At its core, this project invited students to participate in documenting the story and the events from their perspective.

With this main objective in mind, Sanar Creando intended for students to explore and strengthen the concept of identity as a building block of self-esteem and mental wellbeing. It aimed for children to find paths to express their thoughts and feelings — individually and collectively — to contribute to a vision for a better tomorrow for everyone.

Finally, this project also aims to serve as a blueprint for future implementations of similar projects in schools or community-based organizations. It provides foundational knowledge through our shared experience and a series of recommendations that stem from lessons learned.





Impact Population

The project focused on Elementary (K-5) and Middle school (6-8) students from first- and second-generation Latin American immigrant families between the ages of 5 and 15 attending Aurora Charter School. Many of these students have English as a second language, and some are not fully fluent in English yet.

Most of the Aurora School families live, work, or own businesses near the epicenter of the unrest that started after the killing of George Floyd and later spread throughout the United States.

Like the rest of the country, the area was already stressed as a consequence of COVID-19 lockdown, but the intensity and proximity to these events compounded their feelings of fear and uncertainty, with a much larger impact and disruption on their lives.



METHODOLOGY

The background is a dark blue gradient with a faint, stylized illustration. On the left, a tree with green leaves is visible. In the center, a child wearing a red long-sleeved shirt, black pants, and a blue face mask is holding a white rectangular sign on a wooden stick. To the right of the child, two large, light-colored hands are shown, one holding the sign from behind and another reaching towards it. The overall scene suggests a community or educational activity.

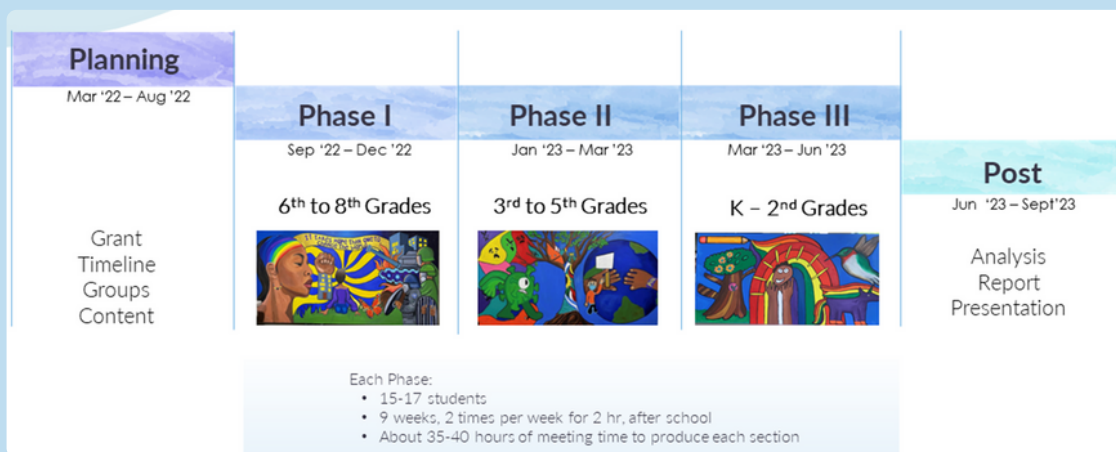
*The students were prompted to answer:
“What’s important for you to show in
the mural?”`*

METHODOLOGY

Phases and Timeline

During the preliminary design, the team had planned that each grade, K-8, would meet twice a week over a 4-week period for each grade. However, after careful consideration, the team determined that longer engagement periods would be more advantageous for the students and the process.

As a result, we restructured our approach and grouped the students into three multi-grade bands, K-2, 3-5, and 6-8. We met with each group for 9 weeks, maintaining the same frequency and duration of the gatherings. This approach enabled the team to create better connections with the students and provide them with a more engaged and meaningful learning experience.



Intervention

Throughout the sessions, students were introduced to several Latin American artists and art forms in images and videos. This served as a fundamental framework for the exploration of the topics of the mural: identity, community, and emotions. The students were asked to consider the themes they wished to depict in the mural as a group.

Additionally, the art therapists provided art directives to facilitate conversations and self-expression. The muralist and the art therapists served as co-facilitators in guiding the conversations. The students were then prompted to express their thoughts and emotions through artistic creations utilizing a range of media, including crayons, acrylic, clay, and fabric.





The students each made their own individual creative work during the sessions. Then, the students were invited to vote to select a small number of specific images that would be included in the mural. The muralist then created a composition draft based on the chosen images. Muralist and students would then experiment with and propose color schemes on paper.

Using a projection technique, the images were projected onto the metal panel to transfer them to the larger proportions of the 10' x 5' or 8' x 4' panels. Under the guidance of the muralist, the students transfer the draft collaboratively onto the panel.

Then the painting would begin! Due to space constraints, only one-third of the class worked on the mural at a time, while the rest worked on other artistic projects. For the youngest group, a variation was ideated where the draft was transferred over a large canvas instead of the metal panel and then cut, painted all the pieces at the same time, and later reassembled over the metal panel as a collage. This methodology allowed more participation of a larger number of students for a longer period of time and proved to be productive with the youngest students.

As the students created art pieces that effectively expressed and explored concepts and feelings under the guidance of the muralist and the artistic facilitator, they gained confidence in and strengthened their artistic skills.



A photograph of a diverse group of children in a classroom, all with their hands raised in excitement. The children are of various ethnicities and are wearing school uniforms. The background shows classroom shelves and educational materials. The image is overlaid with a dark blue gradient.

EVALUATION

“Schools have often left out the value of social and emotional learning therefore, we are seeing a huge increase in mental health. This unique programming brings these important often undervalued elements including cultural identity in art education and valuing emotional intelligence work in tandem to promote a solid sense of identity and embeddedness as a central aspect of the health and wellness within our oppressed, marginalized populations within our community.”

Erin Rafferty-Bugher, former Associate Professor, Adler Graduate School — Department of Art Therapy

EVALUATION

Evaluation Goals

From the evaluation perspective, the project set out the goals to understand:

- What impact may art have on developing students' cultural identity and expression?
- What are Latino youth experiencing and thinking about as it relates to the significant events over the past few years (including the uprising after George Floyd's murder, COVID-19, school shootings, and others?)
- How can art be used as a stress-processing and alleviating tool to support youth through significant events?
- What impact does participation in Sanar Creando have on Latino students?



Three areas of focus anchored the guided conversations:

Cultural identity

The concept of cultural identity can be challenging, even for adults. To start the process, we began by asking students about their personal understanding of cultural identity. Visual aids such as images and videos were used to aid comprehension and promote discussions, where students expressed their own perceptions of cultural identity, including where they observe it in their daily lives and what aspects of it are significant to them.

Impact of the events of the last few years

The facilitators guided conversations to help students identify the emotions experienced over the past few years, such as stress, sadness, fear, happiness, and closeness, and the events that triggered them. Additionally, they talked about whether students have felt unsafe at any point and the reasons behind it, if they could identify them and provided a safe space for students to express their thoughts on these emotions and how they are affecting them.



HEALING THROUGH ART

Engage in conversations about cultural identity and processing through art.

Join us for *Sanar Creando*, an afterschool arts program designed by HACER, Aurora Charter School, and muralist Gustavo Lira.

All ages K-8
TUESDAYS & THURSDAYS 2:45 - 4:15PM

6th - 8th grade
Starting: Sept. 13th - Nov. 10th

3rd - 5th grade
Starting: Jan. 3rd - Mar. 2nd

Kindergarten - 2nd grade
Starting: Mar. 14th - May 18th

Questions about the program or registration?
Nicolas Diaz De Leon
nicolas@hacer-mn.org

Register Here:
tinyurl.com/3nw36pa9

Minnesota Humanities Center
AURORA CHARTER SCHOOL

Hope for the future

In the context of the emotions of the past three years, we explored where and how students have found positive emotions such as joy, connection, and relief. We talked about what factors contributed to those emotions. We prompted them to look ahead and envision if they had the opportunity to change their neighborhood or city, what changes would they make? How could they work towards creating a better future? In what ways could they achieve this future?

Planned data collection methods were:

- Direct observations
- Team debriefs.
- Post surveys with students and parents

The methods that yielded the richest data were conversations with the students in class, team observations and debriefs, and the artist statements. Also, we held conversations with school staff, gathering their observations, as well as a small number of conversations with parents.








OUTPUTS



The project was done in three phases, where students were grouped by grade level.

Number of hours invested in class: Each group met for 9 weeks, twice a week for 2 hours. About 35-40 hours of meeting time per phase.

Number of students participating: Each phase had 14-17 students participating.

Phase I	Phase II	Phase III
Sep '22 – Dec '22	Jan '23 – Mar '23	Mar '23 – Jun '23
6 th to 8 th Grades	3 rd to 5 th Grades	K – 2 nd Grades
		

Each Phase:

- 15-17 students
- 9 weeks
- 2 times per week for 2 hr, after school
- About 35-40 hours of meeting time to produce each section

Number of people involved:

- HACER: 2 (Artist/Coordinator + Evaluator)
- AURORA: 2 (Art teacher + Social Worker)
- ADLER: 1-4 (Art Therapists and coordinator, depending on class schedules)
- MURALIST: 1

Mural unveiling:

- Number of parents attending the final presentation → about 20.





Justice for All



The artists of this mural are students in grades 6th through 8th.

They sought to represent the events they lived during the pandemic and the demonstrations and riots following the murder of George Floyd.

They also expressed their desire for inclusivity in women and her rainbow bandana and the raised fist of "Black Lives Matter."

Finally, the butterfly, represents freedom, and the character looking to the future and the message of hope represents their desire for Justice for All.

Students want this segment of the mural to prompt conversations among those who see it.





Health, Community, and Peace



The artists in this mural are students from 3rd through 5th grade.

The mural represents three important ideas for students – three struggles.

- Fight for health: The intensity of feelings of fear, frustration, and uncertainty during COVID and quarantine
- Fight for our community: The flags around the tree of life representing togetherness, student identities and pride in their cultures
- Struggle for justice and peace: Hands around the world and a student protesting, using their voice, especially when they feel someone is not being treated fairly

Students want this segment of the mural to make us talk about what happens in the world and how we feel about them.





Hope in the Future



The artists in this mural are students in kindergarten through 2nd grade.

The students show here the pride of the task accomplished by hard work and collaboration, demonstrating that we all have something of an artist inside – represented by the pencil and the rainbow and the art that emanates from it.

The tree represents their strengths and protection, especially that of their families. The unicorn is the imagination and creativity of the students. The hummingbird represents freedom.

Students want everyone who experiences this last section of the mural to feel joy, happiness, and hope for the future.



INTERVENTION

“Bringing in art therapy mental health into the schools and including the value of social and emotional learning is crucial. This is a neuroscience and trauma-informed way of working that understands the ways trauma impacts our children and is the key element in successful learning; ie; learning does not happen with kids who are scared, live in fear, and are not treated with respect.”

*Erin Rafferty-Bugher, former Associate Professor,
Adler Graduate School — Department of Art Therapy*

INTERVENTION

Guided Conversations

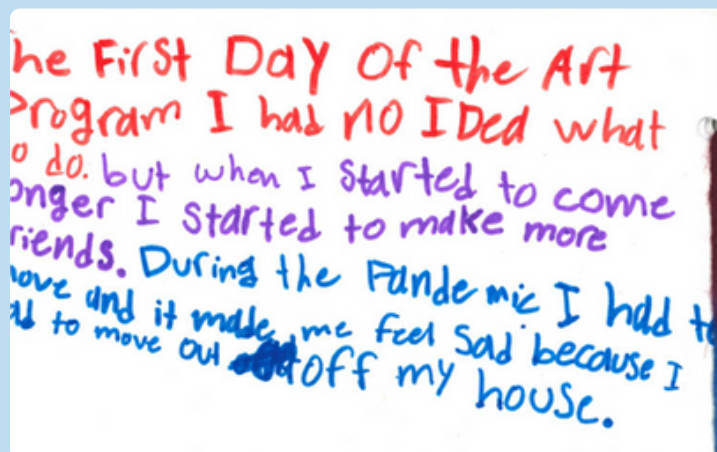
The heart of the project was the conversations and art pieces created by the students following the presentations and art directives activities. The conversations were guided by the team (artists, evaluator, and therapists) along the three main areas: Cultural identity, Impact of the last three years, and Hopes for the future.

The presentations and the art directives provided the students with a starting point and a safe space that allowed them to identify and access feelings, emotions, values, etc. The questions were open-ended, allowing students to choose their own direction and discuss what was important to them.

The third group, comprising of the youngest students, was more focused on the present and had less emphasis on the events of the past three years (they were between three to five years old during that time) Despite this, we were pleasantly surprised by their awareness and understanding.

Cultural identity:

- How would you describe your cultural identity or ethnicity?
- How do you see this culture in your everyday life?
- How would you describe the impact this identity has on you?
- Would you say this culture or identity feels important to you?



The First Day Of the Art Program I had NO IDed what to do. but when I started to come longer I started to make more friends. During the Pandemic I had to move and it made me feel sad because I had to move out ~~and~~ off my house.





Impact of past years:

- Over the past three years, have you felt more than usual amounts of stress, sadness, and fear?
- Considering all the changes we've gone through as a city and as a country, how have you felt in your neighborhood, city, country?
- How have events changed your life?
- Have you had the time or the opportunity to think about where these feelings come from or how they are impacting you? Have you talked about them with someone?

Hope and future:

- In what ways have you managed to find joy in the past three years?
- In moments when times were tough, what gave you feelings of relief?
- How would your neighborhood or city be different if you had full say?
- Looking at what has and has not felt good over the past years, how would you construct your future if you had full say?
- In what ways can you create this future for yourself?





Activities and Art Directives

In Appendix 2, we have included detailed objectives, indicators, and outcomes for the activities. In a nutshell, here, is a summary of the activities and indicators observed:

Muralist Tradition in Latin American Culture (Video)	Introduction to Muralist Tradition Understand the role of murals in the Latino Community From Observers to storytellers
Latinoamerica Calle 13 (Video)	Identify elements of cultural identity
Emotions in Art (Presentation)	How feelings are depicted in art Recognize feelings in themselves and others. Start opening up to talk about feelings and emotions.
Movement and Mindfulness (Activity)	Transition and presence Expression of emotions and feelings using other channels
Loteria (game and activity)	Exposure to cultural traditions Articulating elements of cultural and individual identity. Finding similarities and differences
Self Portrait (Art Directive)	Further developed awareness of self. Individual identity.
Shield of Strength (Art Directive)	Identified and articulated inner strengths, and sources of support from our families and communities. Need for protection, need to protect others.
Puppets (Art Directives)	Medium to express thoughts and emotions. Explore creativity both in the puppet making as well as verbally (tell a story using the puppet)
Tree of Unity (Art Directive)	How individuals create community How we are all interrelated and are interdependent
Reflective Book (Art Directive)	Revisit the journey as a group. Create unique covers – exploring individual expression



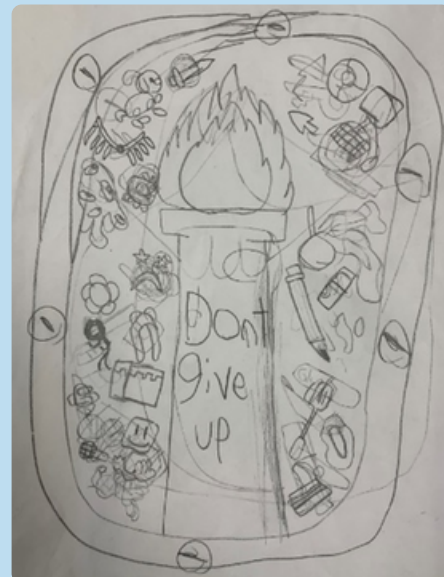


Themes for the Mural

The students talked about themes that were important to them, and they would like to consider them for the mural.



- COVID-19, feeling isolated from their families, parents leaving to go to work, being alone in the house, online school being boring, falling asleep during class.
 - Violence, riots, fires outside their homes, unable to leave the homes.
 - Violence in general in the world, seeing news of violence in other states.
 - Feeling sad and scared due to COVID-19 and the riots
- Discrimination: knowing that people are treated differently because they look different, even if they have not done anything wrong.
 - Countries of origin, flags, foods, dances, and symbols. Memories or stories from their countries.
 - Protecting the environment, specifically, trees and animals, as well as the planet.
 - Protest or speak up when they feel someone has been unjustly treated.
 - Need for peace in the world, need to learn to get along better.
 - Strengths that come from within: skills or personality traits, spirituality and through their family and community.
 - Protection: to be protected and to protect others.
 - Creativity, imagination, feeling good as artists, getting better at artistic representation.
 - Make other people around them happier.





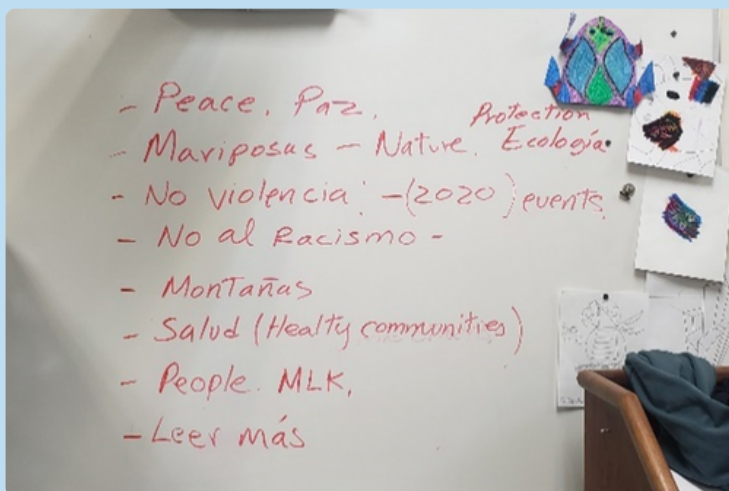
The older and middle groups spent a significant amount of time talking about the riots, the violence, and their feelings about it. For both groups, issues of social justice and discrimination were present.

Both groups had a sense of agency, of the role they could or should play. The older group expressed a stronger sense of urgency, while the middle group had an overall desire for peace and for everyone to play along and respect each other.

For all three groups, the quarantine and isolation due to COVID-19 had strong effects on them. Understandably it was less so, on the youngest group, as they were very young at that time. They were either more sheltered from the effect or were too young to have distinctive memories about it.

Overall, in the third group, the youngest, there was less focus on the past three years and more on the present and the future, since these students would have been between three and five years old when the event happened.

All three groups had strong and fruitful conversations about identity and cultural identity and the realization that we share some traits as a community, yet we are distinct individuals.



- Peace,
- Butterflies
- Nature
- Environmental protection
- No violence
- 2020 Events
- No to racism
- Mountains
- Health (healthy communities)
- People
- MLK
- More reading



DISCUSSION

Many of our students at Aurora Charter School live near or on Lake Street in Minneapolis. Many were directly affected by the violence and the rioting. We are now seeing that a lot of them are relearning what it means to interact with others on a day-to-day basis. (I think that) many of our students have not reflected on or coped with what has happened in our community and world, rather, they have moved forward or are trying to put it in the past.

Many, if not all, of them remember exactly what happened but choose to or could not bring it up in conversation. I think that being able to reflect on it in the art program has been a way for them to process their thoughts and feelings in a more relaxed, meaningful manner.

– Sam Kosel, Social Worker, Aurora School

DISCUSSION

The murals (the final product) are important and the most tangible outcome of the project. They will exist long after the students leave the school and help the Latino community attending and visiting the school feel reflected and represented. The mural will start conversations, both among those who like the art and the message and those who don't.



However, the most value of the project is delivered to the community that participated in its creation.

Because our brains relax while doing art (release dopamine, lower cortisol levels), barriers are lowered, and new pathways are opened. By focusing on the creative process, participants' attention was on the product, so they could access their feelings and ideas and express themselves more freely using avenues that would not have been available to them otherwise.

While the focus was on the product, the learning and the healing happened in the process.

Themes

Following the dimensions proposed by the “Continuum of Impact” (11), created by Animating Democracy to organize outcomes of art programs to “demonstrate how the arts can drive change”, here is a summary of main themes

Knowledge:

Awareness and understanding of identity as individuals, as members of the Latino community, as immigrants, as having an opportunity to education, being bilingual; understanding and acknowledging emotions; identifying own strengths and external sources of support.

Discourse:

Working in collaboration; dialog, interaction, expression, finding the words, articulating identity, strengths, feelings; feeling confident to share, feeling safe to share.





Attitudes (values/motivation):

Uncovering values, motivation (what's important to me and why) and vision: talk about social justice, advocacy, discrimination, protection of the environment, stopping violence, identity, peace, environment, getting along, be happy / wanting others to share their happiness.

Capacity:

Feeling that they have a voice to express, feeling participants, feeling capable of making a change, feeling that their voice matters (as individual or communities); increased or activated sense of agency.

Action: Not observed

Conditions: Long-lasting change – not observed.

Knowledge

Identity, strengths, and support

Identity is a concept that is difficult to articulate, not only for children but for the population in general. For many, what constitutes identity was elusive. At the end of the project, the students were able to express in words and drawings about who they were, through elements on how they see themselves, in physical characteristics and emotional strengths, who they are in relation to their families and their cultures, and how family, communities, and cultures shape who they are.

For the older group (6th-8th grades), most of this discussion happened around the videos and the presentations. For the following two phases, 3-5 and K-2, the team introduced several activities and art directives (Loteria, self-portrait, shields of strength, puppets, etc.), foreseeing challenges with the younger students, to make the work more age-appropriate. These additional tools provided a more concrete base to help layer different elements of identity, added depth to the concept and allow articulate better.





Students were able to acknowledge and articulate their own strengths, and what parts of their communities strengthen them or make them feel protected. This is knowledge that was inside of them, but they might not have been fully aware before. It's the hope that all accessing and talking about "what makes me strong" and "what makes me feel strong/protected" will assist students to feel supported or to know where to turn to in times of stress and hard times.

Students also become aware (or more aware) of the reciprocal role, where they can be protectors of others. This was present in the 3rd-5th and 6th-8th groups where they articulated and drew people protesting injustices.

In the youngest group (K-2nd) two students made drawings where they explained how they protect those around them.

One of them told it like this,

"These are people that go to the store, and we have to be outside to make sure they can go home and not be killed. We have to protect them."

"Is that a story you heard?
that someone told you?"

"No, it is just something I know."



The Shield of Strength as an art directive looks at both influences from mainstream culture and influences from the traditional culture and highlights both as important aspects of what makes someone unique as well as what similarities exist."
– Kellie Benson, Art Therapist Intern – Adler Graduate School





Feelings & Emotions

Gaining knowledge by sharpening the ability to observe with intention.

When the students were exposed to art as well as to the videos, students, the facilitators prompted them with the questions for critical observation: “What do you see?”, “What about that calls your attention?” “How does it make you feel?” “What do you think the artist is trying to communicate?”, etc.

Students were able to go beyond the initial reaction to a piece of art, for example, “I like this or don’t like that” or “I can do better than that,” to observe with attention and intention, understanding symbology and connecting with the art.

For example, in the Trees of Life presentation, through the conversation, students articulated the importance of the root system for the tree and how it could be a symbol or metaphor for our origins – “where we come from.” Appreciating the beauty and diversity of the trees also sparked conversations about the environment and the importance of preserving it.

“Through teamwork and the activities, students learn emotion identification and regulation... this is how mad looks like, how does that show on people’s faces?”





Discourse

Students working in collaboration

Teachers and academics everywhere have reported challenges in attention, learning, and behavior after the quarantine, and Aurora School was not an exception. The project helped students to re-enter interaction and collaborative work after the pandemic and isolation.

Both the social worker and the art teacher reported that the mural project gave students a focus, an alternative way to re-enter the school environment and re-learn the disciplines and the rules of interaction in a non-academic environment, with rules and expectations, but coming from a fun angle with no academy expectations.

We observed that the students were restless at first, but as each phase progressed, the routine, the predictability, and the creative process helped the students to focus and engage. Unfortunately, there is no control group for observation to compare the magnitude of this effect and how much of it is attributable to the project. However, we know the students enjoyed it, by their involvement: once the children were engaged in the program, no students dropped out of it, even those who were hesitant at first. In fact, some students from phases I and II would stop by the art room to visit the younger students' work, an indication of engagement and positive feelings toward the experience they had completed.

Creative expression and communication

Students could express themselves creatively through the mural and art therapy program. The visual arts allowed them to communicate their thoughts and emotions in ways that might have been difficult through traditional verbal communication. This creative outlet encouraged self-expression and provided a safe space for students to share their feelings.

Joining the Art programs was a really good choice. At first I thought it was going to be boring. But as the days went on it began to be more fun. I think it began to be fun because my friends joined. Also we started to do more fun things like painting and making necklaces. I also made new friends. I laughed a lot and I really liked painting and making the Mural. I love the Art Program.





“I believe that art allows students to engage in an exploration of themselves in a more expressive and abstract way. There are many aspects of identity, and it can often be difficult to explain who we are with words in a concrete way. Oftentimes, our identity and, more specifically, our cultural identity can be explained easily by pictures and symbols rather than words. By combining education around identity and then allowing students to reflect and express themselves in less of a technical way, I think, allows for more engagement and understanding.”

– Sam Kosel, Social Worker @ Aurora School

Most children, especially young children, relate to art in some form or shape, so children are more likely to use art to communicate with less constraints, a freedom that adults seem to lose. Many of the students reported great enjoyment, more confidence, and increased interest in continuing to develop as artists. It is the hope that art will continue bringing them joy and providing them with alternative means to express themselves, reducing stress and reaction to stressful situations.

For example, there were several students who had difficulty sharing verbally in the group setting, and incidentally, we discovered that another one had great difficulty expressing themselves in writing (in both English and Spanish – the student has an IEP, the school knows, etc.), but these students were always engaged in the activities, producing drawings full of meaning, and volunteering to do extra work. It is for students like these that art opens new paths of communication and levels the playfield.





Attitudes

Uncovering values by sharing personal experiences

During the program, students could share their personal experiences openly. They discussed their thoughts, feelings, and emotions related to various topics, including the challenges they faced during the last two years, which encompassed the quarantine, the violence after the George Floyd killing, the need of social justice, the role they have and the hope that a future would be better. Also, students share stories about their cultures, conversations about foods, comparing and contrasting flags, or just personal stories.

This sharing of experiences fostered a sense of community and understanding among the students, as they realized they are part of a community that share similar values and were not alone in their struggles.

Exploring social justice Issues

The mural and art therapy program also catalyzed discussions around social justice issues. Students engaged in dialogues about immigration, safety, inequalities, racism, and the impact of recent events on their lives. These discussions were enriched by the visual representation of these issues in their artwork, allowing for a deeper exploration of complex topics.



Connecting Latino culture and recent events

Students drew connections between their Latino culture and the last two years' events (oldest and middle groups). They explored how historical experiences and cultural narratives resonated with and related to with current challenges. This connection between past and present experiences gave students a sense of context and history, opening new ways to see and understand the world around them.





Capacity

Fostering empathy and understanding

Through the program, students not only expressed their perspectives but also learned to empathize with the experiences of their peers. Sharing personal stories and engaging in discussions about social justice helped create an environment of understanding where students could appreciate their classmates' viewpoints and challenges.

Empowerment and advocacy

The program empowered students to become advocates for social change. Students began to develop a heightened sense of self-efficacy as they engaged in conversations about social justice and expressed their thoughts through art. They felt empowered to take action, contribute to discussions, and work towards positive change within their community.

The murals from phases I and II reflect the need of the students to speak up and the process, while guided, allowed and encouraged the students to make decision, opened up a sense of agency, the possibility to play a role in shaping the future. Having a sense of some level of control or participation in one's future, provides hope.

Pride in authorship role and permanency

Creating the murals offered students a chance to become storytellers and authors, allowing them to share their perspectives. As children, they often are recipients of the stories their parents tell, and daily interactions might be limited to mundane topics such as school and weekend plans.

When students were expressing their thoughts through the sessions, their stories were not intended to anyone specifically. Students were encouraged to express themselves freely and select how they wanted to display those thoughts on the mural. This project provided a platform for deeper conversations about personal values and issues that are important to them.





Also, the mural project offered students a unique opportunity to leave their mark on Aurora School and be part of its legacy after they graduate from the school. The students expressed their sense of pride in being able to return to the school and see something they had contributed to. It is a rare chance for young people to make a lasting impact, as most of us tend to pass through places without leaving a visible or permanent mark of our contribution.

***“Murals provide youth with an opportunity to be constructive members of their community.”
Delgado, 1998***

Additional Outcomes & Learnings

Evaluation and data collection in art program: It is advantageous to do it continuously and in conversation vs before/after with surveys.

When asked to reflect on the overall program using a reflection page, most students focused on having fun, enjoying art, and wanting to become better artists. Only some students in the older group articulated insights on what they learned about themselves through the program, even when they had actively participated in the the process.

As we reflected on this, the reflection page was not the best evaluation tool to understand what students learned and measure outcomes. We pivoted and used a more fruitful evaluation tool to understand the students: conversations with the students in front of the mural, where they explained the process, the images, what they chose to include and the reasons behind it.

The importance of clarifying what the project is and what is not impacts the process and its measurements

We had a handful of interviews with parents (Phase II), and most were not aware of the goals of the program. Some were expecting advanced art instruction, leading them to be disappointed that their children reported that the program had “lot of conversation” but no structured specific art skills.





As we reflected on this, it prompts us to think that the program (we) did not communicate clearly enough the expectations with parents and students from the beginning. It's important to inform parents and students of the creative and expressive focus and goals of art therapy and a community-based art approach. Also, depending on context, parents need to feel comfortable about the topics and discussions.

Data collection – Continuity and all hands-on participation

The richest data was collected when the team gathered at the end of the day and shared: **what did we observe today?** We focused on gathering observations without attributing specific meanings and keeping our biases in check. It was fruitful to share from cross-functional perspectives - therapists, artists, evaluators, and school staff. Later, upon analysis time, the themes emerged.

Unfortunately, we had not set these debrief times in the schedule (during the planning phase), so even though they happened several times in each session, more sessions and better attendance would have been beneficial for the data collection process.





CONCLUSION



Awareness precedes expression, and awareness and expression open paths for healing.

Participation in this project provided students an opportunity to explore the concept of identity. For most students, this was the first time they talked about how they felt during the events of the last few years. The duration and consistency of the program allowed time and opportunity for students to revisit and explore these themes with depth.

While the project cannot infer or extrapolate the longer term, more profound impact in the students other than that observed, mental health specialists have established that awareness and a strong sense of identity is related to self-esteem and other mental health measurements. A strong sense of identity and self-esteem might prepare students to overcome past trauma and face adverse events such as violence and discrimination, with less negative effects.

Having a sense of agency gives back control of your own life and hope, as opposed to feeling powerless or hopeless.

We can't say how these students will be impacted long term by this experience, but we hope that it has deepened their understanding of who they are, provided building blocks to their self-esteem, has given them a window to see themselves as able to initiate change and contribute: a sense of agency and hope of the future.





LEARNINGS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS



Another important objective of “Sanar Creando” was to learn and provide insights or guidelines for future similar programs. Here, some ideas to make a successful and fruitful program.

Clarify leadership of the team with clear roles, interactions, and expectations. We worked on the assumption that each function understood its role as it related to the larger objective and to each other, but as the work progressed and we went from big picture to execution details, it became clear that we lacked some cohesiveness and clarity. The team redirected and finished well, but we could have avoided stress had we made the team lead role and each role’s expectations clearer from the beginning.

A team lead would be in charge of balancing the needs of artists, the therapists, the school objective from the project, as well as the timeline and the budget. Provide guidance of documentation, especially data collection expectations (notes to be taken by all team participants during the sessions) as well as systematically collect and share observations and insights.

Art therapists must be part of the design team from the beginning, starting from the planning session and defining the intervention (conversation and metrics) and establishing clear expectations regarding attendance, participation (during the sessions and debriefs), implementing changes based on needs, and documenting outcomes.

School participation and true partnership cannot be overstated. From the buy-in on the part of the administration to support the project to having a dedicated room to work in and committed staff to coordinate invitations and ongoing communication with families, solve transportation issues, and be present in the room. Students are familiar with those teachers and social workers and have a connection with them. Without their presence, the artist, evaluators, and art therapists would lack a way in with the students – no connection, no openness. Their knowledge and ability to navigate the logistics of the school and work with the students is invaluable.





Defined, yet flexible, evaluation metrics and processes. While measuring a healing process is complex and might be elusive, it is crucial to have clarity on the outcomes and indicators, as well as the process of collecting the data. Fruitful data collection methods: ongoing observations in the classroom, frequent debriefs with the team, interviews with the staff, and evaluations from the team. Pre- and post-surveys with parents and evaluation pages could be helpful when expectations are clear, and they must be timely. In order to better understand the impact, it would be beneficial to establish a baseline of knowledge. Again, qualitative interview -conversation- vs. survey would feel more personal, rooted, and sensible to the culture.

It's essential to be flexible and strike a balance between the process and the measurement, and not let the need for evaluation interfere with the priority of the project – healing, expression, identity, etc.

Finally, it's important to keep in mind that the whole field of art therapy has had difficulty quantifying its impact. While the effects of art therapy are widely accepted, “the field currently suffers from inconsistent deployment protocols and needs additional validation data—at the behavioral, neuroendocrine, and neural levels—to establish best practices.”(7)

Ongoing monitoring and adjustments – building debriefing as part of the process. No matter how much and well the project is planned, count on change and the need to adjust. Having ongoing scheduled debriefs will ensure the team stays aligned and develops cohesiveness, fine-tune the process, or detect issues early. Strike a balance between logistics (budget, materials, and timelines) and the emotional/social/learning aspects (acknowledging and documenting the students' learnings, connection, and growth.)

If we were doing a similar project with older students (high school or college), they could participate or even lead it: What did we do today? How does this relate, if any, with the overall objective?

Observing critically, with intention. Using the technique to observe art critically and go beyond the superficial will allow students to understand and appreciate art better. As important, as conversations happen, students practice articulating thoughts and opinions, helping them identify what is important to them. “What do you see?”, “What about that calls your attention?”,





How does it make you feel?”, “What do you think the artist is trying to communicate?”, etc.

Articulating identity and cultural identity. These are complex concepts to articulate and require time to develop. The process will benefit from revisiting and being iterative to arrive at a more meaningful notion. All students will benefit from some concrete prompts. Older students will be more capable of grasping the idea through conversations, while younger students might benefit from the use of art directives. The team must be mindful of their own biases when selecting the prompts. If possible, “test” the prompts ahead of time for effectiveness and age appropriateness and to uncover your own biases.

Production of the mural using the canvas technique. The canvas technique used for the third phase (mural drafted on canvas, then cut, painted, and transferred back to the panel) is more flexible and time-efficient. It allows more students to participate in the painting simultaneously, overcoming the limitations set by the physical area or location of the mural (which, in our case, required to plan activities for the portion of the group that was not engaged at any given time).

Another advantage of this technique is that it could be used for murals that will be placed outdoors or directly on buildings, for example. In those cases, the technique would allow the mural process to be free of limitations imposed by seasons, weather, or location (heights or limited access).

Sensitivity to the students' creative process – to let students explore their creativity and have freedom of expression. Students must be allowed to focus on the process rather than the product. The process would benefit from a team trained or familiar with basic principles of art therapy and in the usage of art as a healing tool, being mindful of the language and tone so the structure of the session is guided by those principles and less like an art class. As much as possible, the team (artists and therapists) should belong or relate to the community they are working and should have a strong language and cultural understanding.





Documentation and reflective book as closure. From the beginning of the program, establish guidelines for storage and documentation, including naming a responsible party and collaborators to share the responsibility. Systematically collect and file art pieces the students create.

To produce the Reflective Book, select or instruct students to select pieces showing their progress and the process. Ensure that all students are represented in the selection and make color copies. The book will then be assembled, and students will make their own cover. Guide a conversation from initial expectations and results, focusing on finding areas of growth and improvements for the future.

Create a lesson plan of artistic technical skills to run parallel to the session, that will be needed for the final product, such as use of brushes, mixing colors, creating textures, creating lights and shadows, proportions, etc.

“We should be mindful of the language, tone, and interaction we have as adults with the children, if we want to create a safe and comfortable space for the children.”

–Pamela Grimaldi, Art Therapy Intern

Cultural and linguistic competency of the team.

All team members from the different disciplines involved in the project should be culturally and linguistically competent in students’ native language and cultural background. This competency becomes important in several aspects: building trust and empathy between students and team as well as strengthening the data collection process.





LIMITATIONS



No individualized outcomes or conclusions

The observation and the outcomes were assessed as a group. While effort was made to include and engage everyone who wanted to share, the project did not have an individualized therapy component. Therefore, it's possible that changes in students at the individual level might differ and were beyond what the evaluation team might have been able to capture.

No long-term impact assessment

Observations and outcomes are limited to those observed during the duration of the project. The assessment of long lasting changes in knowledge, discourse and capacity, as direct outcomes of the project, while possible, was outside the scope of the project.

Similarly, based on the reactions of those visiting the project in progress as well as those who have enjoyed the completed murals, we are confident that the murals will engage people in conversation. However, measuring the impact of the murals as public works of art on school grounds, was outside of the scope of this project.



APPENDICES

A group of children are gathered around a table, engaged in a large-scale art project. They are painting a detailed mural of a butterfly. The butterfly's wings are primarily purple and pink, with intricate patterns. The body is brown and yellow. The children are using various colors of paint and brushes. The scene is set in a classroom or workshop, with a white tablecloth and several paint containers visible. The overall atmosphere is one of creative collaboration and learning.



Materials and Equipment

Murals:

- 2 metal panels 5'x10'
- 1 metal panel 4'x8'
- Canvas fabric
- Glue
- Acrylic paint
- Brushes
- Electric sander



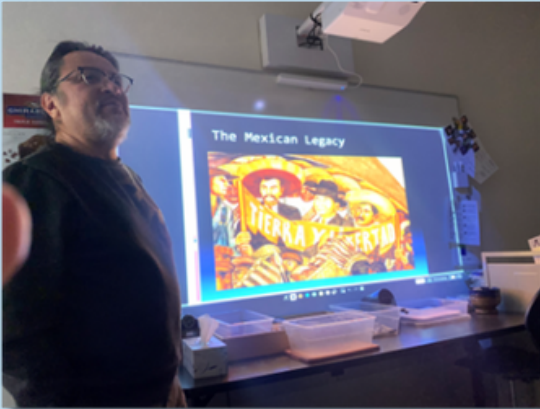
Art Directives and Activities:

- Cardstock
- Cardboard
- Watercolor paper
- Printer & recycled paper
- Brown paper bags
- Canvas
- Markers
- Graphite, charcoal & color pencils
- Chalk
- Crayons
- Paint sticks
- Watercolors
- Acrylic paint
- Glue sticks
- Hot glue
- Glue guns
- Duct tape
- Scissors
- Brushes
- Magic clay
- Clay modeling tools
- Socks
- Ribbons
- Buttons
- Pompoms
- Googly eyes
- Glitter
- Pipe cleaners
- Yarn





Activities and Art Directives



Muralist Tradition in Latin-American Culture

This activity was the cornerstone of the project. The objective of this presentation was to acquaint students with murals as an important artistic expression in Hispanic culture, both in the United States and in Latin American countries. We introduced the motivations of the muralist tradition, such as that is, to celebrate, commemorate, tell the story, educate, or denounce, among others. Murals serve as a medium for sharing a community's narrative, told by the community itself, and lives as public art integrated and accessible to all.

Students were introduced to the objective of the project: a mural that would tell a story or reflect the ideas and images that were important to them. The conversation continued for several class periods.

Indicators:

- Students were able to identify different messages and objectives of the murals, such as celebrating, telling a story, documenting a historical or current event, protesting an issue, or commemorating a person, as well as the decorative and aesthetic values of the art.
- Some of the murals shown were local, and students recognized them, bringing the idea of creating murals closer to them - more relatable and reachable.
- The activity gave students perspective and a reference to the aim of the project and the final product. Students started understanding the idea of history or a story told in images and themselves as authors and creators.
- The conversation about what themes would be included in the mural started here and continued over several class periods. Students drafted some of those ideas.





Latin América – Calle 13

The objective this video was to show students traditional images of the Hispanic lifestyle, showcasing the diversity and richness of the Latin-American culture, awakening, and connecting with a sense of cultural identity. The video uses contemporary music and high-quality production values.



Indicators:

- Students identify themselves with the characters in the video, in their appearance, distinctively Latinos, and in their diversity. They were able to call out elements of the landscape, the lifestyles, and the children playing that related to stories heard from their parents or pictures they had seen and -some- that they remembered.
- Students realized that there were native languages spoken in the video. A handful of students identified the languages, like Quechua, spoken by their relatives.
- Some students remarked about the mural that was being painted as the video progressed.
- The music and the rhythm conveyed excitement and engaged the students.
- The activity concluded with students drawing elements of identity inspired by the video.

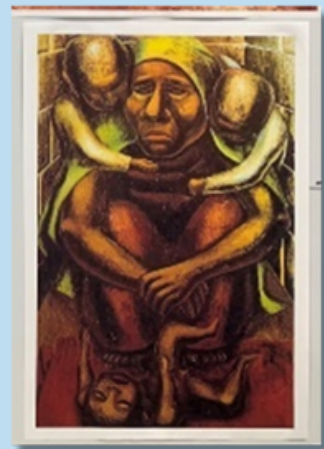




Emotions by several Latin-American Artists

The objective of this activity was to show examples of how feelings and emotions are depicted and communicated in art, etc. and introduce and familiarize the students with some relevant Hispanic artists.

The presentation was followed with an interactive activity and motion (show your emotion in your face / turn around).



Indicators:

- Students were able to identify and call out emotions shown in the images, and how the emotions were communicated in face expressions, positions and colors.
- Some appreciated more abstract representations and how they were able to convey the intended emotions.
- Some students commented on the use of darker colors to communicate the sadness/heaviness of the feelings.
- The interactive activity was engaging and brought a change of pace to the session.
- Students experimented with drawing simple feelings, happy faces, and sad faces. For the 3-5 and K-2 groups, the use of “emoticons” helped students get a better grasp at the fundamentals of representing feelings in drawings.





Movement and Mindfulness

The objective of this activity was to separate the school [CDLRMI] day and prepare the students for the art program. The students would gather for a snack and physical movements and stretches. At first, the movements were directed by a facilitator, and eventually, the students took turns proposing and leading the exercises. We incorporated some variations, like how moods or feelings are something expressed using body language, and the exercise “I am” with the youngest group. When the adults in the team were available, they joined in the transition time.



Indicators:

- Students were able to identify and call out emotions shown in the images, and how the emotions were communicated in face expressions, positions and colors.
- Some appreciated more abstract representations and how they were able to convey the intended emotions.
- Some students commented on the use of darker colors to communicate the sadness/heaviness of the feelings.
- The interactive activity was engaging and brought a change of pace to the session.
- Students experimented with drawing simple feelings, happy faces, and sad faces. For the 3-5 and K-2 groups, the use of “emoticons” helped students get a better grasp at the fundamentals of representing feelings in drawings.



“The movement activities and the Lotería game provided students with additional avenues for self-expression and interaction. These activities allowed them to engage with their peers in a playful and creative manner, fostering connections and a sense of belonging.”

– Marlissa Karpeh, Art Therapy Intern

Lotería & Identity

The objective was to both familiarize the students with the traditional Mexican game Loteria (link to traditions) and to provide the foundation of the concept of identity. The game was explained and played. Then we introduced the idea of creating a Loteria game for our group – what images should we include? The exercise provided students with a base to start understanding the concept of identity, the elements that constitute identity, and start identifying those on themselves.



Indicators:

- The game was a novelty for many of the students in the groups, as their families come from many other countries besides Mexico (El Salvador, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Peru) – it was exposure and discovery of Latin American traditions from other countries. (a richness in culture)
- Students discussed the elements that they later made into drawings: Flags, crests, foods, dresses, family, grandparents, images of the countries (mountains, beaches), foods (corn/elote, picada, tacos, arepas, miloco), etc.
- Flags and crests got a lot of attention - In the process, students learned about their own flags and those of other countries; some got the colors right but out of order, or the symbols mixed up. Students were then very curious to learn the details about their flags and their crests and compare flags to each other.
- Foods yielded an engaged conversation, too. Since many counties and regions are represented, as some were familiar with the food mentioned, but many were not, so they shared - as much as they could - what the food was about.
- This activity was introduced in Phase II (3-5) and repeated in Phase III (K-2), as the concept of identity had posed challenges to articulate with the older students, and the team realized the challenges would be even larger for younger students. It proved to be a helpful tool to understand the complex concept of individual and cultural identity.

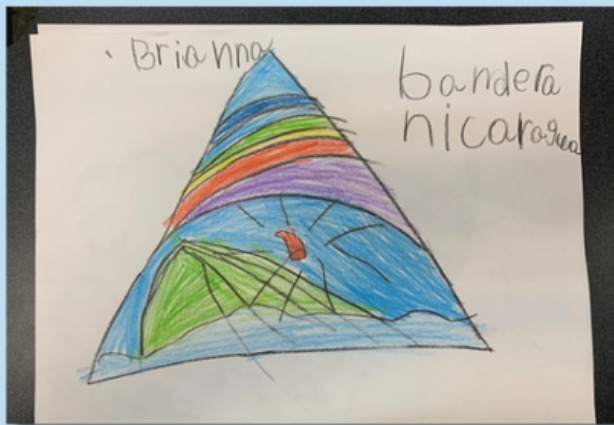




Self Portrait & Identity (Art Directive)

The objective of this art directive was to continue the conversation of identity in a developmentally appropriate way for the youngest of the groups (K-2). The therapists guided the students to talk about what makes us individuals, from physical characteristics to individual qualities, dislikes, likes, hobbies, and other interests the children may have. They also encourage the students to see themselves amidst the group of peers. The desired outcome of the project was for the children to attempt to create a likeness as they see themselves.

An example was made by the therapist to demonstrate what a self-portrait may look like. Mirrors were included at each table so the children could see themselves during the process. It was important to offer a full representation of skin colors that were accessible to each child.



Indicators:

- Some of the students sought out the color called “piel color” (skin color), which often appeared to represent lighter skin tones/ peach tones. A handful of students chose dark skin colors to match their own. Some students “check” themselves or the team if they were selecting the “right” tone.
- Each child drew a self-portrait using mirrors and cell phone cameras and added in details what felt important to them, especially hair, eyebrows, and clothes. Some children made efforts to include emotions that had a likeness to emoticons, showing happy, smiling faces. Many students include some of their favorite adornments that identify themselves, like rainbows and **** (include picture here)





- The students were encouraged to use a large portion of the paper as many had the tendency to draw small images. Taking time to observe their features and practicing drawing a likeness to themselves helps encourage the practice of some of the technical skills of artmaking, such as detailed observation, lines, shape, space, form, pattern, color, and composition.
- Again, this activity was introduced in Phase II and repeated in Phase III. The self-portrait seems to have been an age-appropriate tool to help students articulate and own the differences that they see but might not have been fully aware of. A wide range of skin colors is an important characteristic of Latino identity. It helped the students set a foundation for further learning and experiences in culture and identity.





Shield of Strength (Art Directive)

The main objective of this art directive was twofold: infuse the concept of identity with culture and assist students to identify and bring awareness to sources of inner strength or external support that they could access during times of stress.

The directive was introduced using relatable examples, such as creating their own superhero shield. Then they brainstormed ideas verbally of strength to be on the shields. Students then sketched their own shields and transferred them to cardboard, and even a duct tape handle was included for added “realism” and fun.

On the artist skills side, students were encouraged to work on drafts, iterate and add details, then transfer into the final media (cardboard) using oil pastels and acrylic paint and covering as much surface space as possible in preparation for the draft and transfer of the mural.



Indicators:

- The discussion of “what is a strength” and “what makes you feel strong” was rich. Students articulated sources of strength that come from personality traits, from belonging to a family or a community (where they are protected or when they protect others), from their cultural identity, knowing where they are from and from faith and spirituality.
- Each student got to think and decide what makes them uniquely strong. The directive helped the children articulate positive traits of who they are in a concrete way: unique interests, sports, hobbies, and cultural components (such as cultural food, dress, and flags). As important, it helped them reflect and articulate what they think is positive and constructive about themselves and acknowledge the positive forces or elements present in their lives that are unique to each one of them.





- Students were very engaged in this activity. The activity took two class periods. Some students took the first sketch home and added details. One the second session they proudly showed the team what they had created and added at home. Many students spent extra time focusing on the details. Students had the opportunity to present their shields to the class and many chose to. They were very proud of their accomplishments!
- It's the hope that all accessing and talking about “what makes me strong” and “what makes me feel strong/protected” will assist students to feel supported or to know where to turn to in times of stress and hard times.



Puppets (Art Directive)

Puppet-making in art therapy serves as a medium through which individuals can express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a non-verbal and creative way. This can be especially beneficial for those who find it difficult to articulate their emotions verbally. Creating and interacting with puppets can provide a safe space to explore and release difficult emotions or traumatic experiences.

Through the puppet, individuals can externalize emotions and work through them indirectly. Interacting with puppets can help students express themselves more confidently and allow them to narratives in symbolic and creative manner. Variety of materials and color options were offered to students.





Indicators:

- In the art puppet-making process, it was important to offer students a variety of materials that could give them latitude to represent cultural influences like different skin color paint or just preferences.
- Based on the observations during the creation process of the puppets, it was noticed how students explored different aspects of who they are or who they wanted to represent. The puppet making allowed for some a symbolic culture and for others or just a venue to articulate their individualism not necessarily linked to culture.
- Participants were also challenged to explore their creativity and problem-solving skills using different mediums for the creation of their puppet, for example, socks, clay, fabric, glue, paint, maker, and others. Participants were asked to name their puppets and create stories about them, and some chose to introduce them to the class. Some of the stories were made up, and some related to an event that had happened or that they remembered having heard. For example, there was a student that chose to tell a story about a pet that died back in her country through her puppet.[1]
- [1] Puppets in Phase II were made with modeling clay (head) and fabric (body.) While it was a fruitful activity, for Phase III, the team decided on a less involved/less time-consuming, as well as more age-appropriate, approach and made sock puppets. The result was more time and focus spent on the story and expression of the puppet rather than the technical aspects of the puppet making (clay modeling, cutting fabric, hot gluing, etc.)



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Tree of Unity (Art Directive)

The objective of this art directive was to illustrate how different individuals together create a community, a place for unity, growth, and support. That individual differences are not lost when the individuals belong to a community, rather, the differences make the community richer.

Students were shown videos of trees, both realistic trees as well as trees represented in art, both individual trees as well as trees forming forests. Students were engaged in conversation about what they observed or called their attention. Then they were given the task of creating a tree that represented them and detailing it as much as they wanted. Once the activity was finished, all the trees were placed together, creating a forest. The forest remained in the art room until the end of the project.





Indicators:

- Students engaged in this activity with enthusiasm, utilizing a variety of artistic mediums to express themselves. They incorporated symbols, colors, and shapes that held personal significance to them. While creating their trees, the students discussed their choices and reflected on how the process represented their own growth and interconnectedness with their peers.
- Students from different age groups approached the tree directive uniquely. Younger students tended to focus on the visual aspects, creating vibrant and imaginative trees, while older students delved deeper into the symbolism and meaning behind their artistic choices.
- Through their trees, students expressed a strong desire for unity and community. They used various elements to symbolize diversity, such as different-colored leaves, stickers, yarn, and leaves of different shapes, representing their individuality, yet they commented on how they came together to form a harmonious whole (the forest).
- The discussions around their trees led to reflections on their own experiences of origin, growth, and unity. Many students related these concepts to their personal lives and experiences within their families, schools, and communities.
- The process of creating the trees allowed the students to practice critical thinking and self-expression. They explored symbolism and learned to communicate abstract concepts through visual elements and gained insights into their own thought processes.





Reflective Book (Art Directive)

As each phase was reaching the end, the students collectively created a book that reflected their artistic journey and experience throughout the sessions. The book aimed to preserve their growth, thoughts, and feelings over the course of the program. By creating the book, the students were able to revisit their artwork, providing an opportunity to reflect on how their perspectives had evolved. Each student created a unique cover for their book.



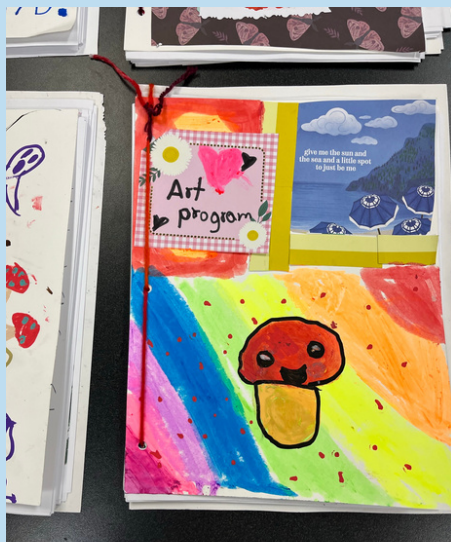
Indicators:

- The creation of the reflective book was met with enthusiasm and a sense of accomplishment. Students took pride in curating their artwork and sharing their experiences in a tangible form.
- The reflective book provided a space for students to witness their personal growth, not just as artists but as individuals and as a group. By revisiting their artwork and reflecting on their experiences, they gained a sense of closure, which helped students recognize the progress they had made. For many, it was a moment of pride. For some students, it also offered an opportunity for introspection and self-awareness. Some students expressed how certain art pieces represented shifts in their thinking.





- During the process of creating a book, the students realized how art was able to convey their emotions, thoughts, and memories in a way that words alone could not. It is our hope that the students have gained a greater appreciation for the power of art as a tool for personal expression and storytelling.
- Creating the cover provided students another opportunity to express individuality and preferences while complying with the guidelines of a group project.
- Seeing all the covers different and together provoked a sense of awe and admiration for their work as individuals and as a group. We hope (we can't say that students realized this) that students could appreciate how it is possible to be part of a group without losing their individuality or the appreciation of the beauty of diversity within a group is what makes the group beautiful.
- However, due to timing/lack of time at this point, we might have missed the opportunity for a deeper conversation, as we did not structure enough time and conversation to reflect on the art pieces and the process that brought us here. This would be a good opportunity to pause and have a guided conversation about progress or growth or how the pieces in the book and on the mural are related. This also could be designed as a post-experience evaluation opportunity, including a reflection about what or how the students wished to remember about the experience.

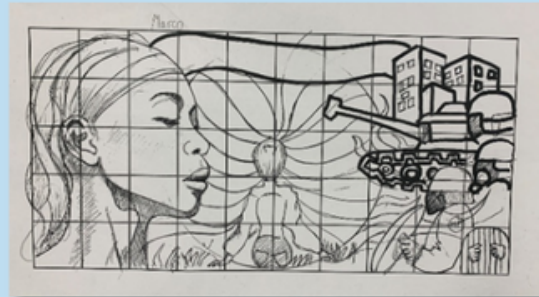




APPENDIX C



Mural Design Process



Phase II – Taking the artist statement



Phase III – Mural Building Process



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THANK YOU

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