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An Identity Healing:
Socialization and African-Centered Practices with At-Risk Youth

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Abstract

African-Centered practices are being regarded as valuable therapeutic healing methods within the African-diaspora. However, there is limited research that examines the propitious advantages and psychotherapeutic use of Afrocentric movement of two very distinctive, yet possible complementary systems, the Katherine Dunham technique and Kemetic Yoga. The research available on these African-based movement practices recognizes them as holistic and encompassing a mind/body/soul connection. Ritualistic practices in counseling remains a growing interest to mental health practitioners of all cultures, to ensure that clients are provided with an experience of client-centered psychotherapy. Therapeutic African-centered practices align with Carl Rogers' person-centered approach and the psychotherapeutic practice of African-centered psychology, as these two procedures focus on the client achieving greater independence, an increased knowledge-of-self and "embodying a cultural identity" of their own. The goal of using African-centered practices in expressive therapy and in dance-movement therapy is to bring more awareness to its therapeutic use. Augmenting this topic, required that both movement systems be utilized interrelatedly and approached from a developmentally appropriate perspective for at-risk youth. Dunham's Isolations, Kemetic yoga poses, and African masks were used for character development with clients ages 7-11, grades 2nd-5th, at a traditional Elementary Public-School Program. The youths' passionate spirit and instantly recognizable involvement with the African practices applied, indicates that younger populations, specifically those affected by trauma can benefit from ritualistic based African-centered practices which endorses the need for future research, acknowledgement and application.

Keywords: African-centered practices, dance-movement therapy, art-therapy, African masks, mime, character development, improvisation, choreography.

If you can walk, you can dance. If you can talk, you can sing.
-African Proverb

Introduction

Identity Healing through African-centered practices can be defined under an Afrocentric framework, and African-centered philosophy system that is based on integrating holistic values of cultural and ritualistic traditions and are recognized as beneficial therapeutic healing techniques in modern-day living (Hatcher, King, Barnett & Burley, 2017). Communing and engaging in movement circles, chanting, drumming and other ways of expressing oneself artistically creates a cathartic experience that is an ancient custom to indigenous people all over the world. Returning to the past, or what we traditionally call, “Sankofa” and recovering the Indigenous African-centered principles and practices that were lost during colonialism is vital in repairing and coming back to the roots of where African-Americans spiritual, philosophical and psychosocial practices originate from historically as a people. Hatcher, King, Barnett & Burley, (2017) stated that “research has confirmed that the lack of Afrocentric paradigms to guide development of interventions and mental health services, in addition to cultural competency deficits in service implementation, has contributed to the underutilization of necessary mental health interventions” (p, 5).

Comparably, as stated in the literature of the Expressive Therapies program at Lesley University, “the creative arts therapies, has a history that extends back to the ancient Egyptians” (Lesley University, 2017). Shaun McNiff (1974) coined the phrase “arts-based knowing” in therapeutic counseling and the creative arts and healing initiative is now forefront in postcolonial society. An *Identity Healing* in arts-based therapeutic recovery is about utilizing a broader cultural lens when counseling diverse groups, specifically African-Americans (blacks or people of African descent) and was found to support and facilitate their journey of healing and greater

understanding of self-awareness. According to Dee Das (2017), “Exposure to culture, meaning the arts, was the first steppingstone out of poverty because it made community members more psychologically open to changing their culture, meaning their attitudes and behaviors” (p. 179). At-risk youth in the African-American community who are exposed to trauma can benefit from an Afrocentric “diasporic expressive culture” which allows them to have a greater understanding of how they fit into the broader American society and world (Dee Das, 2017). Culturally arts-based therapeutic methods through African-centered practices offer an alternative approach to healing that integrates therapy, arts and culture, and can conceivably expand the client’s therapeutic experience, help heal generational wounds due to slavery and colonialism through cultural education and assist to unify a community that is often seen as impoverished and broken.

Given that at-risk youth, who reside primarily within the African-American communities, are disconnected from their own indigenous cultural value system and a culturally-based education, the creator of this paper examined two unique African-based movement systems that combine an African-centered, visual arts mask-making project to help children cultivate ways of expressing oneself holistically, encourage self-regulating behaviors, reduce anxiety and depression and establish interracial communication through socialization and humanization through the arts. The purpose of this therapeutic integrated modality process which is centered in dance-movement therapy is to explore and analyze why creating African-based visual art masks with children is a culturally responsive pathway into African-centered therapeutic practice. This therapeutic approach examines how this method might help improve focus, self-control, and socialization. Also, the method may demonstrate the advantages of DMT or expressive therapies approaches may have on self-expression, knowledge-of-self and cultural identity healing, and reveals specific techniques therapists can use with African-American children that broadens the

cultural lens therapeutically. In speaking about at-risks youth Farr (1997) stated, “the potentials of black children must be assessed and nurtured on the merit of their own strengths; otherwise the adaptive advantages of culturally specific skills and assets may continue to go unrecognized within the limited range of their sanctioned behaviors” (p. 2). This Capstone Thesis Project will integrate an arts-based approach to explore the valuable and necessary implementation of therapeutic arts through African-centered practices as they relate to at-risk youth. The project will offer data to support the advantages of utilizing African-based centered practices in dance-movement, visual art, and other modes of artistic expression through expressive therapy modalities when working with people of African-descent. There will be a specific focus on children who are diagnosed with disorders of adjustment, impulse control, socialization, depression, anxiety and other mental health disorders due to a lack of self-concept and identity. Therefore, culturally arts-based therapeutic methods may provide useful information about the efficacy of examining a broader cultural lens under African-centered practices predominantly with African-American children, and/or at-risk youth. This approach may succinctly understand how and why an African Centered Psychology and approach was created to address mental health issues for African people in the diaspora (as spoken about in Grills, Ph.D., 2006).

Literature Review

This review will focus on current and past literature as it relates to the importance of integrating therapeutic African-centered arts-based practices combined with cultural methods that expand the therapeutic lens in the treatment of African people in the diaspora, specifically, “at-risk” youth.

“At-risk” Youth

“At-risk” youth is defined as an “endangered species and has become synonymous with poor urban black youth, whose environmental conditions render them among the most vulnerable to social and psychological dysfunction in contemporary society” (Farr, 1997). Camilleri, defines “at-risk” youth in her book as “being in danger of future events” (as cited in McWhirter et al., 1998, p. 7). Author of *Healing the Inner City Child*, Camilleri states, “these events, or their outcomes, can include depression, educational failure, addiction, unemployment, incarceration, poverty, or death, and are a result of a complex and often correlated set of risk factors” (Camilleri, 2007, p. 17). Furthermore, “at-risk” youth are the “throw-away” children in America and abroad. These children are considered challenging and problematic within the normal constructs of society. These “troubled” children are mostly Black youth and come from an environment that is often dysfunctional and chronically imbalanced. “Every 85 seconds a black child is born into poverty (Children’s Defense Fund, 1995) and its chances of overcoming deleterious effects of marginalization have appeared to worsen over the last three decades, (as cited in Farr, 1997, p. 1).

When pertaining to youths of African descent, their homes, neighborhoods and communities become inhabitable due to intense crime and poverty, and now they are a detriment to themselves. Farr states, “depression is the single common denominator underlying these diagnoses rendering the young adult’s incapable of altering the vicious cycle of their own victimization” (Farr, 1997, p. 2). Growing up black in America is almost a death sentence, unless you are culturally, socially, politically and financially informed on how to operate within a system that was not necessarily designed for you to succeed. When someone is uninformed, and not properly educated, they are more vulnerable to poverty, poor housing conditions,

unemployment, a decreased access to education and the probability of risking the daily autonomy of survival.

Cultural Identity Trauma in “At-risk youth”

Racial injustice is one of the main causes of depression and cultural identity trauma that continues to confront people in the African-American community and diaspora. Often, due to racial injustice, one’s self-identity, and the acknowledgement and celebration of culture is affected. Also, there is an increase in illness, along with mental health conditions when an individual or group of people cannot properly identify themselves, which results in and relinquishes them from a somatic sense of self or proper identity. “Culture identity trauma in families can create a sense of disconnectedness that ultimately contributes to psychological trauma” (Dosamantes- Beaudry, 1997). She explains why culture as an “internalization screen” is so significant. “One thing that gives humans are distinctive identity is culture. Our culture provides us with the rules of the ways we must express ourselves, behave, think, work, make love, defend ourselves and organize ourselves economically and politically. (Dosamantes- Beaudry, p. 1).

Furthermore, generating a positive self-image and cultural appreciation of self, must come from the psychosocial environments of family, home life and school. This internalization and self-constructing model that Beaudry speaks of is based within the psychoanalytic developmental theory that extends back to Freud’s focus on genetic make-up and how that relates to the impulses and motives of external expression. This concept has expanded with more emphasis on how interpersonal relationships affect consciousness, knowledge-of-self, and humanistic psychosocial development paradigm (Dosamantes-Beaudry, 1997). As this relates to at-risk youth there is a greater evidence of dysfunction and risk-factors when children live in

certain living conditions or grow-up under specific environmental stressors that includes a world-view or reality that does not resemble images or provide a representation of self, which can only exacerbate mental health issues. Camilleri (2007) identifies six main risk factors that can severely impact children and deem them “at-risk” youth. These risk factors include children who grow up in poverty under a system of welfare and are raised in single-parent homes, or without both biological parents. Also, children born out of wedlock, or with uneducated parents have higher risks for emotional dysfunction and dysregulation. These issues are generational and produce a lost sense of self which is further intensified by the continued and on-going racial oppression and resistance toward people of African-descent in the United States and abroad. African-centered arts-based therapeutic practice grounded in ritual is critical to the psychological and spiritual healing of people of African-descent, specifically children in the African-American community labeled “at-risk.” Camilleri (2015) discusses this topic in more detail:

Living in a neighborhood where racial identification and pride are strong, provides a sense of community and shared values, which give children a feeling of meaning and belonging. When minority children are provided with a positive view of their reference-group, their self-concept becomes more positive, influencing their view of who they are and what they can achieve. For African-American children, it was found that the internalization of Afrocentric values was positively associated with self-esteem and psychosocial adjustment. Ethnic identification allows for positive self-identification, counters fear and demoralization, and is an important coping mechanism for minority children. (p.53)

African-Centered Practices & Identity Healing

Expressive movement and dance remains a way for African people to channel their energy positively, connect with each other and relate to the world around them. “African dance as a therapeutic art form is interwoven into the indigenous ritual healing of African people in the diaspora. The use of ritualized movement when working through trauma is held as an ancient practice where healing dance rituals have helped to relieve psychological distress, trauma and dissociation” (Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p. 2). In Judith Hanna’s book (1987), she discusses how dance and movement are healing and innately a part of human life. In many African cultures dance remains a go-to source for personal, social and spiritual enlightenment, and still today is a central part of ritualistic practice. Throughout history, various African societies and cultures have carried out rituals centered in dance and movement with an expanded and cultural emphasis on music and drama. “The Ndeup dance is a Senegalese ritual for the “mental, psychological or emotional illness; the Zar dance that originated in Ethiopia is for mental and physical illnesses, with the body and trauma as significant causes, and the Guinea dance is a conduit dance of emotional healing in the community” (Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p. 8-10). Monteiro & Wall (2011), spoke about a dance-movement ceremony in Guinea where they conducted research in the field and witnessed a ritualized ceremony involving a two-year old boy who had hydroencephalitis, which is an illness characterized by fluid build-up on the brain. The boy and his mother were continuously unsuccessful in treatment but decided to join a dance ritual in the village for about four days. Afterward, it was observed that the mother had undergone a cathartic experience from observing the dancing, singing and playing of musical instruments. Their experience in the field was recorded:

By virtue of their presence, she and Musa became part of the dance. Fatim swayed to the rhythms, closed her eyes during singing and smiled and clapped when individual dancers performed solo routines. After about four days Fatim went back to her home visibly lighter in spirit. She kept in touch with the group's leader, and although there was no positive change in Musa's condition or prognosis, there was an acceptance and peace in her communication. Fatim and Musa had danced without standing up, sang without uttering a word, and connected to the intangible healing force of dance, just by being there. (Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p.12) Thus, the movement systems discussed in this paper have similar therapeutic benefits, being that they are also derived from ancient African healing practices, as well.

The African healing practices of the Katherine Dunham Technique and Kemetic yoga are continuously evolving interventions that emphasize the mind, body, soul connection and are possible methods to be used more frequently within clinical settings. There is current research that shows the historical influence of these two movement-systems and how they have helped improve upon self-esteem and knowledge-of-self, reduce stress and anxiety, provide emotional regulation and how they are healthy alternatives to violence, genocide and restoring a legacy of healing within the African community. In relation to the Katherine Dunham Technique and (Isolations movement), which consists of moving, isolating and controlling one body part at a time, Powell (2013) discussed its influence on school aged children:

The Dunham technique has been used by public school teachers, who have confirmed the workability of the technique and the positive responses of their students. They are particularly useful because of their adaptability to all ages and the small amount of space required. Isolations may be incorporated into the classroom schedule or made part of the

daily routine after a stressful day. An important advantage of isolations is their ability to provide exercise for senior citizens, mental patients and handicapped persons, as a tool to warm-up and strengthen the muscles, stimulate the mind and serve as a therapeutic aid.

(p.65)

Similarly, Kemetic yoga is the other African-based movement system discussed. However, despite some of the research that has been done with the practice of Kemetic yoga, there is very limited literature that currently exists on this topic. Nonetheless, Kemetic yoga (African yoga or Ancient Egyptian yoga) is shown to be an effective therapeutic movement solution and method throughout the African diaspora for the physical and mental relaxation in children and adults, specifically at-risk youth. Master Yirser Ra Hotep, the founder of the YogaSkills Method, and who has taught and practiced Kemetic yoga for over 42 years, designed a system that he calls ISR, or the Internal Self-Regulation system (Hotep, 2018). ISR involved deep breathing and specific movements that is proposed to calm the nervous system. Yirser developed YogaSkills to work with persons who are substance and alcohol users and children who experienced trauma. In his occupation as a licensed social worker, he's worked with children in the community often labeled at-risk who are traumatized by abuse and neglect. The Kemetic yoga movement method proved beneficial for this population, age group and the African-American community at large.

Ritualistic dance and movement have historically played a significant role in the healing of many African societies (Vinesett, Price & Wilson, 2015). In continuing and encouraging the use of culturally based art therapeutic practices with "at-risk" youth in the community, many educators, social workers, therapists and medical doctors are now acknowledging the historical and traditional roots of ritualistic movement and honoring the need for a broader approach in

therapy and more effective ways to achieve the therapeutic benefits desired. For example, Monteiro and Wall (2011) stated the following:

Dance is one form that clearly connects the contemporary with the traditional. Many urban, marginalized or otherwise disenfranchised youth have instinctively and consciously tapped into the artistic healing and movement traditions of the Diaspora. Dance forms such as hip-hop, break dancing, pop locking, and Krumping have acted as vessels of inter-generational cultural transmission, as well as modes of community and individual healing. In addition, traditional African dance as taught and practiced in the West has also taken on a therapeutic function, e.g., women intentionally utilizing African dance for self-therapy and community building. (p. 16).

An African proverb states that, "The child who is not raised by its mother will be raised by the world" (Warfield-Coppock, 1992, p. 4). Concurrently, a child not raised by his parents, and not given the opportunity to learn the traditions of his/her ancestors is at a loss socioemotionally and culturally. The historical concepts of both the Katherine Dunham Technique and Kemetic yoga are indigenous to the African-American experience. The background of these movement methods come directly from the continent of Africa, and/or throughout the countries of the Afro-Caribbean, such as Jamaica, Martinique, Trinidad, and Haiti. Although at times lost and forgotten, these are the dance and movement styles of the black youth's parents, grandparents, and indigenous ancestors. There is a deep need and cultural relevance in these two movement systems that has been proven to stabilize the troubled young minds of at-risk youth and in turn help foster an identity healing that is needed in this population, which can also increase a collective movement toward social change and social justice in the community. Katherine

Dunham's work emphasized the work needed in the community to see a dynamic change in the behavior of the people who inhabited it.

The "Dunham technique" and its philosophical principles, such as self-knowledge, detachment, and discrimination are ideas that contribute to Dunham's anthropological studies "Way of Life," which is an all-encompassing approach to identity healing. Katherine Dunham's technique encompasses a physical, spiritual and ritualistic practice of recovery, and is a way to build community through dance and movement, which Dunham felt could ultimately help end the problem of violence in urban areas (Dee Das, 2017).

For Dunham, political and social activism was at the center of her work as a dancer, choreographer, performer, anthropologist, and holistic healer. She understood movement as a means of mobilizing and activating change within a community of people. After viewing the methodologies behind Dunham's technique and work, one may begin to grasp, appreciate and acknowledge her work as a dance and movement educator, and how she in her own right was a pioneer of dance and movement as a therapeutic tool. Moreover, she was a black woman who paved the way for many other black men and women, through the modality of dance and movement which facilitated a healing intrinsically connected to their minds, bodies, spirits and identities overall. As a leader, pioneer and experienced dancer in ritualistic movement, she was a true believer in the intuitive healing power of dance, she was and remains influential and invaluable to many in the African-American community. Dunham's work was acknowledged as essential and important in the African-American community, but not greatly appreciated in the broader American culture, because of her revolutionary spirit and willingness to change the world around her (Dee Das, 2017). While uncovering the process of identity healing through Dunham's work, another practice she integrated in her technique emerged, which is chakra

energy healing through mindfulness and meditation. As stated in Dr. Albirda Rose's (1990), *Dunham Technique: A Way of Life*, "Africans brought with them as a part of their cultural heritage a cosmology and a belief system that appears throughout their movement expression. Often times this sense of relationship to the universe and their belief system would bring about a high level of spiritual enlightenment if learned and practice. The chakra system is used as part of the movement expression within a cultural context to reach a level of enlightenment." The chakra system practiced within the Dunham methodologies, organically leads us into the next tool that can be utilized for identity healing, and it is an ancient Egyptian (Kemetic) practice that was used thousands of years ago, called Kemetic yoga.

According to Master teacher, Yirser Ra Hotep and Dr. Asar Hapi who developed a modern version of this ancient system during research in the 1970s, Kemetic yoga's origins are found in ancient Egyptian practices (Bernal, 2015). It is a combination of deep breathing and meditation that is like in many other yoga practices, healing and restorative. What makes this type of yoga unique is the progression of geometrically influenced postures that create alignment within the body as well as allow for energy and a life force to flow through the body during practice (Hotep, 2018). The YogaSkills method was developed through the influences of Kemetic yoga and it is based on activating the parasympathetic nervous system to help heal the body from traumatic injury and overuse seen in such occupations as gymnastics or contortionism (Essence Magazine, 1990). In relation to the African diaspora, the Kemetic yoga system is vital to the identity healing process because Africans in America and abroad can begin to find images in Kemetic yoga that relate to who they are. They can then have a connection and relationship to their bodies that may have been absent before. It seems that Kemetic yoga may provide a historical perspective of movement and develops that broader cultural therapeutic lens that

wasn't available previously. Yirser Ra Hotep (2017) breaks down five ways that Kemetic yoga is different than Indian yoga, which is often more formally practiced. The five differences are as follows:

1. Kemetic yoga comes from Africa (Egypt), not India.
2. The main poses in Kemetic yoga imitate ancient Egyptian Gods and the positions of these Gods in carvings on temple walls.
3. Kemetic yoga is slower than many types of Indian yoga, which ultimately focuses on relaxation and meditation vs. athleticism.
4. There is only one type of Kemetic yoga, whereas Indian yoga can be broken down into Hatha, Bikram, Vinyasa, and more.
5. Kemetic yoga is based solely on the philosophy of "*Maat*," which focuses on balance and harmony with the universe.

Furthermore, Kemetic yoga, like the Dunham technique is a part of an ancient African movement and ritualistic practice that is part of the culture, history and ancestors of African people. It is a unique dance/movement therapy tool that is focused on managing the self, and creating balance within the mind, body and spirit.

Physical movement through dance and yoga are only two ancient African-centered practices that were experienced during traditional Afrocentric rituals. When we think about the expressive therapies and the various modalities that it encompasses, dance/movement therapists must continue to expand their cultural lens even further (Capello, 2007). Ritualistic song, music, drumming, poetry and spoken word, visual arts, face-paint/tribal make-up, masks, fashion, jewelry, and mime and drama can also be tailored from an Afrocentric point-of-view. This thesis will discuss how working with African masks as a segue way into dance and movement is also a

component of culturally based artistic expression and can help to heal one's own identity and facilitate growth and self-independence in "at-risk" youth.

According to Stangline (2015) making and wearing masks is a way for children to express their emotions safely. Releasing emotions that can't easily be expressed in other ways, is possible within the masking process because it can help children put difficult feelings into words, art and motion simultaneously. Capello (2007) referenced the use of African masks by a Swedish-American dancer by the name of Laura Sheleen, stating, "she links ritual movements coming from mythological stories and theatre, and working together with masks to move the "individual self" through a collective human expression" (Capello, 2017, p. 3). Another reference to the use of masks is noted, as well. A practice that originated in the 8th century, from a Japanese traditional musical about the Noh civilization. During these musicals the players would speak, sing songs, and dance to music while wearing masks. The dancing in Noh musicals was known as Shimai, and it was carried out as a cultural tradition by its soldier class then passed on to prominent families for many years. "There are about 300 performances in Noh, many of them having themes of verbal and non-verbal communication with the dead or with ghosts. A few dance/movement therapists use Shimai in their sessions in Japan, believing that the dance forms of Noh are useful in introducing patients to dance" (Capello, 2007). The use of masks, drumming, story-telling and dance as ritualistic healing methods are also ancient historical traditions of African people and is still culturally relevant to their identity healing while building and maintaining unity in their communities. Additionally, analyzing how the methodologies of these two movement systems are similar and why if converged as a therapeutic practice can benefit many inner-city children.

What both the Katherine Dunham technique and Kemetic yoga have in common is the desire to liberate an oppressed people who have lost part of their historical relevance and culture. Both these movement techniques and tools are focused on a change in consciousness, internal self-regulation and emotional regulation, control, strength, balance, relaxation, mindfulness, improved focus, flexibility, expansion, confidence, rhythmic connection, movement for self-expression, building relationships and socialization through the arts. They are ritualistic in nature and provide a way to build a relationship with one's own body, so that positive relationships with other bodies can manifest wholesomely and organically.

Socialization Through the Arts

Socialization through the arts was a philosophy that Dunham incorporated into her classes and movement practice. It involved, the physical, mental and spiritual preparation of the integration of the body and movement. Movers were expected to show complete focus and come in with a personal goal for each day of class. Rose (1990) stated:

When Miss Dunham starts a class, the first physical preparation is to begin with Breathing, which is a basic part of the technique. Breathing is basic to life. It is a life force. Dunham used the breathing exercise to cleanse the body. Learning how to breathe properly within one's own rhythmic force allows the student/client to prepare the body for strenuous activity and focus the mind towards conscious disciplined activity. (p. 31-32).

Just as breathing is accommodating to all human life, the Dunham technique and her interracial model was accommodating to all races, cultures and nationalities. Joanna Dee Das (2017) provided further clarification on how Dunham's interracial model was all encompassing and involved people from all over the world that came to study, teach and practice this model while

also incorporating these philosophies of daily living into their lives as dancers and individuals:

“The US government granted the Dunham School permission to enroll students on nonimmigrant visas. Cuban, Palestinian, Haitian, and Irish students took classes from teachers who hailed from Haiti, Trinidad, Mexico, Austria, and elsewhere.” (p. 87).

Dunham’s interracial model was aligned with her philosophy of socialization and humanization through the arts which is a theoretical model that involved the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual of the individual. In Rose (1990) this description was given, “The theory of *form and function* uses the physical, which shows how dance relates to a particular cultural pattern and belief system, and ultimately is what Dunham used to introduce people (her audience and dancers) to other cultures.” (p. 20). The *intercultural communication and socialization through the arts* focuses on the mental and emotional aspects of who we are. The objective of this aspect of the model is to seek to connect with others around us, despite our differences, and to realize that we have more in common than not. Doing so, will allow one to expand their consciousness and awareness and maintain a universal world-view. Socialization through the arts and its emotional aspect is distinctively defined as a much larger system that contains or holds certain philosophical and expressive components. To practice the technique effectively, students must understand that the technique is “codified, demonstrated, and transmitted daily” but the system is even more complex and requires more delving into. Albirida Rose, who is a master Dunham teacher, and who was taught by Dunham years ago describes the Dunham technique as a basic Dunham technique that involves vigorous work at the bar, isolations, movements, and control of energy flow. The technique perfects the body; the system clarifies the mind. Such a system decrees change, rigorous self-interrogation. (Rose, 1990, p. 21).

According to Dee Das (2017), the therapeutic component and transformational aspect of the Dunham technique is based on three principles, which she Dunham discusses in her “Reflections on Survival” speech when presented an Honorary Degree as Doctor of Humane Letters. They are *Self-Knowledge*, *Detachment* and *Discrimination*. Self-Knowledge is about the student looking within themselves and integrating the body, mind and spirit to become a complete artist who is self-sufficient in society. As described in Rose (1990) “Self-knowledge, the sum total of faith in oneself to move to feel, to know, and to use for self and others, to give through the motion of the body what we call dance. This is the blending which creates the balanced person on stage, in the classroom, and in one’s own private life.” (p.26) Detachment, is a word that some might confuse with being uninvolved or noncommittal, but Dunham was not referring to the word detachment in this way. Her use of detachment can be defined as an involvement and feeling, but non-possessiveness. In a Dunham workshop, at Columbia College Chicago I attended summer 2017, “detachment” was lectured on by several master Dunham teachers and this example was given by Master Dunham Teacher, P. Godboldo, personal communication, August 3, 2017: “If two children are engaged in an argument or fight, the teacher or counselor should encourage the children to detach themselves from the situation “or walk away” to refrain from further chaos. Lastly, discrimination can be defined as learning how to choose, select or *discriminate* between good and evil, constructive and destructive, harmony and dis-harmony, both in our individual and social lives, and how to select with wisdom alternative acts set before us...To make clear distinctions between or amongst the essential and the superfluous. (Rose, 1990, p.27). Again, these are elements of Dunham’s technique that lead to an inner feeling state of pure balance between body, mind and soul or a higher consciousness of self, which relates to the fourth period of the Dunham technique that includes Fundamental,

Lyrical, Karate and an understanding of energy flow through the energy centers of the body or (Chakras). The Dunham Chakra Adagio sequence or system in the Dunham Technique is focused on spiritual enlightenment. “Africans brought with them as a part of their cultural heritage a cosmology and belief system that appears throughout their movement expression. The word Chakra is Sanskrit, and signifies a wheel” (Rose, 1990, p. 98). Dunham felt, “that for the dancer the Chakras represent the ability to control each point as they represent the energy force of movement application. The mastering of these energy points would mean ultimate control of one’s body as it is propelled through space and drawing upon the multiple energy centers of the body” (Rose, 1990).

Comparably, the Kemetic yoga system is focused on meditation, yoga postures, breathing and our chakras (or goddess energy) that activates our internal self-defense system, overall survival and liberation. Studies have looked at yoga and its effects on physical and mental health. It was found that practicing yoga can indeed enhance the mind/body/soul connection, relieve stress and it is a wholistic way to maintain peace and balance within the body. Kemetic yoga is effective in this way, as well, but adds a significant cultural influence (Hotep, 2018).

Part of the ancient Egyptian system of physical and spiritual enlightenment, Kemetic yoga is about connecting with one’s inner-self to achieve self-realization and self-actualization. “Kemetic yoga practice is the African roots of the philosophy and practice of yoga that have been lost, forgotten, ignored or referred to as a prehistoric phenomenon” (Bernal, 2015). Just as the traditional Eastern practice of yoga has proved as a beneficial therapy for stress, depression and anxiety, Kemetic yoga is as well, meaning it is a form of yoga that anyone can practice. Bernal states, “The historical tradition is necessary to avoid confusing the cultural history of Kemet with the much more recent history of ancient Greece, which ruled Kemet (Egypt) for 3

centuries (323-330 BCE) following its conquest by Alexander the Great” (Bernal, 2015).

Regardless of its historical roots, Kemetic yoga is also significant and can be beneficial within the therapeutic clinical practice of dance-movement therapy. As well, its validity and impact within African culture to help provide healing is relevant, a desired teaching tool and maintains a credibility of efficacy.

Broadening the Therapeutic Lens

Mental health professionals are beginning to understand that cultural specific treatments generate and optimize results in treatments. Moreover, therapists are increasingly acknowledging the importance behind learning other cultures wants and needs in relation to the therapeutic setting, and the best ways to address how clients choose to experience and receive therapy.

Capello (2007) discussed the cultural foundations of dance that are the source of dance/movement therapy education and practice. The author stated, “This article addresses how the diversity of ethnic dance styles may have therapeutic implications and what social or psychological functions these dance forms fulfill in their unique cultures. This article also provides both historic and present-day illustrations of the impact of cultural forms on therapy. Similarities were apparent in the use of traditional folkdances, particularly those in circle formations and the cross-cultural experience of simple, repetitive communal movements that are at the foundation of dance/movement therapy sessions worldwide” (Capello, 2007, p. 2). This article by Capello was substantial to the topic of African-based therapeutic practices within the field of dance/movement therapy because dance has always been and will continue to be a source of healing for the Black community. In her article, one of the presenters, Dr. Jocelyne Vaysse of France, referenced the importance of Dunham’s work and described how dance/movement therapy practices have been influenced by a variety of dance styles. Capello (2007) stated:

In contrast to the typical French dance style, Vayesse explained, the introduction of movement styles influenced by jazz, and the “primitive dance” of the African-American dancer/choreographer/anthropologist Katherine Dunham, began to have an effect on dance/movement therapy. She cited as an example a former member of Dunham’s company, the Haitian-born dancer, HERN Duplan, who developed an emphasis on the anthropological and universal sources of the dancing body. During the 1970s Duplan brought L’Expression Primitive (Primitive Expression) to France. He defined this dance style as an anthropological enterprise that leads the individual to a search within the self, and then, through the group, for his or her own genesis (p. 3).

In the article, there was an emphasis placed on the word “primitive.” Primitive was defined as the “first” or an “initiator” of various movement styles and techniques. When referring to Dunham’s dance as primitive, it was recognized as a traditional dance, and if practiced and learned as a method, one might begin to see it as a way to connect to other ancient traditional dance styles and gesticulations.

Also, in broadening the therapeutic lens, therapists are being asked to focus more on a patient-centered approach. Therapy based patient-centered care helps to address disparities within the health care system and allows clients and/or patients to become better advocates for themselves. Epstein and Fiscella (2010) discuss how patient-centered care is vital when dealing with the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities that exist in healthcare. The patients who are sick often tend to belong to minority groups, suffer from mental health issues and have a low literacy rate, so they ask fewer questions about their healthcare and are often disregarded in the healthcare field. Patient centered care is often seen as an approach to eliminate these disparities and provide greater prevention and treatment (p.4). McCarthy-Brown, (2009) stated that students

are often rejected for their cultural backgrounds, and automatically introduced to ballet and modern dance styles. “However, hip-hop is a dance style that is a major part of African students in the diaspora’s lives, they live the dance form, from making up dances on the block, to teaching younger siblings and dancing with their elders, to the expanded gestural body language of the culture” (McCarthy-Brown, 2009, p. 3). In relation to multiculturalism and globalism in the arts in psychotherapy, Lewis (1997) stated that a culturally sensitive therapist recognizes barriers that must be acknowledged, including the therapist’s lack of awareness of the individual’s world view and his or her experience of living in this culture. Caldwell (2013) discussed the importance of broadening the therapeutic lens during movement observation and assessment, and how valuable this work is to a dance/movement therapist. “Theories in dance/movement therapy have creatively struggled with the issue of either the universality or the particularity of movement meaning. While acknowledging cultural differences in movement style, movement analysis literature tends to commit to the idea that movement assessment forms are only describing what is there, in terms that are culturally neutral and universally applicable. This premise also holds that because of the basic human universality of movement, movement empathy becomes a valid means for a therapist or observer to ‘pick up’ movement meaning from others.” The field of dance-movement therapy and many of the therapeutic applications therein can be wide-ranging and can emanate from a variety of cultural influences. Depending on the population of clients being worked with, should determine what therapeutic application is utilized. Current literature suggests that there is a lack of diversity found in the roots and underpinnings of this expressive modality that often diminishes the diversity of inclusion in this practice and field. The great women pioneers’ work in this expressive modality field was drawn from many indigenous cultures and then integrated into modern-day society. The ingenious work that they conveyed

was deeply-rooted in the long-established spiritual practices of different races and ethnic belief systems. The advantages of such an extensive network of movement options, and the plethora of dance styles to choose from within the therapeutic movement setting is comprehensive and should be made accessible to everyone who can benefit. However, the first step is to concede and promote these alternatives and movement influences to gain more research on their therapeutic implications. Additionally, as we consider visual arts from an Afrocentric perspective, the discussion will include how working with African masks as a segue way into dance and movement is also a component of therapeutic, culturally based artistic expression and can help to heal one's own identity and facilitate growth and self-independence in "at-risk" youth.

Methods

The African-centered practices of The Katherine Dunham Technique Isolations routine, Kemetic yoga postures and an African-mask visual arts project was implemented with "at-risk" youth through the following methods: 1) Check-in using counseling worksheet 2) Grounding and centering with isolations 3) Mask making project 4) Deep-breathing, meditation, mindfulness with Yoga and closure.

Participants

Three different African-based therapeutic practices were carried out in a public elementary school program, where teachers, staff and administrators presented complaints with students related to trauma, severe anxiety, depression, emotional regulation, bouts of expressed anger and abandonment issues. Presented and designed as an introduction to African-centered ritualistic practices, structured movement and a therapeutic visual arts project was utilized with eight children over the course of four separate one-on-one sessions that included six children who participated in duos (so, there were three groups with two children in each small group) and

two individual sessions. The ages of the children spanned from about 7.5-11 years throughout this year-long program, but only four weeks was thoroughly documented.

Materials

The materials needed for the method are provided in the Materials Table 1.

• Movement	• Visual Arts Project
• Open Space	• African-mask template
• Yoga mats/rug	• Tracing Light up board
• Our Breath and Bodies	• Black Sharpies
•	• Acrylic Paint/ Brushes
•	• Art smocks
•	• Scissors/hole puncher/string

Procedure

In the ‘Express Yourself’ meeting space at the public elementary school program each session opened with Dunham isolations movement for grounding and centering into the present moment. This movement process helped prepare the students for the visual art mask making activity and the Kemetic yoga postures that included stretching and deep breathing at the end of the session. In each 30-minute session, I worked with an individual student or two students at a time. We would begin isolations once we were in the room, standing with our feet grounded into the floor and hip-width apart and our arms down at our side. The isolations moved from our head, to our shoulders and arms, torso and hips, down to the legs and feet to engage, stimulate and wake-up the entire body with the focus being more on how to be present in our bodies, and fully engage ourselves in the creative therapeutic process. Isolations are done moving only one

body part at a time, while the rest of the body is stationary. This was used to allow a greater awareness of self, and the tuning into what is needed to activate the mind/body/soul connection. This technique usually lasted for 3-5 minutes. After our minds and bodies were internally calm, but still present and attentive, we moved on to visual arts. In this portion of the session, the children chose from 1 of 3 templates to make their mask (see example of what a template would look like in Appendix A). They used a light-up trace board to trace the mask onto mixed media paper using a black sharpie. After, we would either take the time to create designs using Adinkra symbols, or save that part for later, if desired, after the mask was painted (see examples of Adinkra symbols in Appendix B). The next step was to create a colorful mask that spoke to each person individually, based on their moods, emotions or feelings, and personality (see examples of my masks in Appendix C). The designing and painting process of each mask took one to two sessions to complete, and the time frame given for visual arts was usually 15-20 minutes. Most children were able to complete two out of the three mask templates available within the four-week session. Lastly, we would end each session coming back into movement and finding our breath utilizing the Yoga Skills Method of the Kemetic yoga system. We started yoga by heading to a carpeted space or our mats and removing our shoes. The following Kemetic yoga poses were incorporated: tekken pose, pyramid pose, sphinx pose, child's pose and (tree pose- as balancing/grounding ending pose for children). All postures/poses were introduced in the first session, and by the end of the trial period, the children could accomplish each pose, and the sequence of movement on their own with repetition and practice. Deep breathing, meditation and mindfulness was a part of this therapeutic process which allowed the children to focus on relaxing the entire body but activating the mind. The portion of this movement sequence lasted between 5-10 minutes, depending on how long visual arts took that week. Each session, I wrote

in a journal to document our movement process, and I also participated in the art work each week with the children making several masks of my own.

The information collected to document their emotions and what they were struggling with socioemotionally from week-to-week was recorded on a worksheet titled “Things I want to talk about today.” At the beginning of each session, upon entering the space, we would sit down and go through the worksheet together. Each week we talked about how the movement or art work that we’d done in the previous week had helped them, or not, to become more involved in their classroom work and help improve their anger, sadness, or other issues they were dealing with (see Appendix D).

Results

The worksheet “Things I want to talk about today” (Copyright 2015 © Creative Counseling 101.com) collected at the beginning of the four sessions, and then consecutively before each session every week from the 8 participants was based on their participation from the prior week. At the onset of the first session, most students complained of being unhappy in their classrooms, and having problems at home which resulted in displayed bouts of anger and emotional dysregulation during school hours.

Observations

Observation of each child’s behavior during the movement and art process greatly revealed an eagerness, vivacity and deep connectedness to the entire method applied. The unique flow between the movement and art making kept their minds and bodies captivated while allowing them to adapt and regulate the strong emotions that they often experienced. Some of the comments they expressed after the isolations were, “My body feels loose now”, “I feel calmer and not angry as much”, and some of them even suggested different ways to move our bodies

with the isolations. After the African mask project, they mentioned how much fun they had and were all excited to wear the masks once finished. They commented enthusiastically, and would say, “This looks awesome on me, I can be anything I want to be while wearing this”, “I feel safer now”, and “I created something that looks so cool.” Following Kemetic yoga and deep breathing, they would often say, “My body doesn’t feel tight anymore”, “That felt good” and often, most of them would suggest other poses or stretches to incorporate, and they would say, “Look, I can do the splits too”, “Can we practice back bends” and “I want you to help me do a handstand!” The Dunham isolations technique, Kemetic yoga and the African masks were diversifiable enough to capture the children’s attention, help hold the therapeutic space and allow for enough flexibility and freedom to be creative while providing culturally arts-based treatment simultaneously.

Movement/Art Responses

Each week, the children were excited to come to the “Express Yourself” space to make art, dance and move. Many would have song suggestions for the isolations movement, and during the art activity we would discuss the different colors they chose to use on their masks, and why. Often, they would relate these colors to their mood or how they were emotionally feeling that day; other times, these colors were inspiration for changing their mood and how they wanted to feel. During Kemetic yoga and the Dunham isolations, sometimes many of them wanted to lead the movement and have me follow them. They became more knowledgeable each week with the movement process, remembering the techniques and how to incorporate rhythm, flow, body posture and the functional movement required.

Closing Session

At the end of each session, I noted their comments to brief questions that I asked about the movement and art exploration that day. All the comments were positive as the children gave

feedback on the process. The students responded with comments such as: “That was fun.”, “When will I see you again?”, “Why can’t our sessions be longer?” and “I can’t wait until next week.” On the last day of session four, the children were able to wear their masks and improvise movement by integrating various character traits that we’d discussed throughout the process. Some of the characters chosen were healer, princess and super hero. Their movement included the Dunham isolations, Kemetic yoga poses, the Laban movement effort actions (which we’d worked on the entire semester), and any other moves they wanted to include to express their characters honestly and enthusiastically. The movement was done while wearing the masks. All the students were determined to share their mask characters and demonstrate the movement, dance, mime and verbal expression that helped them to express their emotions, spirits, imaginations, inner-worlds, personalities and realities in a safe way.

Discussion

The results for this capstone thesis project are based on the writer’s experiences, insight and feedback received while working with 8 students at an elementary public school utilizing age and culturally appropriate movement and art techniques with children, specifically at-risk youth who suffer from trauma, depression and anxiety. The current literature continues to provide evidence that African-centered practices in therapy can reduce anxiety and depression, and help heal trauma in children, adolescents and adults (Capello, 2007). However, studies considering African ritualistic practices in therapy is not wide spread. For that reason, these methods were utilized exclusively for school-age children for the sole purpose of initiating socialization and identity healing in an age-appropriate manner. These techniques are flexible enough to use with various age groups and other populations. Given the results reported for this project, the author suggests that when children are given the opportunity to engage in these therapeutic approaches

more consistently with therapists, teachers, parents, or other community leaders, this practice may potentially help alleviate the anxiety, depression and trauma that this age group experiences, and provide a greater balance in behavioral and socioemotional developmental health outcomes.

The research and evidence above capture a need for further examination of African-based therapeutic practices with at-risk youth. Exploration and research should extend to analyze how these therapeutic interventions and others that are similar can be utilized to broaden the therapeutic lens for expressive therapists, teachers and educators alike. Making these approaches more accessible is key; the writer foresees these therapeutic interventions more accessible in the near future.

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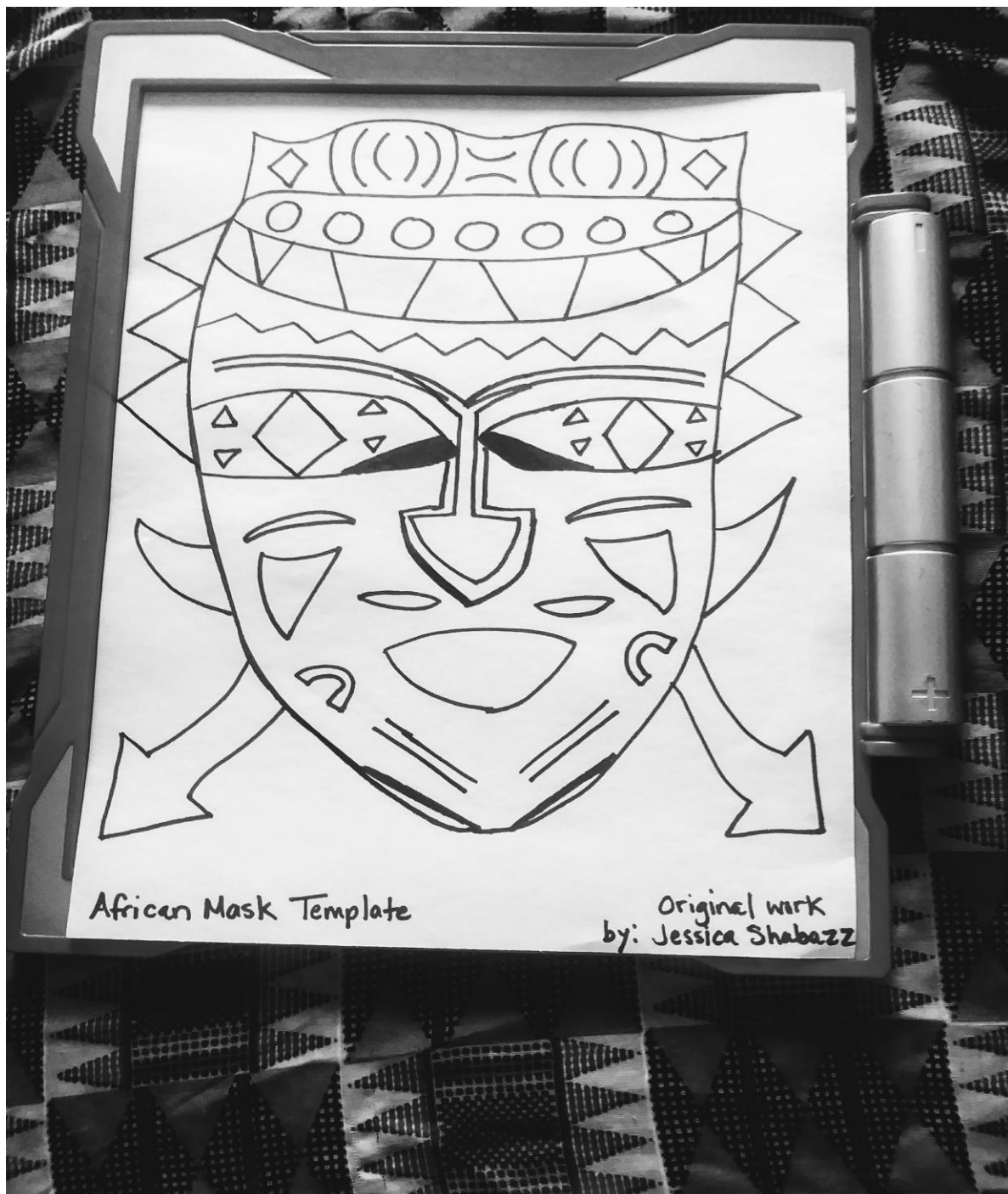
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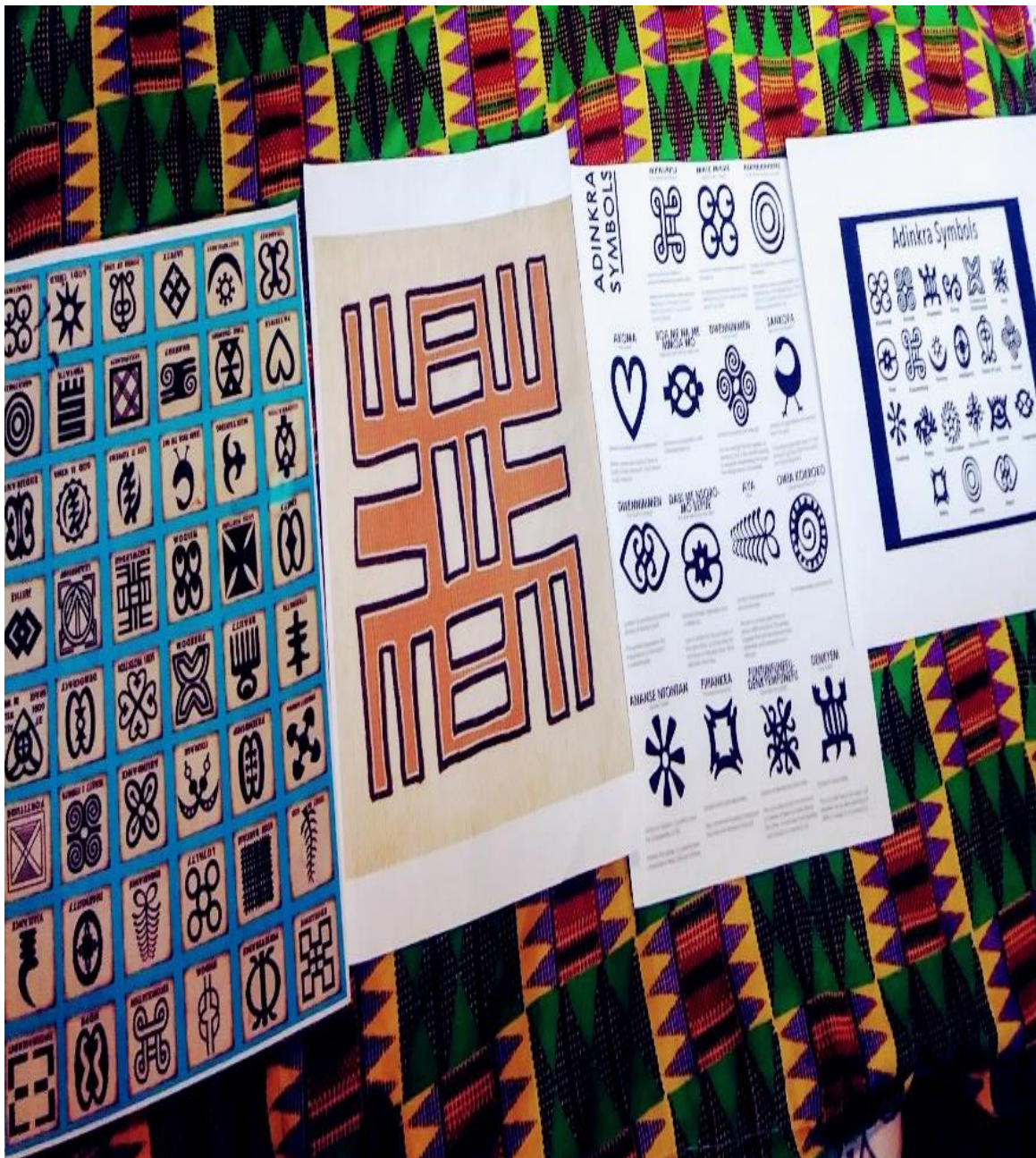
Appendix A

Afrikan mask template example created by Jessica Shabazz



Appendix B

Afrikan Adinkra Symbols



Appendix C

Afrikan mask templates painted by Jessica Shabazz

Original/African Tribal Mask Craft Blank templates at ©LearnCreateLove.com



Original Afrikan Mask template by International Visual Artist Ammar Nsoroma at

[facebook @ammarnsoroma.com](https://www.facebook.com/ammarnsoroma.com)



Appendix D

Things I Want to Talk About Today Worksheet

Documenting Feelings and Emotions

Things I want to talk about today!

Color in the areas you want to talk about:

My Family

My Grades

Pets

Special Things:

Friends

My Star

Something Else

Bullies

Looking Up..

I need help:

I am thinking about:

Anger

I don't want to talk...

Fears

Dreams

School

I need to say this:

S.O.S.

Things are going okay...

?