

The Graffiti Project

By Janet Scollick

The Graffiti Project was a very successful service project that involved over 75 students in 6th, 7th and 8th grade. This was a partnership project sponsored by the National Council to Prevent Delinquency (NCPD). Research Director, Ms Faith Weilder was their project coordinator. The culminating activity was a beautiful student mural depicting the values, goals, and themes of Julius West Middle School. The installed mural contains 40 panels and is 144 feet in length. It was installed in the school cafeteria so all students are able to enjoy the project and reflect on the values and themes of our school.

Meet a recognized need in the community: Students learned about the impact graffiti and vandalism has on our community as they read news reports about the local, national and international problems of graffiti. Students watched TV news channels as they described the problems and interviewed victims of graffiti vandalism. All of this reinforced the need for graffiti prevention in our community and identified this as a recognized need in the community.

Achieve curricular objectives through service-learning: The curricular objective met through this project included reading for information and following directions, which supports our school improvement plan objective. Students developed vocabulary that they incorporated in their creative writing assignments. The project required lots of teamwork and cooperation as students learned the proper use of public space. Students discussed legal issues, responsible citizenship and the importance of maintaining a safe and clean environment. Math skills were tested as students estimated the high cost of cleaning up vandalism for cities and their citizens. Lessons were created that would meet the needs of our student population, address the MSSA/MSDE Maryland State Department of Education/Maryland Student Service Alliance (MSDE/MSSA) Best Practices, as well as address the local, national and international problem of graffiti.

Reflect throughout service-learning experience: Student reflection occurred throughout the project. Raps and poems were written to express how graffiti and vandalism negatively affect our communities and nation. The students completed a reflection document that provided an opportunity for them to define their feelings and attitudes about the proper use of public space.

Develop student responsibility: High quality service-learning allows students to take leadership and ownership over the projects performed. The students certainly accomplished this best practice and, in fact, were involved in decisions regarding the details of the mural project from the beginning. The students selected the themes, color and designs for the mural. What do we want students to see when they look at the mural? How does it reinforce school values and expectations? The students came up with wonderful ideas and the professional muralist did an outstanding job of taking all student ideas and creatively arranging them on the mural. Lots of brainstorming of ideas took place throughout the project and all ideas were viewed as valued contributions.

Establish community partnerships: A partnership with The National Council to Prevent Delinquency was formed in June 2003. Project coordinator, Faith Weilder meet with me throughout the summer and early fall to establish guidelines, create curriculum, and establish a timeline. Ms Weilder was introduced to the students and she explained the project and described objectives and goals. Although the project is over, Ms Weilder and I

continue to collaborate on ways to extend and improve the pilot project. Interactions with caring adults and civic-minded people provide positive role models for our students. This transfers into respectful behavior and promotes a sense of community and appropriate aspirations.

Plan ahead for service learning: The planning for this project began in June of 2003. Ms Weilder, the Research director and I met throughout the summer to plan and discuss goals and objectives. We discussed student needs, 7 best practices, school improvement plan, and curriculum material. Lessons were created to meet the needs of our student population. The students also participated in the planning process as they identified graffiti education/prevention, as a real community need. Students were exposed to vocabulary, graffiti types, financial burdens to cities and victims, and appropriate use of public space. Students planned the mural design, PA announcements and JAG news segments to educate the student body on the need for graffiti prevention.

Equip students with knowledge and skills needed for service: The curriculum was designed for students in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. Prior knowledge was assessed in each class. Vocabulary was presented and explained. News articles, video clips, samples of graffiti types, cost analysis sheets were explained. Once the background information was complete, students were aware of graffiti, vandalism, and the impact that it has on communities. Students learned techniques for creating a mural as they worked side by side with a professional muralist. The classes were well prepared to create a beautiful mural that showed teamwork, dedication, creativity, and knowledge and skill.